

Cote 521

Chapter 521: Clubs

When visiting larger clubs, Tachibana Akane would typically use the roster to count heads. If numbers were sufficient, she rarely said much. With smaller clubs, however, she would carefully inquire about their situation.

Smaller clubs were more vulnerable to being abolished. As upperclassmen graduated, if they couldn't recruit enough members, the club would be disbanded the following semester.

Kaoru told Horikita Suzune that four small clubs had already received warnings from the student council. Most were niche clubs founded by upperclassmen based on personal interests.

During these situations, Tachibana Akane would discuss solutions with them, which struck Horikita Suzune as strange. Wouldn't it be simpler to just follow the rules?

Why consult these people about solutions?

Later, when a student dispute arose in the library, Tachibana Akane and Kaoru had to abandon club inspections and rush over.

The conflict was straightforward—seat hogging and noise issues. Someone had taken another's seat and made noise during study sessions, leading to dissatisfaction and arguments.

By the time Kaoru arrived, both parties had already calmed down, though Tachibana Akane still issued warnings.

Horikita Suzune witnessed Tachibana Akane's lecturing throughout and grew more perplexed. Why could Tachibana Akane reprimand others while she couldn't?

On their way back, filled with questions, she voiced her confusion to Kaoru about everything she'd observed.

"It's somewhat complicated," he explained. "Simply put, our senior was a student council executive with inherent authority. More deeply, she's handled numerous disputes and helped many people, earning their trust. Even after retiring, she can still persuade others."

Hearing Kaoru's praise, Tachibana Akane proudly puffed out her chest—her years of effort hadn't been in vain.

"I understand," Horikita Suzune nodded thoughtfully. "They complain and seek help from Tachibana-senpai because they trust her capabilities."

Then she abruptly shifted topics. "But what does this have to do with me?"

Kaoru sighed. "Your interpretation isn't wrong. The main reason we brought you along was to show you the complexity of interpersonal relationships."

"Interpersonal relationships?"

Horikita Suzune tilted her head.

"Between students, clubs and students, clubs and clubs, underclassmen and upperclassmen, boys and girls, students and teachers." Kaoru said, "I know you dislike interacting with most people, especially those who are of no help to you. You believe there's no meaning in engaging with such individuals."

Horikita Suzune pursed her lips slightly. Was he about to lecture her again?

"That's right, your thinking isn't wrong. Most people in this world hold no significance for us, just as we are unnecessary contacts in their eyes."

"But thinking there's no need for contact and therefore refusing it is just being detached from reality. Horikita Senior is worried about this very aspect of you. He feels you don't know how to communicate, don't understand others' thoughts. You only recognize that most people are worthless existences, yet you can't distinguish between them."

"What exactly is value? Just like how you initially believed you didn't belong in Class D, you consider Class D students as unnecessary trash to interact with. You even think Class A students aren't worth understanding. Yet the trash in your eyes became famous during the sports festival - Ayanokoji nearly won first place in running, and even Sudo shone brightly."

"Horikita Senior once told me that you're merely imitating his demeanor. You don't understand true strength, mistakenly interpreting it as aloof pride."

Hearing this much, Horikita Suzune finally couldn't hold back and spoke up: "I have been trying to change, my brother's..."

"What the senior just did is exactly what Horikita Senior used to do."

Kaoru said softly, "Horikita Senior had great prestige among the upperclassmen - not because he was in Class A, nor because he was student council president. It was because he actively reached out to most students, helped solve their problems fairly and justly. That's why everyone liked him, even though he appeared to be a cold, distant senior."

Horikita Suzune looked at Tachibana Akane, who nodded gently.

"That's roughly it. I wanted you to understand the difference between you and your brother."

Kaoru said, "Then, you can try to understand Horikita Senior's perspective."

Horikita Suzune fell completely silent. Try to understand her brother?

"Oh my, it's not really that serious. Horikita-kun is just too stern."

Tachibana Akane laughed it off, "He always keeps a straight face, nobody knows what he's thinking. I suspect his mind contains nothing but studying."

Kaoru smiled, his tone softening considerably: "This isn't meant as my lecture, just my perspective on you and Horikita Senior."

His words weren't wrong. At least Horikita Suzune had been constantly thinking about these questions - why her brother kept rejecting her.

Initially, Horikita Suzune thought she wasn't strong enough, thus not qualified to stand by Horikita Manabu's side. That's why when she met Kaoru, she felt particularly unconvinced.

If I can't match my brother, can't I at least surpass you?

Although she inexplicably lost to Kaoru later, it didn't exceed her understanding - she was simply defeated by someone stronger than her. She was still better than most people.

This way of thinking couldn't be called wrong, but it represented no real change.

Kaoru didn't intend to force Horikita Suzune, telling her this won't do and she must change. Instead, he wanted her to try stepping out of her own world.

"So, you think I should abandon my previous naivety and unite with classmates like Kushida, relying on the strength of the majority?"

"That would just make you another Kikyō, another Honami - not the Suzune I know."

"What are you trying to say?"

"I think Suzune should go ask Horikita Senior herself."

...

Closing the office door, Kaoru stood outside. His gaze met Tachibana Akane's beside him.

"Didn't you say she and Horikita-kun would start fighting if they met?"

Tachibana Akane asked worriedly, "Is it really okay to leave the two of them in there?" "That shouldn't be the case. I deceived... I told Horikita Senior that since he's graduating anyway, it's perfectly normal to want to see his sister."

Kaoru said with a straight face, "Besides, tomorrow is Suzune's birthday. As her brother, he should at least show some consideration, right?"

Tachibana Akane's lips twitched. So this was how he managed to trick Horikita Manabu into coming to the student council office?

"Tomorrow is Horikita's birthday?"

"Yes, but they plan to hold the party tonight, combining it with Valentine's Day celebrations."

"Stare—"

Kaoru subtly averted his gaze. He kept feeling like his room was becoming too crowded lately, having specifically bought a double bed to replace his old broken one.

"Here, your Valentine's gift."

Tachibana Akane reluctantly took out a box of chocolates from her backpack and tapped it against Kaoru's head. "Being with you is nothing but trouble. People have been asking me all day what our relationship is."

"Next time, tell them to ask me directly. I'll tell them that Senior is my girlfriend."

Kaoru took the chocolates from her, beaming brightly.

"What girlfriend? I haven't agreed to that yet."

Tachibana Akane snorted a few times. "Everyone's calling you the Harem Overlord now, and a Cuckold Enthusiast at that."

Kaoru argued defensively, "Asahina Senior and I have mutual feelings. It's Namagiri who's interfering with our relationship."

"Did I mention Asahina at all?"

Tachibana Akane looked at him with disdain. "I heard that Karuizawa used to have a boyfriend."

Pretending not to hear, Kaoru opened the chocolate box and found it filled with adorable animal shapes.

"Hehe, I made these myself! Aren't they cute!"

Seeing his expression, Tachibana Akane puffed out her chest proudly, looking extremely pleased with herself.

Even though they weren't heart-shaped, these handmade creations clearly showed the girl's feelings.

Chapter 522: Courage

"How does it taste?"

"It's delicious! How did you make these?"

"Hehe, I thought since the home economics classroom has cookie molds, they should work for chocolate too. So I bought lots of chocolate to experiment with, and eventually succeeded!"

"I want to eat more."

Chocolate is different from cookies—it melts easily and is harder to shape.

Tachibana Akane had clearly put in considerable effort.

However, it seemed she had sacrificed flavor.

After eating several pieces, Kaoru realized they were all pure chocolate with very high cocoa concentration.

Seeing how happy Tachibana Akane looked, and being the only one tasting these chocolates, Kaoru had no choice but to keep munching on them.

The two squatted on the floor, leaning against the wall.

Seeing him enjoy the chocolates so much, Tachibana Akane started craving some herself and couldn't resist trying one.

"Uwah, this is way too bitter!"

Her face contorted, and without a second thought, she shoved the half-eaten chocolate into Kaoru's mouth.

"Didn't you make these yourself?"

Kaoru was utterly confused. How could the maker not know how they tasted?

"I, I forgot to try them!"

Tachibana Akane's cheeks flushed slightly. "At first I bought many different flavors of chocolate, but when I mixed them all together, the taste became really strange. So I just bought dark chocolate instead."

"You didn't taste test them at all?"

Kaoru already understood what had happened.

Of course dark chocolate would be more bitter than most other chocolates.

Tachibana Akane felt embarrassed.

Counting on her fingers, she whispered, "I want to eat it with you."

'Oh no, the senpai has fallen in love!'

"Let's not eat these. I'm keeping them as souvenirs."

Kaoru carefully sealed her chocolates and tucked them into his backpack.

Then he pulled out the chocolates he'd bought today. "We'll eat these instead."

But when he opened the box, only three pieces remained.

"I'll have two, you have one - since you've already eaten plenty of chocolates today."

Tachibana stated her plan matter-of-factly, though not merely to get an extra piece.

"That doesn't work for me. I have a better way for us to share equally."

Kaoru rejected her suggestion. "Most people don't know there's another way to eat chocolate. The conditions are quite particular, so I've never tried it before."

His words piqued Tachibana's curiosity. What other way could there be to eat chocolate?

She watched as Kaoru unwrapped one chocolate and placed it in his mouth.

Tachibana stared blankly, then grew anxious, thinking he was tricking her to eat it himself.

Just as she was about to get angry, he suddenly turned and kissed her.

Her lips trembled slightly, glistening with moisture.

Her previously pressed lips parted unexpectedly under his masculine presence. Tachibana's eyes widened as she felt something bittersweet with milky sweetness flow into her mouth.

Along with the sticky sensation, she instinctively swallowed.

Like a baby bird being fed, the girl's throat moved, and a bit dripped from the corner of her mouth.

Her hands unconsciously rose to clutch Kaoru's sleeves as she leaned sideways.

Kaoru wrapped an arm around her waist to prevent her from falling over while more of the sticky substance disappeared in their mouths, gradually leaving her lips.

When their lips parted, Tachibana seemed dazed, staring blankly at Kaoru before uttering a confused.

"Huh?"

"This is the other way to eat chocolate. What do you think?"

Kaoru whispered, amusement dancing in his eyes. "We shared the same piece together."

Tachibana suddenly flushed crimson, finally understanding what had happened. She began pounding Kaoru's chest.

"You idiot! Who eats chocolate like that? That's disgusting!"

Just thinking about the chocolate melting in his mouth and hers simultaneously, mixing with both their saliva, made Tachibana feel utterly revolted.

"Drop dead! A thousand times over!"

Kaoru caught her flailing hands and kissed her again.

At first, Tachibana resisted, trying to push him away, but gradually stopped struggling. She closed her eyes and began enjoying the kiss.

After a while, Tachibana blushed and whispered, "You can't bully me... Using your tongue is cheating. I don't know how to do that."

"This is the most proper way to kiss. I'll teach you more about kissing later, senior."

Kaoru said with complete seriousness.

Tachibana pouted. "Teach me nothing! I don't want to learn such vulgar things. Go practice with Ichinose and the others!"

Kaoru chuckled dryly and picked up another chocolate.

But before he could speak, Tachibana immediately snatched it away, eyeing him warily.

"Not going to eat it?" Kaoru asked shamelessly.

"One for me, one for you - that should be fine."

Tachibana Akane glared at him. "If you dare try anything funny again, I'll bite you to death!"

Though it was disgusting, it was merely unpleasant at worst.

But to suddenly kiss her without reason, and in that manner - Tachibana Akane felt she was being quite generous by not getting angry with him.

Kaoru behaved himself, silently eating the chocolate.

Tachibana Akane secretly glanced at him, feeling somewhat reluctant in her heart, so she kissed his cheek.

"I'm not actually angry!"

The girl pouted. "If you want to kiss me, at least tell me first. I'm not your girlfriend - you need my consent to kiss me."

Kaoru was taken aback for a moment, then smiled. "When you kissed me just now, you didn't seek my consent either."

"That's different. I usually kiss small cats and dogs too," Tachibana Akane had flexible standards.

"In my eyes, you're just a silly bad dog. Only I can kiss you - if you kiss me, it's harassment!"

Taking advantage of her finishing speaking, Kaoru kissed her, looking at her with a half-smile.

"Even if I harass you, what can you do about it, senpai?"

Tachibana Akane's face flushed red, trembling with anger as she said stiffly, "I'm ignoring you!"

With these words, she distanced herself from Kaoru, completely unwilling to be near such an ill-mannered scumbag.

Kaoru suppressed his laughter. To be honest, teasing this senpai and Kamuro was indeed more fun.

"Senpai, I was wrong."

"Hmph."

"Because you're too cute, I couldn't help myself earlier."

"You're clearly bullying me!"

"I like you, senpai."

"Wh-what, what nonsense are you spouting again!"

"I..."

As Kaoru slowly approached Tachibana Akane, the latter looked extremely nervous. However, neither of them expected that the next moment, the office door would open.

Sensing the gaze, Kaoru looked up to see Horikita Suzune and Horikita Manabu standing before them, with Horikita Manabu particularly adjusting his glasses.

"Are we interrupting you?"

Tachibana Akane covered her bright red face with her hands, but Kaoru didn't feel embarrassed at all, standing up without changing expression.

"I have something to discuss with you, Mitoma-kun."

Horikita Manabu turned around and returned to the office.

Kaoru realized something and looked at Horikita Suzune.

She was holding a book in her arms, its title and cover unclear, but the corners of her eyes were slightly red, as if she had been crying.

"Suzune..."

"We'll talk later," Horikita Suzune interrupted him calmly. "My brother isn't in a good mood right now. I suggest you go in quickly."

Could it be that he found out about his relationship with Horikita Suzune?

Even if Horikita Manabu didn't know, seeing the subtle atmosphere between him and Tachibana Akane would probably put him in a bad mood.

This was a necessary trial for a Harem Overlord.

With the look of someone ready to face death, Kaoru bravely entered the office alone.

Chapter 523: The Brother-in-Law

As soon as he entered and saw Horikita Manabu watching him expressionlessly, Kaoru swallowed the words he had been preparing.

"Have a seat," Horikita Manabu spoke, without the expected anger of a brother-in-law towards an unworthy suitor.

"To be honest, I didn't expect the student council office to have changed this much."

At this moment, the student council's atmosphere had completely transformed.

Extravagant and luxurious decorations could be seen everywhere, and even the original sofas and tea sets had been replaced.

The president's throne particularly showcased its owner's unique aesthetic taste, with an even more conspicuous desk displaying his beloved ornaments.

Clearly, this was Nagumo Miyabi's personal style.

It seemed Horikita Suzune hadn't yet informed Horikita Manabu about their relationship, which made Kaoru breathe a sigh of relief.

"Nagumo used a significant portion of the budget to renovate the office, but ironically, after the renovation was completed, he rarely shows up at the student council. Now I'm basically the one managing the council's affairs."

Actually, Kaoru had received feedback that Nagumo Miyabi was preparing to replace the original student council members with newly recruited ones.

Replacement was fine - after the other party left, Kaoru would return to the student council anyway.

"Because of your appearance, he's now dealing with the dissatisfaction among second-year students. Kiriya has been constantly stirring up emotions among the lower classes."

Horikita Manabu paused briefly, "He's about to be surrounded. You're currently slaying the dragon, though I didn't completely believe your words from the beginning."

"Not that fast. Nagumo is just temporarily blinded. Before he could make a move against me, I had already accumulated sufficient capital."

Kaoru spread his hands.

Although he didn't control the entire grade level, he had people in every class.

It would be difficult for Nagumo Miyabi to sow discord like he could, especially since Nagumo himself had planted many time bombs among the second-year students that were now detonating one after another ahead of schedule.

As long as Nagumo Miyabi couldn't quickly reverse his image, he would continue bleeding to death like this.

Horikita Manabu glanced at him, his expression unchanged: "My assessment of you remains the same as before - you're like an elusive presence drifting through the world, making it hard to understand what you want. But now you seem more human."

'He's definitely angry,' Kaoru thought somewhat awkwardly.

The next moment, Horikita Manabu turned his head away.

"Never mind, let's not talk about these things. I appreciate your intention to help my sister grow. However, even if you try to teach Suzune to view the world with understanding, she won't comply with your wishes. I believe she'll continue contemplating what she and others should do according to her own thinking."

Kaoru was somewhat curious about what he and Horikita Suzune had discussed - it probably wasn't just about giving a birthday gift.

"Horikita-senpai cares about Suzune more than I imagined."

Kaoru smiled, "What she sees isn't me trying to teach her, but what her brother has done before. Once she understands the differences between both sides, Suzune will actively seize a completely new ending for herself."

"You seem to have full confidence in Suzune."

"Because she takes everything too seriously."

"I see. No wonder she keeps mentioning your name. Your understanding of her surprises me."

Kaoru's smile froze.

What was going on with Horikita Suzune? Shouldn't she be crying in her brother's arms?

Why would she mention his name?

"Curious why she mentioned your name?"

A faint smile appeared at the corner of Horikita Manabu's mouth, as if he had finally regained control of the conversation.

He turned back, "Because of your existence, she seems to have realized her own problems. I should thank you, Mitoma-kun."

"You're too kind."

Kaoru forced a dry laugh, "Actually, between Suzune and I..."

"I really shouldn't interfere in your affairs, but you're going too far..."

Horikita Manabu couldn't find more precise words for a moment, letting out a deep sigh.

"Why would even Tachibana end up like this?"

If Kaoru had only pursued Horikita Suzune, Manabu would have felt strangely pleased - after all, he was genuinely surprised that the sister he knew could actually be won over.

Having Kaoru as a boyfriend to correct her didn't seem problematic to Manabu.

The real issue was that Kaoru didn't have just one girlfriend.

The rumors about him had become so numerous that Manabu couldn't make sense of it all - Ichinose Honami, Kushida Kikyo, Asahina Nazuna, and others. Who was the actual girlfriend?

What was even more surprising was that Tachibana Akane was among them.

Manabu simply couldn't understand it.

He felt like the world had become something he no longer recognized.

"Things are somewhat complicated," Kaoru said through gritted teeth. "Before I knew it, it ended up like this. It's hard to explain in just a word or two."

"But, Horikita Senior, my feelings for all of them are genuine."

Manabu remained silent, staring at him for a long time before finally speaking.

"Tachibana will graduate soon. Have you thought about what you'll do then?"

Kaoru was slightly taken aback.

Instead of asking about Horikita Suzune, Manabu was inquiring about Tachibana Akane, which stirred some ripples in his heart.

"Senior plans to continue her studies. I'm thinking of going out once a month, which would be perfect for seeing her."

The Personal points obtained through the system item - Kaoru intended to use them all for this purpose.

His situation was somewhat similar to a long-distance relationship, except they couldn't communicate freely at any time.

Manabu was stunned for a moment, seemingly unsure how he planned to go out.

But upon second thought, since he said so, he probably had some special means.

"Have you thought about the future?" Manabu asked seriously. "I don't oppose you simply dating, but life isn't just about romance. To be blunt, I don't think you can keep Suzune. Her future potential will be higher and stronger than mine. She won't be content being just an appendage to a man."

Just moments ago he was criticizing his sister, and now he was praising her, Kaoru thought to himself.

"What do you mean by 'keep'?" Kaoru countered.

Manabu raised an eyebrow, but then heard him continue: "If you think I would restrain Suzune, you're mistaken. I won't bind her, or Honami, or any of them, in the name of love or family."

"You're aware you have other girlfriends. Why would Suzune stay by your side?"

"Horikita-senpai, I understand what you mean, but such presuppositions are unfair. Right now, Suzune and I share the same position. She wants to prove herself, to defeat Class A - I don't see that as betraying me. In fact, I welcome it. Someday in the future, whatever university she wants to attend, or whatever career she wants to pursue, I won't be standing in opposition to her decisions, but supporting her own choices."

"..."

Manabu fell completely silent.

He understood what Kaoru meant, and was even somewhat incredulous.

"I see. So that's why you brought her here, specifically telling me beforehand to prepare a birthday gift for her."

So the book she was holding earlier was the gift Manabu had prepared.

The elder brother and the boyfriend surprisingly shared the same thinking in this regard.

"Although your feelings are somewhat peculiar, your desire to mend the relationship between me and my sister is..."

A faint smile appeared on Horikita Manabu's face. "I must admit, I have no room for refusal."

Kaoru blinked.

Had he passed this hurdle?

'It's a pity I didn't witness the tender moment between those siblings earlier, and I've never seen Horikita Suzune shed tears before.'

Chapter 524: Reunion With You

"What did my brother say to you?"

On their way back, Horikita Suzune slightly turned her face toward Kaoru, posing the question as if casually, yet her gaze remained fixed on him.

The faint redness that had lingered at the corners of her eyes was gradually fading.

She thought she could face Horikita Manabu directly, but she had hesitated, paused, and even paced back and forth in front of the office door, almost wanting to avoid entering altogether.

In the end, Kaoru took advantage of her distraction, opened the office door, pushed her inside in one swift motion, muttered something like "bon voyage," and then closed the door behind her.

"Probably just the usual worries an older brother has for his younger sister, asking me to look after you a bit more."

Kaoru responded absentmindedly, his thoughts drifting to what Horikita Manabu might be discussing with Tachibana Akane.

After their conversation ended, Horikita Manabu indicated he had something to say to Tachibana Akane, seemingly wanting to talk about life's deeper topics.

Kaoru simply took Horikita Suzune back with him.

He had originally intended to invite Tachibana Akane and Horikita Manabu to the birthday party, but Tachibana Akane felt too embarrassed, and Horikita Manabu had no interest in joining.

"Is that all?"

Horikita Suzune shifted her gaze back forward. "I thought my brother already knew, so I ended up saying a bit more. But... thank you."

"Actually, even if you hadn't said anything, I was considering whether to tell Horikita Senior. We can use the excuse of free love for now, but eventually we'll have to consider gaining family approval."

This wasn't the first time Horikita Suzune had heard such words from him.

For some reason, it still felt strange to her - like seeing a notorious gangster helping an elderly woman cross the street, creating an inexplicable sense of dissonance.

"Compared to me, what did you talk about with Horikita Senior in the office?"

Kaoru pointed to his own eye corner with a mischievous smile. "Were you crying?"

Horikita Suzune immediately denied it.

"No, who was crying?"

The smile on Kaoru's face widened as he softly said, "Actually, you do believe deep down that your brother doesn't hate you. If he hated you, how could I have possibly tricked him into coming here?"

Horikita Suzune pressed her lips together.

Yes, no matter how much she hesitated, seeing Horikita Manabu appear before her still stirred an involuntary urge to draw closer to him.

Moreover, Horikita Manabu hadn't shown the same disgust toward her as before. Perhaps the sports festival had slightly changed his perception of her.

"I told him about what you showed me today, what you taught me, and... my feelings."

Horikita Suzune whispered, "But I still want to catch up to him."

Kaoru glanced sideways at her lovely face.

What Horikita Manabu actually wanted to tell her was that she was free, that she didn't need to hesitate, and that she should boldly forge her own path.

"Not just catching up to his shadow, but as a sister, catching up to my brother, surpassing my brother."

Horikita Suzune seemed to be searching for something as her gaze wandered before settling on Kaoru's face.

"I will lead our class and surpass you someday. At the very least, I need to prove this to you."

So he's that important to her now. Kaoru roughly understood what the siblings had been discussing.

"Big brother... he seemed genuinely pleased. It's been so long since I've seen him smile at me. It really surprised me."

Horikita Manabu wasn't expressionless, Kaoru was quite certain of this, though he rarely saw him smile, and probably even less so in Horikita Suzune's memory.

"It shows Suzune is starting to try to understand her brother."

Kaoru chuckled, "As for me, I'll look forward to the day Suzune defeats me. I hope you can do it."

The pleasant atmosphere was broken.

Though Horikita Suzune didn't realize it, she still shot him a glare.

"I admit Class D is currently behind, but don't forget we still have two years."

Horikita Suzune said, "Next, I'll defeat Class C, then Class B, and finally it will be your turn. Please wait for me with the determination to fight to the death."

Kaoru couldn't help but laugh.

"So you can have chuunibyou too. Besides light novels, no one actually talks like that in reality."

Horikita Suzune frowned.

Though she didn't understand what chuunibyou meant, it probably wasn't a good term.

"Getting carried away."

"Yes, I am getting carried away."

Kaoru suppressed his laughter, "So, what about Horikita-senpai's gift?"

The book Horikita Manabu gave her was already in her bag, and Horikita Suzune showed no intention of taking it out, merely pursing her lips.

"It's Nietzsche's 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra,' with his notes inside."

Kaoru turned his head.

Seriously, as a brother, you give your sister something like this?

No wonder he raised his sister like this. He strongly suspected Horikita Manabu also needed correction, at least in terms of education.

"My birthday is tomorrow, right?"

Horikita Suzune suddenly said, "Why did you specifically ask me out today and have my brother give me a gift?"

Kaoru hesitated.

He didn't know if Horikita Suzune would agree if he told her.

Because today's birthday party was also Kushida Kikyo and the others' idea, intending to trick Horikita Suzune into coming.

"Kushida?"

Well, she had already guessed.

Kaoru had no choice but to surrender and answer truthfully.

"I see. You planned to hold a birthday party for me today, so Valentine's Day would essentially be celebrated together?"

"Can't be helped. Your birthday is just too coincidental."

"So, where's your gift?"

Kaoru was taken aback, his steps faltering as he looked incredulously at the girl beside him.

She had slightly flushed cheeks but was staring at him seriously.

Perhaps finding Kaoru's expression amusing, Horikita Suzune leaned in slightly, a faint smile crossing her face.

"Did you think I wouldn't mention the gift myself?"

"I am a bit surprised."

Kaoru felt somewhat awkward, "It's not like the Suzune I know."

The evening breeze was slightly chilly, a few strands of hair gently brushing against her snow-white cheeks.

Horikita Suzune tucked her hair behind her ear with her fingertips, a sly, girlish smile flickering in the corners of her slender eyes.

"I've always been led by you. Isn't it my turn now?"

She said it as if it were natural, "If you can satisfy me, there might be a reward. Otherwise, you should know the consequences."

It was somewhat intimidating for no reason, but Kaoru didn't really believe she had any means to deal with him.

After hesitating for a moment, Kaoru took a contract out of his bag.

Seeing the content of the contract, Horikita Suzune suddenly fell silent, her earlier smile completely gone.

"What does this mean?"

"These debts, I believe Suzune should be able to repay, but they're no longer suitable for our relationship."

"Are you saying we should end things?"

"What's ending is the past. If Suzune wants to defeat me, she can't have weaknesses in my hands. Who would want to see their leader being the plaything of their enemy?"

"Between you and me, it was just purely..."

"I want to have a better relationship with Suzune. If not lovers, then at least the most intimate relationship."

He didn't specify what constituted the most intimate relationship, but the usually stubborn Horikita Suzune understood his meaning.

By now, this could be considered his second confession.

"I know this doesn't really count as a gift, but you..."

Horikita Suzune suddenly grabbed Kaoru's wrist.

Under his astonished gaze, she forcibly dragged him to a secluded path.

She'd really had enough of this guy's presumptuous behavior!

They were right - he needed to be taught a lesson!

Chapter 525: The First Experience

At first, Kaoru didn't understand what was happening.

Seeing her silent demeanor, he felt somewhat bewildered.

"Did I say something wrong?"

Horikita Suzune stopped abruptly, causing Kaoru to nearly bump into her.

Looking down, he saw her dark hair swirl as she turned, the skin from her hairline to her ears flashing before his eyes - pale and thin, almost revealing the faintly pulsing blue veins beneath.

The crimson hue seemed to symbolize her current emotions.

In that instant, a pair of clear, bright eyes appeared beneath her long eyelashes, staring intently at Kaoru.

"You only targeted me from the beginning, right?"

Horikita Suzune's voice carried a hint of chilliness. "You took advantage of my reckless actions, set a trap for me together with Kushida, then used the contract to threaten me, forcing me to satisfy your desires. I'm not remembering this wrong, am I?"

Her bluntness was rather startling. Kaoru could only nod.

"That's correct. So it's perfectly normal for anyone to hold grudges against me."

"Grudges?"

Horikita Suzune seemed to be tasting the word, as if she had caught onto something.

A strange smile flickered in her eyes. "I understand what you mean. In your eyes, that's indeed the case, and I am indeed very dissatisfied."

"If you want to repay this debt completely, it will probably take you a very long time."

Kaoru sighed lightly. "Moreover, I feel it's useless now. Keeping it serves no purpose other than bullying you."

"If you were a loan shark, you'd definitely go bankrupt."

Horikita Suzune crossed her arms.

Though nothing was revealed, one couldn't help but imagine how they would feel to touch - clearly too substantial to be held in one hand.

Kaoru glanced sideways at her.

"I've already received what I wanted."

However, Horikita Suzune smiled meaningfully: "Where's the determination you showed when forcing me to complete the list back then?"

Kaoru was left speechless.

The list at that time consisted mostly of wishes related to her body.

If all were fulfilled, it could probably amount to over ten ten-draws.

Still, he had completed quite a few already. After all, through various intimate interactions, he could discreetly accomplish one or two by paying slight attention.

With Tachibana Akane earlier, Sakura Airi before that, plus their paired activities, Kaoru had actually accumulated enough for another round of ten-draws recently.

Horikita Suzune was unaware of these matters and decided to counterattack.

"Without these debts, I won't obey your every command like Kushida does. Is that acceptable?"

It sounded like something she might regret, but Kaoru genuinely felt the contract was unnecessary and thought it best to end it here.

"No problem. Horikita Senior has already entrusted Suzune to me. I believe that's sufficient."

Horikita Suzune stiffened momentarily, regretting her decision.

She shouldn't have trusted this guy—she should have just punched him instead.

Without a word, she snatched the contract from Kaoru.

Without even glancing at it, she tore it into pieces with unusual calmness and declared clearly, "With this, the debtor-creditor relationship between us is over."

"How does it feel? A gift worth over a million?"

Kaoru smiled faintly.

He had originally considered giving books but was glad he hadn't, as it would have overlapped with Horikita Manabu's gift.

"It feels like I've been completely renewed."

Horikita Suzune let out a light laugh, then stared intently at him. "So, what kind of relationship do you want us to have now?"

The conversation circled back. Kaoru hesitated briefly.

Given her usual behavior, she likely wouldn't agree to being called lovers, and being friends was even less feasible.

"I hope for a normal relationship." Kaoru added, "Like calling each other by our first names. I want Suzune to call me by my name, and I hope you'll call the others by their names too."

Horikita Suzune sighed deeply, feeling a headache coming on. "Just as Honami said, you're definitely hiding something from us."

Kaoru looked puzzled.

He had many secrets—what was she referring to?

"Never mind. Do you have any other ideas?"

"Will you go on a date with me next time?"

"It's a bit surprising, but I refuse."

"Why?"

"Until you give me the answer I want, I'll keep refusing you."

"..."

Kaoru fell silent, nearly forgetting that Horikita Suzune was also a girl, naturally skilled in using such powerful moves.

"Heh, can't figure it out?"

Horikita Suzune deliberately provoked him, "Should I give you a little hint out of pity? Though I doubt it'll help, since the debt is settled, I don't need to satisfy you anymore."

Her mocking tone made Kaoru take a deep breath.

Then, he grabbed her wrist and, before she could resist, wrapped his arm around her waist.

"Starting to act like a pervert now— Mmph..."

Kaoru fiercely captured her lips, swallowing her words and leaving only muffled whimpers.

Trapped in his embrace, Horikita Suzune couldn't resist.

She squirmed slightly as a token gesture of defiance, allowing him to claim her moist lips and savor their nectar, sweet and delicious like honey.

After a while, Kaoru whispered hoarsely, "Even if we're not lovers, I don't mind forcing the issue."

He sounded almost like a criminal.

Horikita Suzune panted lightly, feeling their shared warmth with every slight movement.

His chest pressed against hers aggressively, making her entire body go weak.

"I do have reservations in my heart, but before that, I've already decided to fulfill your desires."

Horikita Suzune pressed her forehead against his. "So, could you please respect my decision a little?"

Even if the debt was canceled, Horikita Suzune didn't consider it a big deal. Her goal wasn't to repay debts but to advance to a higher class.

Since their relationship began with a debt, he wanted to break the distortion within it and build a new connection—Horikita Suzune could understand this.

However, Horikita Suzune still felt displeased.

Without the debt as a foundation, how would he consider doing mischievous things with her?

Wouldn't they lose a legitimate excuse?

"Sorry, but I think this is better. It shows our relationship isn't just a transactional one."

Kaoru suddenly smiled, "It also means Suzune enjoys doing mischievous things with me."

Horikita Suzune's pretty face flushed red.

He wasn't wrong, but why did he have to say it out loud?

"I'm just fulfilling your requests."

She wrapped her arms around Kaoru's neck and whispered softly, "You wrote it on your list, didn't you? You wanted to tease me fiercely in public, to see me in an embarrassing state in front of others."

After all, it was Valentine's Day.

It was understandable to indulge a little, right?

Unaware of Kaoru's stiffness, she continued matter-of-factly, "Though it's impossible in public, it's fine here. I usually take this path back to the dorm, and hardly anyone passes by during this time."

If these words had come from Kushida Kikyo, Kaoru wouldn't have been surprised.

But coming from Horikita Suzune, he could feel the immense resolve the girl in his arms had mustered.

"Since we're not lovers, it's okay to go a little overboard."

Horikita Suzune still hadn't agreed to be with him, but the girl bravely kissed him nonetheless.

...

"They're taking so long. Did something happen to them?"

Kushida Kikyo checked the time.

The sun was about to set, yet Kaoru still hadn't returned with Horikita Suzune.

"Did you message him?" Ichinose Honami asked.

Kei Karuizawa pouted, "I did, but he hasn't seen it!"

"How strange. Did Horikita run away?" Kushida Kikyo mused thoughtfully.

"I'll call him!"

Kei Karuizawa volunteered and immediately dialed Kaoru's number.

The next moment, a phone rang outside the door.

The girls exchanged glances, and Kushida Kikyo couldn't help but smile.

"Ahem, it seems our guest has arrived. Let's forgive his tardiness for now!"

Chapter 526: The Aftermath Is Hard to Put Into Words.

The white walls, the faint sunlight filtering through the curtains—Kaoru lifted his drowsy eyes as a slender figure suddenly drew back the curtains, flooding the room with dazzling light.

"You should get up now. We have classes today."

As she turned around, Kaoru finally saw her clearly: long, jet-black hair cascading smoothly down her back, a well-endowed chest, and a serious expression.

Though she wore a neat and tidy school uniform, she had an apron tied around her waist, giving off an inexplicable "JK mom" vibe.

Without a doubt, it was Horikita Suzune.

"I've already tidied the room. Hurry up and get ready for breakfast."

Kaoru checked his phone and realized he had overslept.

Surprisingly, Kushida hadn't called to wake him.

"Sorry, you really didn't have to do all this."

"Since it was a birthday party for me, it's only right that I help clean up."

Horikita Suzune untied the apron around her waist, her tone calm. "Though, I have to admit, I'm a bit surprised. I thought you were really going to throw a sound party."

"Who would throw a sound party at a birthday celebration? Never mind Kikyo, your impression of me is way too terrible."

Kaoru slowly got up from the bed, noticing his body having an odd reaction upon seeing Horikita Suzune in this state.

"If you leave such impressions on people, you're the one who's terrible to begin with."

Horikita Suzune paused briefly, "Besides, keeping a girl in your room, then holding her and using her as a hugging pillow all night - anyone would think you're a pervert if this got out."

Kaoru's face darkened.

So now it was his fault?

Last night, someone was the one flustered and tongue-tied when Kushida and Karuizawa suspected them of sneaking around.

That same person ultimately surrendered because of the birthday party and Valentine's chocolates.

"I'm not someone who only thinks about those things all the time. Can't I be like this occasionally?"

Kaoru said gloomily, "As for daring to do naughty things in public, Suzune, you're much worse than me."

Horikita Suzune immediately turned her face away, calmly stating, "I'm just satisfying your desires. Like Kikyo said, you can treat me as an onahole. What I'm thinking has nothing to do with it."

Kaoru nearly choked.

This girl definitely didn't understand what an onahole was.

Why would Kushida teach them such things?

However, watching Horikita Suzune sitting properly at the table, seeing that she had personally made breakfast for two while he was sleeping, Kaoru found his feelings becoming complicated.

"What are you staring at? Hurry up and go wash your face."

Horikita Suzune frowned, particularly uncomfortable with his gaze.

"Suzune would make an excellent mother too." Kaoru's tone was extremely complex.

Under Horikita Suzune's death glare, he immediately shut his mouth and turned to enter the bathroom.

After he left, Horikita Suzune averted her eyes.

What did he mean by "excellent mother"?

Come to think of it, she had felt somewhat happy last night.

It was just a birthday party, so why did she feel that way?

It wasn't like Horikita Suzune had never had birthday parties before.

Her family would hold parties for her and her brother, but her memories of them were completely unenjoyable.

Was it because the cake tasted different? Or because she received more gifts than before?

Perhaps it was because she received a gift from her brother after so long?

Horikita Suzune's mind conjured Horikita Manabu's face, then quickly flashed with images of Kushida Kikyo, Ichinose Honami, and Karuizawa Kei.

The moment the door opened, with several pops, the party poppers exploded, filling her vision with flying confetti.

[Welcome back! Suzune-chan!]

"This time, I was really... quite surprised."

Recalling Ichinose Honami's smile, Horikita Suzune murmured to herself, "Is this what they call a surprise?"

When preparing Kushida's birthday party, she had heard them emphasizing something about surprises, but Horikita Suzune hadn't paid it much mind.

When it was her turn, Horikita Suzune found herself unexpectedly startled.

"Let's eat."

Kaoru's voice suddenly made her tense up.

Looking up, she saw he had somehow sat down beside her and was already eating the fried eggs with relish.

"This is pretty good."

"Has no one ever told you not to startle people during meals?"

"What were you thinking about just now, Suzune?"

"It feels utterly baffling. Last night they suddenly threw me into your room, and Kei specifically stuffed a few things into my hands, as if it were some predetermined routine—like animals mating at specific times."

"Just one day apart, and your mouth has suddenly become so venomous."

"Nothing really. I'm just annoyed that you all arbitrarily included me in your harem, and what's more, you're being so polite about it."

"..."

Kaoru silently ate his breakfast.

To be honest, he didn't quite understand the girl's point of annoyance, but perhaps that was exactly what made her seem cute.

No matter how cold and aloof she usually appeared, Horikita Suzune was ultimately just a sixteen-year-old girl.

"What about Valentine's Day?"

Horikita Suzune suddenly said, "Wasting all your time here with me seems like a poor trade-off. Last night they mentioned that Hasebe and several others brought you chocolates, but you weren't there."

Because of Horikita Suzune's situation, Kaoru hadn't attended the study group gathering, so they had specifically delivered the chocolates to his room.

He heard they originally planned to leave them at the door, but unexpectedly heard Ichinose Honami's voice coming from inside the room.

Thus, the two groups accidentally ran into each other.

"I never expected you to quietly win over my classmates like that. Had I known earlier, I should have interfered with your study group back then."

Kaoru silently drank his miso soup.

Most of his Valentine's chocolates yesterday had been received by Ichinose Honami on his behalf, while he himself was completely absent.

Just thinking about it felt despairing.

"Kei suggested that since we had no time yesterday, we might as well each have our own Valentine's day."

Kaoru explained, "For example, I'll go on a date with Kei today, with Honami tomorrow, with Kikyo the day after... This way there's no need to worry, and everyone has plenty of comfortable time."

Horikita Suzune remained silent for a moment.

"You should try for a Guinness World Record - the biggest scumbag with the most consecutive dates with different girls."

"I feel like you're being particularly sharp with me today." Kaoru said puzzledly.

"Isn't it the truth?"

Horikita Suzune put her hands together, "I'm finished eating. I put your lunch box in your bag. This time, don't give it to the neighbor's classmate again."

Kaoru felt somewhat guilty - when Kamuro wanted to eat the lunch box, he couldn't stop her.

Suddenly, Horikita Suzune let out a deep sigh.

"Although I don't think it's necessary for you to prepare these things for me, but..."

As she spoke, Horikita Suzune's voice gradually softened, "It doesn't feel too bad. I'm actually a little happy."

Kaoru was taken aback for a moment, then his expression became complicated.

Shouldn't you have said that yesterday?

"Don't look at me with that 'why didn't you say this yesterday' expression. It's my first time experiencing something like this - how was I supposed to know what to say?"

For some reason, Horikita Suzune glared at him fiercely.

Chapter 527: Skipping Class

Kamuro wasn't looking forward to her birthday.

In some people's eyes, it might be an important day - surrounded by various people offering good wishes and gifts, even receiving more lenient treatment than usual.

Despite this, Kamuro wondered what any of this had to do with her?

What would happen if she received gifts and blessings? What would happen if she didn't?

Couldn't a person celebrate their birthday alone?

Kamuro had grown accustomed to her current life.

The fully enclosed management didn't really affect her, and whether the class atmosphere was good or bad similarly had no impact on her.

Although people had always suspected her relationship with Kaoru, which was somewhat irritating, for the most part, she had no interaction with her classmates.

Some say she speaks little, is usually too reclusive, behaves somewhat strangely, occasionally attacks people for no apparent reason, can't read the room, and needs to improve her teamwork skills.

Moreover, Kamuro is also a ghost club member in the art club.

Throughout the year, the number of times she has visited the art club can be counted on one hand.

Currently, there are only about three people who can hold a conversation with her.

Kaoru, Sakayanagi Arisu, and Yamamura Miki.

In other words, Kamuro essentially has no friends, and she is quite different from Morishita Ai.

Although the latter also behaves strangely, she inexplicably gives off an air of natural airheadedness.

Additionally, since she is responsible for managing the class points, she has somehow integrated into the class circle.

Kamuro, on the other hand, is purely friendless—even Yamamura Miki has made friends in Class D.

However, Kamuro doesn't care about any of this.

"Masumi, is there really nothing you want?"

Today, the person next to her was talking to her again, casually using her first name as if it were nothing.

"I want a lethal weapon that can punish womanizers."

"Does such a thing exist?"

"Since it doesn't, stop bothering me."

Kamuro turned her head away.

This guy had no idea what he was thinking, asking such questions every day as if he thought she were an idiot.

What's so great about birthdays?

Just thinking about having to blow out candles in front of him and pretending to make wishes that would never come true made Kamuro feel that such behavior was both hypocritical and childish.

"Let me think—if Masumi could order me to do one thing, what would it be?"

"Hah, the order would be to go to S..."

Just as she was about to continue attacking him, Kamuro suddenly froze.

"Any order at all?"

"Theoretically, yes. Does Masumi already have an idea?"

"None of your business."

Kamuro tried hard to suppress the slight upturn at the corner of her mouth.

Ordering him to do something didn't seem so bad—it actually sounded quite fun.

But what exactly should she make him do?

Make him run naked around the school?

That wouldn't work.

Never mind whether he would agree, she would likely end up suffering for it.

Make him do something embarrassing?

Come to think of it, he had always been the one bullying her. Shouldn't it be her turn now?

Make him kneel and call her "master"? No, no—that would be rewarding him.

Make him post his embarrassing past on the forum?

That was worth considering, but it felt too light—there was no satisfying sense of revenge.

Wait, since he's such a lecher, why not make him refrain from doing anything bad for a month—no, a whole semester? That idea seemed pretty good.

But what if he couldn't hold back and ended up taking it out on her instead?

Kamuro unconsciously twirled her pen, hesitating and unsure what to make him do.

"Masumi, you can decide by tomorrow."

A voice came from next to her.

Why was he smiling so creepily? Kamuro couldn't stand it and completely ignored him after that.

Today's lessons weren't too complicated. The teachers of each subject were covering review materials.

With the mock exams over, the real exams would arrive soon, and everyone was studying seriously.

Kamuro could keep up with the teachers' pace—after all, Kaoru had taught her that learning wasn't just about reciting textbooks; what mattered more was the way of thinking.

With Kaoru's help, she barely managed to form her own study approach, gradually understanding the textbook content through her own methods.

She was quite grateful to him for this.

As Kamuro took notes, her thoughts drifted back to the scene of his confession.

Gratitude aside, she was thankful she hadn't fallen under the Christmas magic.

If she had accepted him, what status would she maintain in front of them? What attitude should she adopt toward them?

Moreover, even that Sakayanagi guy maintained an ambiguous attitude, so there was no need for her to rush in.

Kamuro kept thinking—maybe she should just order him to speak his true feelings?

Unfortunately, with the school bell ringing, the guy next door quickly packed his things and immediately left the classroom under her gaze.

Soon after, Kamuro saw Yamamura Miki hurriedly follow after him, and she couldn't help but curl her lips—it was his Harem gathering time again.

It seemed tomorrow would be another ordinary day.

...

"Let's skip class, Masumi."

The next morning, hearing Kaoru say these words to her with a serious face, Kamuro wondered if this guy had lost his mind.

"Hah? What are you talking about?"

Then, right in front of students passing by downstairs at the dormitory, Kaoru grabbed her wrist.

"Let's do something bad for once. I'll take full responsibility for the consequences. Masumi just needs to enjoy the fun of being mischievous today."

"Wait just a—"

Before Kamuro could scold him, he suddenly pulled her along forcefully, making her follow behind him as they fled the dormitory under the surprised gazes of many students.

"Hey hey hey, Mitoma! You two aren't allowed to skip class! You'll make us lose points!"

Totsuka Yahiko's voice came from behind, filled with shock and anger.

Following his shouts, Kamuro noticed students on the road turning their attention toward them.

Some clearly didn't understand what was happening, only seeing a boy pulling a girl's hand and assuming they were a young couple, their eyes unfriendly.

"None of your business if I skip class!"

Totsuka Yahiko's face turned red then pale, nearly chasing after Kaoru to argue, but Katsuragi beside him stopped him in time.

At that moment, they finally realized Kaoru wasn't heading toward the school building but toward Keyaki Mall, causing immediate commotion among the crowd.

Simultaneously, Kamuro's heartbeat quickened.

Was she really skipping class like this today?

"How does it feel?" Kaoru shouted loudly, "Skipping class right in front of everyone feels great, doesn't it?"

Kamuro froze for a moment.

Skipping class could have been done secretly, but he was making it so public—apparently he deliberately wanted everyone to see.

"I've never skipped class before!"

"Then what's Masumi's review of her first time skipping class?"

"Absolutely ridiculous!"

"Someone who steals from convenience stores but has never skipped class is even more ridiculous!"

"I don't steal things often!"

"I know. Masumi only does outrageous things because she's too lonely!"

"I'm not lonely at all!"

"From the first time I saw you, I knew you were always craving something!"

"Explain yourself clearly!"

Before she even realized it, Kamuro found the corners of her lips lifting.

The wind rushing past felt so clear and cool, her entire bloodstream boiling with excitement as if every cell were cheering in delight—so this was what skipping class felt like.

Even if he were to claim he lacked friends or needed a thrill, Kamuro would have accepted those answers.

However, Kaoru suddenly burst into laughter.

"Hahaha, Masumi, don't just believe everything people say!"

Kamuro flushed red with embarrassment—this guy was teasing her again!

"Just kidding! There's only one thing Masumi lacks the most right now!"

Kaoru shouted into the wind, "Cheer up a little—you're the least likely person in the whole class to smile!"

Kamuro froze.

Cheer up?

"Never mind Morishita or Miki—you're always stuck at your desk, completely expressionless. Even Miki secretly sends me emojis, but you're just like a dead fish."

At his words, Kamuro couldn't help but get angry.

What did he mean, "dead fish"?

"You're so nosy!"

"I don't care. Just let loose today. When you graduate and look back on your high school life, you'll regret having nothing to remember."

"Mind your own business! I'll live my high school life however I want!"

"Fine. I hope Arisu doesn't appear in those memories."

"Hey, she's the one relying on me!"

"So forget about all that today!"

Chapter 528: Actually a Date

Since it was a school day, most shops in the Keyaki Mall didn't open too early, as their main customers were still in class.

Yet, Kamuro now saw rows of shops clearly in operation—every storefront wide open, every clerk at their post, even niche stores that usually only opened during specific hours were doing business.

If she didn't know they were skipping class, she'd suspect it was some holiday, with all the shops waiting for students.

"From now until noon—four hours—this place belongs entirely to us."

Kaoru gazed calmly at the mall. "No matter what we do from here on, the staff will pretend not to see us, unless we ask for help. Also, the surveillance cameras are temporarily off. No traces will be left."

"Huh?!"

Kamuro turned to him in disbelief.

What was he saying? How could he possibly order the mall to open, make the staff ignore them, and even force the school to shut off the cameras?

In every sense, this was way too extreme.

What was this guy thinking?

"What exactly did you do?"

"Nothing much. Just followed school rules. Since Personal points can buy anything in this school, getting them to temporarily disable the cameras was negotiable."

"W-Wait, is this really about rules and cameras?"

Kamuro glared at him, highly displeased.

Though she knew the power of Personal points, pulling this off definitely required a staggering amount.

In response, Kaoru showed a hint of confusion, which only infuriated her more.

"How much did you spend, you idiot?"

"Two million to shut down the school's cameras. Another five million to coordinate with the mall manager."

"What?! You spent that much? Are you an idiot?!"

Kamuro was nearly furious to death!

"What's with that tone of yours, as if you just bought a bottle of soda? I don't remember you being this rich!"

Even if he had kept the personal points extorted from Nagumo Miyabi back then, spending seven million all at once just for four hours at a shopping mall was simply reckless extravagance!

"You're not comfortable in crowded places, are you?"

Kaoru's tone remained unchanged. "Though I considered throwing you a birthday party, I figured Masumi probably wouldn't like it. For someone with no friends normally, being forced to attend a party would be downright unpleasant."

Kamuro flushed bright red. "Take back that pitying look right now! It's not that I don't have friends—I just don't see the need!"

Kaoru shifted his gaze away from her and asked, "Is there anything you'd like to do next, Masumi? For instance, shoplifting at the mall?"

Kamuro fell silent for a moment. "Is that the only impression I leave you with?"

"After all, I did say I'd take you to do plenty of bad things. Shoplifting counts as one of them. Otherwise, why would I specifically skip class?"

A faint smile appeared on Kaoru's face. "I bet the whole class is talking about us right now. Feels pretty good being the bad kids, doesn't it?"

"How disgusting."

Kamuro rubbed her arm—not because his words sounded contemptible, but because she realized she was actually feeling a bit stirred up.

Skiping class seemed to carry an inexplicable magic all its own, making the girl's heart begin to flutter with excitement.

And so, a few minutes later...

Kaoru watched as Kamuro walked out of the convenience store without paying, bold as brass.

"So this is what it feels like to take something right in front of everyone."

Kamuro seemed genuinely surprised. "It's like being invisible. Isn't this just a prank?"

So, they had actually gone to the convenience store and shoplifted.

"More fun than I imagined. That clerk was trying hard to pretend he didn't see me take the most expensive item."

"Don't worry, I already paid for it."

"Shut up! Just hearing you say that pisses me off!"

"I didn't expect you to be this cute, Masumi. I thought you'd at least do something illegal, but all you did was take a few things."

"You...!"

Just as Kamuro was about to give him a piece of her mind, she suddenly realized something and fell into thought.

"The surveillance cameras are all turned off, right?"

"Yeah, only the clerks can see us now."

As he spoke, Kaoru waved toward a bubble tea shop not far away.

The clerk inside acted as if she hadn't seen a thing. "But they'll all pretend not to notice us."

"You said something earlier that was spot on. I'm planning to do something illegal now."

Kamuro suddenly announced to Kaoru, "As the instigator, you wait here for me. Don't you dare leave!"

With that, the girl turned around and strode back into the convenience store behind them.

"Just don't go overboard." Kaoru said flatly.

Soon enough, Kamuro reappeared before him, holding two cans of beer.

"Your idea of 'illegal' is kind of adorable."

"Hah, what's that supposed to mean?"

Kamuro shoved one of the beer cans at him. "I've taken this kind of stuff before, but I've never tried it. Minors aren't allowed to drink, after all."

"So you're going to give it a try this time?"

Kaoru looked at the beer in his hand.

Underage drinking was prohibited in Japan—not serious enough to land someone in jail, but corresponding penalties would be imposed on guardians and liquor vendors instead.

"I don't know, I just felt like trying it, so I wanted to give it a shot."

With a crisp pop, Kamuro pulled the tab on the can, releasing a faint aroma of alcohol. "It's kind of like when I applied to this school. I don't really care about these things. Besides, this time you're the one allowing me to do something bad—feels pretty good."

Kaoru wasn't the type to absolutely forbid drinking, so he said, "This is an exception. Once you finish this, that's it. Even if you win another round, you can't drink anymore."

"Just a moment ago, you were encouraging me to do something bad, and now you're lecturing me. Are you schizophrenic?"

Kamuro sounded displeased and took a sip of the beer.

Pfft—

In an instant, Kamuro spat out all the beer in her mouth, her expression twisting in disgust.

"Ugh, what is this? It's disgusting! So bitter and astringent—it feels like my tongue's on fire. And it smells awful!"

It seemed she couldn't stomach it on her first try. Kaoru pulled the tab on his own can and took a small sip.

Without a doubt, it was the taste of alcohol.

"How can anyone drink this? It's literally poison. So gross."

"Don't say that. You'll hurt adults' feelings if they hear you."

"I don't get why people like drinking. I thought it would taste more refreshing. Could it be that cigarettes are just as disgusting?"

"So you were planning to smoke too?"

"Doing something bad right in front of them—Isn't that what you wanted me to do?"

Kaoru averted his gaze and took another sip of beer.

"Actually, I just wanted to go on a date with Masumi."

Hearing this, Kamuro froze for a moment before becoming uncharacteristically flustered, though she tried hard to act composed.

"Y-you've really gone too far. Skipping class with me, saying things like 'make yourself happy' earlier, and now it turns out you just want to win me over. Is your head filled with nothing but women's bodies?"

As she spoke, as if to mask her agitation, Kamuro mimicked his actions and took another sip of beer.

It tasted awful, but this time she didn't spit it out.

Chapter 529: Changing Clothes

A date? Sounded like such a hassle.

Just the two of them, alone—could anything be worse?

She was starting to regret it.

She shouldn't have agreed to this in a moment of impulsiveness. Using skipping class as a cover for his intentions—how sneaky.

Even if she hadn't realized it at the time, it was still sneaky.

And why did he have to say it out loud? How was she supposed to pretend not to notice now?

Kamuro could easily imagine how their classmates would view her.

The rumors about the two of them were already ambiguous enough, and now they'd skipped class in front of everyone.

She'd probably never be able to clear her name.

"So this is your method. How capable of you."

Kamuro held the beer with both hands as they walked through the mall.

At this point, there was no turning back.

"Buying the entire mall, deliberately shutting off the surveillance cameras, and tricking a minor into drinking—are you planning to take advantage of me?"

"Yeah, I'm fantasizing about your body."

Kaoru's tone was dismissive. Kamuro gritted her teeth in frustration.

It was always like this—this guy always knew how to provoke her emotions, yet she could never retaliate against him.

It was truly infuriating!

Occasionally, he should be the one getting teased and messed with by her!

Bang!

With a loud noise, Kaoru stopped in his tracks and turned to see a conspicuous footprint now marked on the vending machine.

Shifting his gaze, he saw Kamuro's face flushed bright red, looking somewhat exhilarated.

She was the one who had caused the sound just now.

"Are you drunk?"

Kaoru noticed the beer can in her hand was already empty, the girl's grip so tight it nearly crumpled the aluminum.

"Hah, who's drunk now!"

Kamuro's breathing grew rapid, her voice significantly louder.

"It's my birthday today anyway! I never needed you meddling from the start. What does it matter what I do alone?"

She really seemed drunk.

Such low alcohol tolerance?

But her drinking manners were rather poor—probably the type who gets increasingly reckless with each drink.

Fueled by mental exhilaration, she'd indiscriminately attacked the vending machine.

Indeed, she shouldn't be allowed to drink more.

"But birthdays should be happy occasions. Though this method is foolish, I want to become accomplices with Masumi—to understand how you usually feel."

"That's utterly pathetic!"

"How does committing a crime feel?"

"Shut up!"

Kamuro lifted the beer can, apparently intending to toss it into the trash bin, but accidentally put too much force into it.

The can traced a parabolic arc through the air and, under Kaoru's watchful gaze, plummeted straight down to the first-floor lobby.

They were currently on the third floor.

Fortunately, there were no pedestrians below, or this would definitely count as throwing objects from a height for Kamuro.

"How terrible."

Kamuro touched her cheek. "Is my body burning up? I feel so hot all over, like I'm bursting with endless energy."

"You're simply drunk. You're forbidden from touching beer ever again."

Kaoru walked to the trash bin and casually tossed his own beer can inside.

The one downstairs could wait for now.

"I don't need your lectures! Besides, I'm not drunk at all—I feel perfectly alert!"

Kamuro glared at Kaoru, then shifted her gaze to the shopping mall.

"This is actually my first time seeing the mall so quiet and empty. It's always so noisy normally."

"Want to experience all the shops?" Kaoru asked.

Kamuro patted her head, trying to sober up a bit. "Are there any stores that normally don't allow students in?"

"This is what you usually care about?"

Kaoru was somewhat speechless.

"None of your business! I'm just curious."

Kamuro muttered quietly, "Spent so many points just to wander around the mall. You idiot."

You should've said so earlier—it's not like I couldn't have taken you out somewhere.

"Shops where students can't spend money... I suppose they'd be venues specifically designed for teachers."

"B-bars?"

"Absolutely not. Not in your current state."

"Stop nagging!"

"..."

Kaoru sighed in resignation and had no choice but to take her to the bar.

The bars here were essentially identical to those outside—clearly set up for office workers.

Normally, not only teachers would visit, but other Kōyuku employees could also drop by for a drink.

Under usual circumstances, the staff would have shooed them away.

But now, armed with his Cash superpower, Kaoru smoothly escorted Kamuro through the bar's entrance.

"See? It doesn't look that special—pretty much like a yakiniku place."

"Your expectations for bars are too high, aren't they?"

"Don't TV shows often depict protagonists picking up women in bars? Depressed women drinking some Bikini Cocktail, then the protagonist can hit on them and eventually get a room together."

"Does such a TV drama exist?"

"When watching those scenes, I'd always wonder—what do cocktails taste like? What does it feel like to drink in a bar?"

Kamuro let out a deep sigh, then grew agitated again, veins bulging on her forehead.

"The result is about the same as a yakiniku restaurant—this is practically fraud!"

"Bars are just like that; you're overthinking it." Kaoru led her out of the bar.

Though they had drunk beer earlier, openly ordering cocktails in a bar would create a bad impression.

Bang!

"Ahaha, Mitoma, you died again!"

In the arcade, Kamuro was unusually excited.

She picked up the light gun with extreme seriousness, having already taken down Kaoru seventeen times—a complete victory!

"Pathetic! What kind of terrible gameplay is this? Coordinate with me! You're such a useless man. How dare you bring a girl to the arcade with skills like this!"

Perhaps alcohol had clouded her judgment, as she now appeared more spirited than usual.

Her classmates would probably never believe the woman wreaking havoc in the arcade was Kamuro.

Well, they likely wouldn't imagine her occasionally kicking the machine while muttering about why the drinks wouldn't fall out either.

Kaoru had no choice but to buy milk and honey to sober her up first—otherwise, today's plans would likely be ruined.

"Uwah, wh-what is this?"

Kamuro took a sip of milk, her face contorting with disgust, "It's slimy and doesn't taste good at all. Did you give me some weird drink?"

"Pure milk." Kaoru said, "If we keep arguing, it'll be lunch break soon."

At these words, Kamuro seemed to regain a moment of clarity.

"So fast? It feels like only seconds have passed. You really spend money like water!"

Was she going to keep harping on this all day?

"So frustrating. Being dragged out by you for no reason—my future life is definitely ruined. Honestly, from the moment I got involved with you, I've been like an idiot, constantly being played by you."

"Can't you have any positive thoughts about me?"

"Heh, there's no way to be optimistic. Having a Harem Overlord around me, who didn't even spare me—just thinking about it makes me despair."

"Hold on. Today is your birthday."

"My birthday?"

Kamuro knocked on her own head, "Seems like it is. Skipping school for my birthday, even this part is under your control. I don't know what to do anymore."

"Didn't I tell you already?" Kaoru said calmly, "You can order me to do one thing today. Consider it your birthday gift."

"So the birthday person gets what they want?"

Kamuro raised her eyebrows—this didn't seem bad.

"Since you didn't want to attend a birthday party anyway."

Kaoru said, "You might as well spend the day however you like."

Kamuro closed her eyes.

Celebrating her birthday—no matter how she thought about it, felt completely unrelated to her. This was just how things had always been.

When she first left home and applied to Koudo Ikusei, she didn't think it was anything special.

Advancing to higher education, getting a job—these were just excuses to convince her parents.

The reason she took the entrance exam was probably because it didn't matter where she went.

She just never expected to actually be accepted.

Initially, when she heard about the S System, Kamuro didn't have any particular thoughts.

She just slightly felt the person next to her was impressive for being able to predict these things.

Whether she could graduate from Class A or get expelled for some reason—though she felt a bit nervous, Kamuro realized she was different from them.

What was there to care about?

Even if she got expelled, she could just transfer to another school.

If she couldn't advance her education, she'd obediently find work.

When it came to life plans, Kamuro rarely thought about such things.

Her daily life was simply that of an ordinary student: attending classes and resting, nothing more.

She stole things because she felt like it—no particular reason.

Kamuro wasn't short on money, nor did she have any psychological issues.

She simply wondered: if she took a few things, would anyone notice?

This was probably what they called a twisted sense of amusement, right?

After all, the things she stole were usually not used but kept as trophies.

Later, when Sakayanagi Arisu discovered it and Kaoru used the Cold Reading Technique to coax the truth out of her, aside from being startled and resentful, Kamuro didn't think it was a big deal.

There was nothing to worry about in the first place. She had nothing worth caring about, and even if she got expelled, no one would mind.

Holding such thoughts, Kamuro was confessed to for the first time.

"Let me ask you something."

The girl suddenly opened her eyes.

Kaoru looked at her in confusion, waiting for her to continue.

"Why do you want to make me happy?"

Kaoru was slightly taken aback, then pondered and said, "Maybe it's easier to win you over that way."

Kamuro's expression remained blank. As expected, he was a playboy, always thinking about women.

"Fine, there's one thing that would make me happy right now. Are you willing to do it?"

"Go ahead."

"Promise me first."

"..."

Kaoru gave in.

He had thought she was still drunk, but she had sobered up so quickly and even knew how to trap him.

Still, it didn't matter if he agreed.

Though Kamuro was often harsh toward him, she wasn't a bad person at heart.

However, the next moment, Kaoru saw Kamuro break into a smile and point a finger at him.

"Cross-dress for me!"

Damn it, she was acting out while drunk.

"It's almost lunch break; people will be coming soon."

Kaoru tried to refuse. "Besides, where would I find clothes to change into?"

"No, no, no. It's precisely because people will be coming that I want you to cross-dress."

As she spoke, Kamuro naturally began unbuttoning her own clothes."

"Don't worry about the clothes—we can swap!"

In that instant, Kaoru fully understood: he must never let her drink again.

Chapter 530: The Greedy Foot Fetishist.

Just as he had thought, Kamuro wasn't entirely sober.

Seeing him finally show a flustered expression only made her more excited.

So, the girl unbuttoned her jacket, then the bow at her chest.

With her movements, it was clear how tightly her shirt clung to her increasingly mature curves, accentuating her soft, full features for the first time.

As she undid the second button, Kaoru grabbed her wrist, trying to stop her.

"Stop messing around. Why are you taking off your own clothes?"

The two of them were in the game center.

Though there were no surveillance cameras, Kamuro's actions were too conspicuous, and Kaoru felt nothing but a splitting headache.

"Hey, didn't you promise to follow my orders?" Kamuro took his restraint as resistance. "Someone like you deserves this—put on women's clothing immediately and run ten laps outside!"

As she spoke, she kept struggling against Kaoru's hold.

"The shop staff will see!"

Kaoru desperately controlled the girl's hands. "You're the one embarrassing yourself right now. Who would strip their own clothes to give someone women's wear?"

Kamuro seemed to take it in.

Her eyes scanned the surroundings, falling into hesitation and contemplation.

"Finally coming to your senses?" Kaoru breathed a sigh of relief.

He should have stopped her from drinking earlier.

"Hmm, making you obediently comply clearly won't work."

Kamuro nodded. "So, I'll satisfy you a little!"

Suddenly, she grabbed Kaoru's hand and, without another word, forcibly dragged him straight toward the restroom—specifically, the women's restroom.

It was Kaoru's first time in a women's restroom. He was promptly pressed onto a toilet seat by Kamuro as the stall door slowly closed.

Thus, in an isolated space where all surveillance was disabled, the girl stared wordlessly at Kaoru.

The heavy silence made him wonder if she was about to vomit.

"Hic~"

Kamuro covered her mouth with one hand, turning her delicate face slightly away.

The flushed tips of her ears came into Kaoru's view.

"Going to throw up?"

Kaoru prepared to give her space, recalling that milk and honey could sober someone up.

"Who's throwing up? It's your fault for feeding me something weird earlier."

Kamuro's nose twitched.

She seemed to catch a strange scent—was that alcohol on her breath?

"So, what's the situation now?"

Kaoru found it hard to look away from her chest.

The collar button was undone, revealing a glimpse of pale, delicate skin and subtly indented collarbones.

The white shirt clung tightly to the girl's fullness, plump and hinting at indecency.

Kamuro tapped her forehead, feeling somewhat dizzy.

Yet her whole body burned with heat, the heightened emotions keeping her from drowsiness.

"You said you'd make me happy, right?"

"Do I really have to cross-dress?"

"Seeing that expression on your face means I'm doing it right. Finally got a handle on you."

"This isn't really a 'handle,' and are you malfunctioning right now?"

"Sorry, but I'm just that kind of bad girl—I can watch you ruin your life without batting an eye."

"..."

Kamuro felt deeply satisfied.

The long-suppressed resentment finally had an outlet, and with alcohol lowering her inhibitions, she couldn't be bothered to overthink.

"Well? Will you do it?"

Kamuro pressed his shoulders, already visualizing him in women's clothing, dashing across campus under everyone's stares.

"No."

Kaoru shattered her fantasy. "You're drunk. Why would I agree?"

Kamuro's face flushed crimson.

She wasn't drunk at all—just a few sips of beer.

Who gets drunk from that?

"Damn it, so you just want to satisfy your perverted desires. What a disgusting guy!"

"No... I didn't say anything, did I?"

"Though it's frustrating, as a trade... I could satisfy you, you foot-fetishist pervert." Before Kaoru could voice his confusion, Kamuro supported him while leaning slightly closer.

The delicate fragrance unique to girls wafted into his nostrils, and her slightly prominent chest came into close view.

The next moment, the girl lifted her right leg, hooked off her shoe with her fingers, and—right before Kaoru—placed her slender foot, clad in black calf socks, squarely on the toilet seat between his thighs.

Kaoru glanced at the calf before him, then raised his gaze to see the girl's skirt barely covering her plump, pale thighs, exposing a small portion of the curve of her pert, rounded buttocks.

He didn't see the true color, as she was wearing safety shorts.

"W-what's so strange about safety shorts? It's not like I show you what's underneath every day."

Kamuro blushed but stubbornly glared at Kaoru. "That time was an exception. I'm not like them, so you'd better give up on that idea."

In truth, she had assumed Kaoru would force her to show him what was underneath, so she had been wearing safety shorts all along, intending to cruelly toy with his expectations and crush his spirits as a way to vent her frustration.

Yet, Kaoru had always behaved properly.

"I'm a bit confused. Is Masumi trying to show me her safety shorts now?"

Drunk people often have bizarre thought processes, so it was natural for Kaoru to struggle to follow her logic.

"No, I'm indulging your foot fetish."

Kamuro said, puzzled, "Aren't you excited?"

Kaoru fell silent for a moment. "You're not expecting me to lick your feet here, are you?"

Though the girl's delicate feet looked enticing—wrapped in slightly thick black stockings like filled chocolates, with pink toes tinged a wine-red hue, and smooth, rounded heels free of wrinkles or calluses, making them utterly appealing.

Moreover, just above were her thighs, with skin as pale and tender as milk, possessing a jelly-like elasticity.

Combined with the allure of her skirt and uniform, there was a sense of forbidden temptation.

Seeing her slightly flushed, charming face, it would be understandable if one couldn't resist making a move.

"F-fine, if you don't want to, then forget it. It's not like I'm eager to let you do it anyway."

Kamuro seemed stung by something. "They'll all satisfy you anyway. I'm not as pretty as them, and my figure isn't good..."

Kaoru gently grasped her ankle.

The warm, smooth texture was incredibly silky, and with just a few light strokes, her voice abruptly cut off.

"I don't have a foot fetish. It's just that I happen to like you, so I'm greedy and don't want to miss any part of you. It has nothing to do with whether your figure is good or not."

As the man's hand began to wander, Kamuro's face flushed crimson.

Her previously muddled mind suddenly cleared, the alcohol evaporating alongside her innate sense of shame.

Stuttering, she looked down at Kaoru.

"But Masumi's figure is already very good. I like it so much that I can't help but get handsy."

Kaoru whispered, "So, don't say things like that. Don't tempt me like this, or I might lose control."

With those words, he kissed the girl's calf.

Kamuro shuddered instantly, goosebumps rising all over.

She instinctively stepped back but found herself pressed against the door, with no escape.