

Cote 581

Chapter 581: I'm Honored

After school, most students were packing their bags, with only a few having no intention of returning home.

They gathered around Katsuragi Kohei.

The Katsuragi faction was discussing strategies, or rather, their positioning in the upcoming exam—whether they should fully cooperate with Sakayanagi Arisu or take the opportunity to sabotage her plans.

Of course, they didn't voice the latter idea openly, merely asking Katsuragi what to do and what his thoughts were.

To be honest, although Kamuro Masumi wasn't deliberately paying attention to the Katsuragi faction's situation, she knew those surrounding Katsuragi Kohei were his staunch supporters.

The Katsuragi faction wasn't united.

Besides the core members, the rest were either former Sakayanagi supporters they had won over or observers/swing voters from the class who had been waiting on the sidelines.

Kamuro Masumi couldn't help but sigh softly.

Even in a disadvantaged situation, the Sakayanagi faction had stubbornly survived, closely following Sakayanagi Arisu.

Based on her understanding of this little princess, this conflict would continue until one side was completely defeated.

"Sigh, we're about to become second-years soon. When will this situation end?"

Suddenly, someone inadvertently voiced her inner thoughts.

Kamuro Masumi turned to see Hashimoto Masayoshi also watching the Katsuragi faction's movements.

Perhaps her gaze was too noticeable, as Hashimoto Masayoshi looked back at her, slightly surprised, and offered a faint smile.

"Sorry, please forget what I just said."

"Some say you're also responsible."

Kamuro Masumi withdrew her gaze, packing her bag to leave the classroom.

"Lately, you've been promoting that 'iron triangle' idea. I think it's quite good."

"Haha, not fully following the little princess's orders is indeed my fault."

Hashimoto Masayoshi said, "But I'm not the only one who hasn't been taking action."

Before he said this, Morishita Ai and Kaoru had already left the classroom.

These people completely disregarded the upcoming exam.

Kamuro Masumi felt somewhat frustrated.

Why did he leave so quickly?

She could only see him in the classroom—couldn't he have stayed a little longer?

"I'm not interested in your affairs."

"Ahaha, actually I feel somewhat similar to you, though perhaps more cheerful and carefree. Those without achievements should just wait quietly for those with capabilities to work hard."

"You've suddenly subverted my impression of you."

"What impression?"

"I thought you were someone completely self-absorbed."

"...Is that so?"

Hashimoto Masayoshi laughed, pointing at himself, "Sorry, my standards for myself are quite flexible."

Kamuro Masumi stared at him for a moment without responding, picked up her backpack, and turned to leave the classroom.

...

Meanwhile, Ichinose Honami was smiling as she bid farewell to her friends and caught up with their homeroom teacher Chie Hoshinomiya.

She accidentally caught sight of Kamuro Masumi's retreating figure.

She remembered she was Kaoru's... female friend?

Ichinose Honami couldn't find more precise words for the moment - calling her his woman would feel rather strange.

A volatile element temporarily remaining outside their small circle - that description fit better, similar to people like Asahina Nazuna and Sakayanagi Arisu.

This won't do.

If these people keep maintaining such distance, we can't achieve an ending where everyone finds happiness.

Just then, Ichinose Honami noticed the shadows cast by sunlight filtering through tree branches.

Though the grand flower season was yet to come, some cherry blossoms had already begun blooming quietly.

The soft clusters of flowers outlined the shape of spring, and petals dancing with the wind unknowingly brushed against her toes.

"Sensei, do you have someone you like?"

"Ara ara, is this about romance? Is Honami-chan wanting to consult me about love troubles?"

"I'm curious about adult relationships."

Chie Hoshinomiya pressed her index finger to her lips, signaling Ichinose Honami to lower her voice.

The latter obediently closed her mouth.

"The adult world is quite realistic. It's better for young girls not to inquire too much about these things," the homeroom teacher said. "Men are troublesome. Even when they just want to have fun, they insist on believing you're their destined one and won't stop pestering you. So annoying."

"Does teacher have much experience?" Ichinose Honami asked. "Like dating multiple people simultaneously..."

"Ehehe, I knew you'd ask that. Tell me, did that bastard from Class A do something to you?" Chie Hoshinomiya's eyes burned with gossipy flames.

"Even back in my day, we never tried anything like what you kids are doing!"

Ichinose Honami felt somewhat embarrassed.

She shouldn't have approached this unreliable teacher who always claimed to have experience but actually only had theoretical knowledge.

For instance, Chie Hoshinomiya often earnestly taught them about high school romance, but Ichinose Honami knew this woman never had a boyfriend during her own high school days.

Still, even if Hoshinomiya had experience, she probably couldn't solve her problem anyway.

What would the future hold?

She didn't care.

This time, she would at least hold tightly onto Kaoru and never let go, even if it killed her.

...

"It appears everyone is present. Please each draw one slip. The student who draws the paper with a red dot will be granted selection rights."

Mashima picked up a lottery box and walked before the students.

Present were Sakayanagi Arisu, Ichinose Honami, Ryuen Kakeru, and Kushida Kikyo - all representing their respective classes' Command Towers.

"I'll go last." Sakayanagi Arisu smiled and said, "They say blessings come to those who wait. I like that notion. Please begin, Ichinose-san."

"Sounds good! I won't hold back then!"

Ichinose Honami offered a faint smile.

Some people had no one to blame but themselves for not seizing opportunities—this wasn't child's play where turn-taking mattered.

Mashima didn't intervene, allowing Ichinose Honami to reach into the lottery box.

She drew a slip of paper marked with a red dot.

"It seems waiting doesn't always bring blessings, Sakayanagi," Ryuen Kakeru nearly laughed aloud.

Sakayanagi Arisu's expression remained unchanged as she chuckled softly.

"Hehe, luck isn't solely defined by my draw. Please designate a class, Ichinose-san."

Any rational person would have chosen Class 1-D, the weakest among them.

Students like Kushida Kikyo present here were deemed insignificant by both Sakayanagi Arisu and Ryuen Kakeru, as all four classes had coincidentally made the same decision: assigning students with Protection Points as Command Towers.

"Sakayanagi-san seems quite composed. Is it because Class A faces anyone with ease?" Ichinose Honami didn't make an immediate decision, her gaze fixed on Sakayanagi Arisu.

"Not at all." Sakayanagi Arisu maintained her smile. "This is just how I am with everyone."

Ichinose Honami knew about her wager with Kaoru, understood this was her final chance, and was aware of the consequences if she lost the bet.

"I see. I understand now. The class Class B designates this time is—"

Perhaps recalling past grievances or recent words exchanged, Ichinose Honami felt grateful for the insights shared with her.

Whether considering personal motives or class interests, there was only one choice to make.

"—Class A."

She knew this was the outcome Sakayanagi Arisu welcomed—no, the other had intended to defeat her from the start.

Sure enough, as she spoke, Sakayanagi Arisu's body began to tremble slightly, her face glowing with a dangerous radiance.

"Hehe, I'm honored."

Chapter 582: Gritting Teeth

Class 1-B versus Class 1-A—the outcome was already evident.

Mashima Tomonari explained the Command Tower system to the students.

During the official exam, each class's Command Tower would operate the system from this location.

Similar to playing chess, the Command Tower could freely select students from their class to compete and exercise their authority to intervene in the exam at opportune moments.

Communication between the Command Tower and the frontline was one-way: the Command Tower sent text messages to the frontline, where students received instructions via walkie-talkies.

Considering that mobile phones couldn't be used in some events, walkie-talkies were employed instead.

These devices used AI to relay the Command Tower's instructions, preventing direct communication between both sides.

"Only one student may wear a walkie-talkie per event, even in team competitions," Mashima Tomonari concluded.

"That covers all the exam details. Any questions?"

No one raised any.

Thus, the assembly concluded.

...

On the way back, Sakayanagi Arisu lagged behind the group, walking slowly.

Ichinose Honami deliberately slowed her pace as if to accommodate her.

"It seems you've confirmed your resolve."

The afternoon glow filtered through the window, casting shadows across the long corridor where Sakayanagi Arisu's petite figure emerged.

"I'd like to know what Sakayanagi-san thinks."

Ichinose Honami didn't beat around the bush, "Have you ever had feelings for him?"

"How strange of you to ask. Is this the unrealistic hostility a girlfriend holds toward everyone?"

Sakayanagi Arisu maintained her composure, leisurely walking out of the special teaching building.

"Well, I've been curious about Sakayanagi-san's ring."

Ichinose Honami openly admitted her feelings, "Why do you always wear it?"

"Oh? What kind of answer are you hoping for?"

Sakayanagi Arisu suddenly stopped, raising her ring-adorned hand.

The glittering reflection shone in her eyes and fell upon Ichinose Honami's lovely face.

"Even if I were unwilling, when facing my father, I had no choice but to comply."

Her words were somewhat difficult to comprehend.

Ichinose Honami couldn't help but imagine the scene of them meeting parents - Kaoru Mitoma gaining approval from her family.

"I don't like having my destiny decided by others."

The young woman grasped her own hand, "Like is like, dislike is dislike. It has nothing to do with parents. That's why I wear his ring."

Sakayanagi Arisu had noticed it long ago - the other girl was also wearing Kaoru Mitoma's ring.

Everything was already self-evident; everyone knew about this couple's relationship.

"Perhaps it's just his Game. I won't throw myself into the fire like moths to flame like you all, bringing about my own destruction."

Sakayanagi Arisu said, "I haven't considered romance. I have things I need to do."

"Is that so?"

Ichinose Honami placed her hands behind her back, slightly turning her body as her long hair cascaded down.

She looked at Sakayanagi Arisu beside her, "Yet I feel Sakayanagi-san's curiosity about him is about to explode."

"Just curiosity about a dead man."

Sakayanagi Arisu sighed deeply, "Actually, the person I can't understand is you. He had over twenty women before. Everything you've experienced with him, he's already experienced with other women."

Yes, what she had told Ichinose Honami earlier was Kaoru Mitoma's secret.

"I see. Sakayanagi-san cares deeply about his past."

Ichinose Honami smiled slightly, "I don't really mind though. The Kaoru I love is the present Kaoru, not the past one."

Sakayanagi Arisu chuckled lightly - this girl was beyond saving, completely love-struck.

"How he returned from death, what his purpose is here, what his past was like."

Ichinose Honami returned to her usual demeanor, expression calm, "I don't care. I'll only learn about these as part of who he is, but it won't affect my feelings for him."

Even if Sakayanagi Arisu hadn't told her, she felt she would have discovered Kaoru Mitoma's secret eventually.

"That's rather heavy, Ichinose-san."

Sakayanagi Arisu laughed, the more she laughed, the tighter she gripped her cane.

"I used to struggle with whether I should stop your bet. Now I feel relieved."

Ichinose Honami seemed to breathe a sigh of relief, "You only feel curiosity toward the unknown about him, like a chemist marveling at elements beyond the periodic table. You want to get closer to him and uncover his secrets."

"Is that your assessment of me?"

"In my eyes, your relationships are so fragile they could crumble at any moment," Sakayanagi Arisu said coldly.

"The only reason nothing has happened yet is because you're consciously excluding others. If anyone else wants to get close to him, they must first get your permission."

She had a key to his room, yet found it difficult to get near it because Karuizawa Kei, Horikita Suzune, Kushida Kikyo, Ichinose Honami, and the others were there.

Sakayanagi Arisu had no desire to squeeze in with them.

"I love him."

Ichinose Honami's voice was soft. "I love him so much it's hopeless, to the point where I'm afraid of losing him. So say whatever you want, I will stay by his side."

After speaking, she flashed a smile that Sakayanagi Arisu found particularly grating.

"I'll never let him go in this lifetime."

Things like making his producer hang himself were enough to make Ichinose Honami detest Kaoru's past, she had no desire to learn about that part of his life at all.

"Heh, do as you please."

Sakayanagi Arisu's gaze was cold.

What's with this 'I'm the main wife' expression?

The two fell silent for a moment, only to see Ryuen up ahead, seemingly waiting for them.

"What a great atmosphere you two have. Mind if I join in?"

Ryuen Kakeru grinned. "Although we're not opponents this time, I've got high hopes for you, Ichinose. This little shrimp is just a third-rate hack."

"I'll teach you a proper lesson next time, Ryuen-kun."

A cold smile touched Sakayanagi Arisu's lips, her usual composure completely gone.

Ryuen was momentarily stunned, then clicked his tongue in admiration.

"You've done a fine job, Ichinose, managing to put her in such a foul mood."

"If you don't mind, I'd appreciate it if you kept your mouth shut, Ryuen-kun."

Ichinose Honami wore a smile, but it held no warmth. "This is a battle between me and Sakayanagi-san."

A chill ran down Ryuen Kakeru's spine.

Even though it was broad daylight, he found himself sweating, a hint of coldness creeping over him.

"Don't tell me you're fighting over a guy..."

The words had nearly tumbled out of his mouth, but he was cut short by a dual glare, which made Ryuen shut his mouth for a rare change.

"I almost forgot, I have something to take care of today."

Ichinose Honami suddenly pressed her hands together. "My apologies, Sakayanagi-san. I hope we can have a pleasant and frank chat next time."

Her smile made Sakayanagi Arisu feel extremely uncomfortable.

It was a feeling she had never experienced before—no, that wasn't right.

She had felt it several times before this.

"That's a great expression you've got there, Sakayanagi."

After Ichinose Honami left, Ryuen brazenly sized up Sakayanagi Arisu's face, his grin widening.

"I said, it has nothing to do with you."

Sakayanagi Arisu took a deep breath. "Don't think I don't know what you're up to. Such childish provocations have no effect on me."

"My, my, I just love seeing you make that face. It's even more pathetic than a child who's had their toy snatched away, Sakayanagi."

Ryuen recklessly continued to provoke Sakayanagi Arisu, completely ignoring the girl's increasingly icy expression.

However, before Sakayanagi Arisu could get angry, Ryuen Kakeru turned and left, thoroughly satisfied.

He gazed up at the sky.

Komiya should have sent the photos to the 283 Agency by now.

"Mitoma, I'm very curious to see what you'll do next."

Ryuen didn't see any problem with his actions.

Dirty tricks like this were precisely his favorite kind.

As long as it led to victory, he would stop at nothing to move forward.

He had a feeling the next semester would be even more interesting.

Chapter 583: The Flirt.

Turning back time, Mashima Tomonari was explaining the Command Tower's system to everyone.

Chabashira Sae, looking bored, slipped out of the multipurpose classroom.

Chabashira Sae went to the end of the corridor and leaned against the wall, pulling a ladies' cigarette and a lighter from her pocket.

She knew smoking was a bad habit and affected her health, but at this point, smoking improved her mood.

After all, a certain someone drank all day and reeked of alcohol, which was far worse than her habit.

"Oh my, oh my, is Sae-chan hiding out here for a smoke again?"

An unwelcome voice appeared, and its owner's ample chest immediately pressed against Chabashira Sae's body.

Arms wrapped around Chabashira Sae's waist as she clung to her like a small animal.

"You look cool smoking with one hand, but be careful not to poison your lungs, okay?"

Chabashira Sae pulled her arm out of the embrace and said nonchalantly, "Someone who treats alcohol like the water of life has no right to criticize me."

"Eh, you can't say that. Alcohol is a friend to humanity. It restores the truest world inside our minds. It's not the same as smoking."

Evidently, Chie Hoshinomiya had already developed her own unique brand of twisted logic.

One could only hope this teacher wouldn't be a bad influence on her students.

Chabashira Sae had no interest in humoring her.

She savored the sensation of the tobacco, the brief pang in her lungs that lightly stimulated her weary, numb body.

"Hey, Sae-chan."

Chie Hoshinomiya wouldn't let her be, whispering, "Are you worried about this exam?"

Class 1-D currently had less than 200 points.

If they returned to a state of zero points, it would likely set a new record—their third time hitting zero.

Chabashira Sae's face was visibly twitching.

After a moment, she steadied her breathing and said calmly, "It has nothing to do with me. It's simply due to their lack of ability."

"Yahaa, Sae-chan is so strict with her own class's kids."

Chie Hoshinomiya sounded a little displeased. "If it were me, I might feel sorry for the kids and secretly help them out."

Chabashira Sae shot her a sharp glare.

The latter gave an embarrassed smile, which seemed to carry a hint of shyness.

The air trembled in the silence, and her smile slowly faded.

Clang—

Both of them instinctively looked toward the staircase.

To be precise, they had noticed a sound coming from the bottom of the stairs.

Chabashira Sae frowned.

Could it be a student loitering here?

...

[The Bloodstained Holy Grail has accumulated one instance of Miracle Power!]

[Until Divine Miracle: 2/7]

Kaoru looked at the beaker in his hand.

The sulfuric acid that was originally inside had been turned into potable pure water by the effect of [Purification].

No one else should be able to do this.

After all, it was a wondrous magic.

Pouring out the water from the beaker and carefully cleaning up any remaining traces, Kaoru restored everything to its original state, minus a little sulfuric acid.

He planned to try [Explosion magic] next time.

Although it had "magic" as a suffix, humans had already mastered explosives technology, even nuclear weapons like the atomic bomb.

An explosion might not count as a miracle.

Kaoru felt a pang of regret.

The [Teleportation Scroll] he had used before was definitely a miracle.

But what's done is done.

No amount of complaining would help.

Kaoru closed the door to the science classroom and glanced at his phone.

It was still early before their appointed time, leaving Kaoru feeling suddenly at a loss for what to do.

"Whoa, what are you doing here?"

Someone let out a cry of surprise. "Don't tell me you're trying to eavesdrop on the Command Tower's secrets, Kaoru-kun?"

Kaoru turned around to see Chie Hoshinomiya and Chabashira Sae standing not far behind him.

They must have just come down the stairs, likely having heard him close the door.

What a coincidence.

"Routine Student Council inspection and patrol. I had nothing to do, so I came to have a look."

Kaoru said it without batting an eye.

He had a legitimate reason to wander around the school grounds.

"Ehehe, I don't believe you."

Chie Hoshinomiya walked up beside him and lowered her voice. "Are you waiting for Honami-chan?"

Her proximity brought a faint, sweet fragrance to Kaoru's nose, like a ripe peach, subtly emitting an appetizing scent.

It could be perfume, or it could be her natural body scent.

"What brand of perfume have you been using recently, Sensei? It smells quite nice."

Kaoru reached out and touched a strand of her hair.

"It's a bit like peaches."

Chie Hoshinomiya froze on the spot.

She, who had been about to tease the young boy, suddenly found her mind a complete blank.

If it had been a grown man, she might have put on a false mask and played dumb with a giggle.

But this was a young boy!

Looking into Kaoru's clear eyes, Chie Hoshinomiya felt a strange sensation rise within her, as if she had jokingly asked him to call her "onee-chan" and he had actually done it.

"Ahaha, no can do. While I understand how you feel, this perfume wouldn't suit Honami-chan. She's a young girl, she's fine without any perfume!"

Chie Hoshinomiya returned to her usual self, the silky strands of her hair slipping through the young man's fingers.

Her smile even held a big-sisterly playfulness.

"Honami-chan?"

Kaoru withdrew his hand. "I wasn't planning on buying it for her. I was just genuinely interested in your perfume, Sensei."

Chie Hoshinomiya's smile froze.

She instinctively took a small step back, unable to remember what she had been about to ask.

Kaoru looked at Chabashira Sae on the other side.

She was dressed in an OL uniform that accentuated her feminine figure.

Below the black pencil skirt was a pair of jade-like legs wrapped in black pantyhose.

The high heels made her seem even taller, making her presence hard to ignore.

Similarly, Chabashira Sae was also staring at him, her fingers unconsciously digging into her palm.

This year's A-Class had destroyed her dream.

"See you next time, Chabashira-sensei, Hoshinomiya-sensei."

Kaoru bid the two women farewell.

The moment he turned to leave, Chie Hoshinomiya finally snapped back to her senses.

"Whoa, what's with this student!"

Chie Hoshinomiya gestured exaggeratedly. "Who was it that said he had hypnotism? This guy could seduce women with just that face alone!"

"Stop pretending. I know you have a thing for younger guys."

Chabashira Sae extinguished her cigarette in the portable ashtray she carried.

"As a teacher, I hope you can be mindful of your distance."

"Hey, don't slander me! I like mature, reliable men!"

Chie Hoshinomiya was displeased.

She wasn't some rich sugar mommy; she couldn't afford to keep a pretty boy.

Chabashira Sae couldn't be bothered with her.

She turned and walked back upstairs.

Running into Kaoru here had soured her mood somewhat.

Chie Hoshinomiya had been curious about why Kaoru was here, but seeing her leave, she had no choice but to hurry after her.

"Oh my, Honami-chan is going to face off against A-Class. It makes one curious about what happened. Sae-chan, do you think she can win against A-Class?"

"I don't know."

"Why so cold? I actually think it's a 40-60 split. After all, the current A-Class is terrifying, isn't it? Who knows, this year's students might not see any class changes for all three years, you know?"

"..."

And so, on the way back, Chie Hoshinomiya chattered on and on about A-Class, occasionally bringing up D-Class.

When she saw Chabashira Sae's face darken, she would change the subject with a giggle.

Seeing her swallow her anger, Chie Hoshinomiya felt her mood lift wonderfully, and at the same time, Kaoru's face flashed before her eyes.

Chapter 584: I'm Counting on You.

After six in the evening, the neon lights of Keyaki Mall began to flicker on.

In the bustling shopping center, Kaoru saw Karuizawa Kei.

"Yahho! Have I kept you waiting?"

The girl approached, bringing a fresh fragrance with her.

She wore a sky-blue dress that slightly exposed her smooth shoulders.

A white belt was cinched tightly around her slender waist, and the hem of her skirt fluttered in the gentle breeze, revealing her fair, soft thighs.

Her beautiful calves were hidden inside black thigh-high stockings, looking rather eye-catching in the twilight glow.

Beaming, she waved at Kaoru.

This was her cheerful Hot girl mode for when she was in public.

"No. If I'd known you were going to wear casual clothes, I would have changed too."

Kaoru was a little frustrated.

He hadn't had time to change out of his uniform, though there were others in the mall dressed like him.

"Oh, about that... I told Satsuki and the others, but they insisted on celebrating with me today, so we hung out at karaoke for a bit."

Kei Karuizawa seemed a little embarrassed.

When girls hung out together, they inevitably picked up strange scents.

She didn't want Kaoru to smell anyone else on her, so she had even taken a shower.

Kaoru understood a little of a girl's delicate thoughts.

For example, the dress she was wearing was one she had bought just yesterday.

"Do I look good?"

Kei Karuizawa seemed to have sensed his thoughts.

She twirled around a few times, revealing her slender, fair arms under the cuffs.

Her small, perky chest was hidden beneath the collar, looking somewhat alluring.

"You look great."

Kaoru took the initiative to reach out and take her hand. "Are you free to have dinner with me tonight?"

Kei Karuizawa's movements stiffened for a second, perhaps because it was the first time they had been so intimate in public.

"Hey, what's with that flirtatious tone?"

Ichinose Honami's slightly lively voice appeared. "No funny business with Kei right now, not for a little while, okay!"

Kaoru was a bit surprised to see she had popped up beside them at some point. Like Kei Karuizawa, she was also in casual clothes.

Her white shirt wasn't a form-fitting style, but her prominent bust made it cling to her, showing off her full figure.

Below was a gray skirt that ended just at her knees, and the calves it revealed were completely encased in black pantyhose.

Even though she wasn't showing much skin, she gave off a very sensual vibe.

"Surprised?"

Ichinose Honami grabbed Kaoru's other hand, her fingers intertwining with his.

A blush rose to her cheeks. "Ahem, I know it's a bit shameless, but please let me join your date."

Kaoru subconsciously glanced at Kei Karuizawa, who tried to pretend she didn't see.

"N-No, don't people spread rumors about us all the time? So, so let's just let them think it's true."

She seemed a little angry now.

In fact, strange looks were already being directed their way.

There would probably be even more rumors by tonight.

"As long as you two don't mind."

Kaoru held both their hands tightly. "Actually, I've wanted to do this for a long time. Let them be jealous that I have several girlfriends."

"S-Several?"

Kei Karuizawa instinctively puffed out her cheeks, then realized what she was doing.

'Am I getting angry at myself?'

Ichinose Honami let out a "pfft," stifling a laugh. "That's a real scumbag thing to say. Do all boys think like that?"

"Well, I'm that kind of scumbag. I'm not giving back anything I've gotten my hands on."

Kaoru looked completely unconcerned. He was already a pervert, why would he care about these things?

Ichinose Honami smiled and didn't dwell on the topic.

Instead, she said, "I prefer to seize the moment. For example, I'm hungry right now."

Kaoru didn't realize the gravity of the situation.

Since he hadn't eaten either, he decided to take his two little girlfriends to dinner.

The place was a Western-style restaurant with few customers and private rooms, ensuring both quiet and privacy.

Since they weren't of drinking age, things like alcoholic beverages had to be skipped in favor of juice.

As dusk fell and night gradually descended outside the window, a single flickering candle was lit on the table.

The phrase "candlelit dinner" came to Kaoru's mind.

Click, click—

The two girls were taking pictures.

It seemed to have become a common practice to post online before eating.

Though Kaoru also found the scene a bit romantic.

"Ehehe, I've been here before, but how should I put it... the atmosphere feels a little different."

Ichinose Honami put down her phone. "It doesn't feel like this at all in the main hall."

"Because it's expensive. Including the private room, I remember the price was something like, what, thirty or forty thousand?"

Kei Karuizawa was poor.

Her class was the bottom-feeder that had gotten zero points twice.

Without Kaoru, she might have been eating the weed-and-grass special often.

"You can't put a price on a good mood. Don't worry, it's my turn to pay today!"

Ichinose Honami waved her hand magnanimously, though her smile also held a hint of poverty.

To prevent any dropouts in their class, they didn't have much savings themselves.

"N-No, that's okay! I'll pay my share too!"

Kei Karuizawa had no intention of getting a free meal, even if it was her birthday.

After all, if she received a gift, she would give one in return later.

"Today is different!"

Ichinose Honami said, then leaned in and whispered a few words into Kei Karuizawa's ear.

The latter's face gradually turned red, her eyes unconsciously darting toward Kaoru.

Kaoru remained unfazed. He could just find an excuse to slip out and pay the bill later anyway.

"By the way, Honami, you challenged A-Class today?"

Sakayanagi Arisu had already posted the results in the group chat, so Kaoru knew about Ichinose Honami's decision.

"From the class's perspective, I think challenging A-Class is the best choice."

Ichinose Honami lifted her face. "Although she didn't say it out loud, I have a feeling she would have challenged B-Class too."

Kaoru was suddenly a little confused and took a sip of his juice.

Just then, the waiter brought over the foie gras.

"Eh, how do you eat this?"

"Dummy, why did you order something you don't know how to eat? Hmph, hmph, I just looked it up online. I'll teach you!"

"Th-This is caviar, right? Kei, what are you doing?"

"Eh, eh, eh?"

"Oh no, it's going to slide off!"

Unexpectedly, neither of them had much experience.

Not knowing why they chose this place, Kaoru had no choice but to teach them, hand over hand, how to eat the foie gras with caviar.

"Stare—Kaoru is so skilled."

"He has the composure of an adult. No wonder he's the young master of a large conglomerate."

"You just don't know how for now. After you've eaten it, you'll know how next time."

Hearing his words, Kei Karuizawa subconsciously asked, "Are we coming here to eat next time too?"

"Not necessarily. Next time, I might take you to the Tokyo Tower in a helicopter."

Kaoru started spouting nonsense. "Under the romantic night sky, we'll look down on all of Tokyo, toast each other, and sip red wine at a height of 332 meters."

Ichinose Honami kicked him under the table and chided, "Stop bluffing. If you keep joking, Kei and I will start taking you seriously."

"Who said I'm joking? I was originally planning to take Kei out for her birthday."

Kaoru pouted. "We need to have a trip to let loose once in a while."

"Is that why you skipped class with Kamuro-san?"

Ichinose Honami rested her chin on her hands. "Are you very unhappy with my arrangements?"

"I think you should ask Kei about that."

Kaoru looked at Kei Karuizawa. "Kei, do you want to go out with me?"

Kei Karuizawa blinked. "I want to be with you. Just that is enough."

In an instant, Kaoru was left speechless.

"Ahem, Kei's thoughts are the same as mine."

A smile appeared on Ichinose Honami's face. "So, Mr. Boyfriend, why are you always thinking about leaving school and going to the outside world?"

"Probably because the world outside is bigger."

Kaoru cut a piece of foie gras and stuffed it into her mouth. "There are many wonderful stories and sights that I want to share with you."

"Is it the different scenery between a commoner and a rich second-generation heir?"

Kei Karuizawa naturally misinterpreted his words.

"It's the feeling of looking at Earth from the moon. It'll give you something to take pictures of and post for a lifetime," Kaoru replied.

"That's way too abstract. I don't get it," Kei Karuizawa retorted.

"Exactly. Please use words that a normal person can understand," Ichinose Honami said, chewing the foie gras.

"This is yummy. I want more."

Kaoru fed her another piece.

As a result, Kei Karuizawa tugged on his sleeve, so he had to feed them both.

"Are you two children?"

"This is replenishing our final battle nutrients!"

Ichinose Honami naturally flashed a smile. "Today is the day for girls to make their resolve."

Kei Karuizawa's face suddenly reddened, and she continued to tug on Kaoru's sleeve.

"The thing we talked about before... you promised you'd grant my wish... Does that promise still count?"

"Of course it counts," Kaoru said nonchalantly. "This is Kei's birthday magic. You can make any wish you want, and I'll be responsible for making it come true."

"Is that so..."

Kei Karuizawa became even more embarrassed.

Kaoru Mitoma felt something was off as Ichinose Honami moved her chair closer to him and whispered.

"Before Kei makes her wish, I just want to ask one thing—answer us honestly."

"What is it?"

Kaoru grew wary.

"Will you stay with us through all of high school?"

Ichinose murmured softly, "No matter what happens."

Kaoru noticed both her and Karuizawa Kei watching him intently.

After a brief silence, he replied, "No matter what happens, I'll be by your side."

"No matter what?" Karuizawa Kei pressed.

Kaoru spoke slowly, "I'll stay with you."

Ichinose pressed her index finger against his cheek, then let it drift down to his lips, a playful smile blooming on her face.

"Promise you won't lie."

Kaoru hesitated, his inner plans wavering at that moment.

"Ahem, Kei, please make your wish to him now."

Ichinose withdrew her mischievous finger, grinning at Karuizawa Kei.

"R-Really... do I have to say it out loud?"

Karuizawa covered her flushed face, "I'm too embarrassed! Why don't you tell him instead!"

"Eh?"

Ichinose's eyes widened, "But you're the experienced one!"

"I-I'm not Kikyo!"

Karuizawa refused to believe she was that shameless.

Kaoru was utterly confused by their cryptic exchange.

Just as he was about to speak, he noticed Ichinose's ears turning bright red.

She lowered her head, tugging at Kaoru's sleeve, and whispered, "T-Tonight... could you... with us... here... do... that..."

Kaoru thought he misheard. He patted his own face and asked uncertainly, "What did you say we should do here?"

"H-Here... you know... with me and Kei together..."

"Uwaa, I can't take this!"

Karuizawa suddenly interrupted, her face crimson, "Double date! Please hold us both tonight!"

Kaoru choked on air—for the first time in his life, he literally choked on air!

Chapter 585: Ichinose Levels Up!

Kaoru couldn't quite remember the last time he'd been in a hotel room.

"Wow, I've never seen a room like this before."

From the moment they entered, the two girls temporarily set aside their shyness, fascinated by everything they saw.

The room was spacious enough to accommodate three or four people.

Though there was only one bed, it was far better than their student dormitories.

"There's a TV!"

Ichinose Honami's eyes lit up—it was her first time seeing such a large LCD television.

Meanwhile, Karuizawa Kei was staring at the bathroom, which had translucent glass walls revealing the interior.

"This bathroom is so gross."

Just imagining it gave Karuizawa chills, convinced it was the designer's malicious intent.

Kaoru was similarly speechless. Why would a school have such a room?

He walked to the window.

Though curtains obscured the view, drawing them back immediately revealed half the campus, including students passing on the roads below.

"Mmm... don't..."

Suddenly, strange noises emerged from the television. Kaoru turned around to see two girls frozen in place—one holding the remote control, the other sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Eeeeeeh?!"

Ichinose Honami finally snapped out of her daze, fumbling frantically to turn off the television.

As the sound abruptly cut off, the tips of her ears turned even redder.

"Why would something like this be here?"

Karuizawa Kei pointed at the television with utter disbelief.

"Hey, I don't know!"

Ichinose Honami flung the remote onto the sofa as if it were a burning coal. "It wasn't me! It was already like this when I turned it on!"

For these two innocent girls, the earlier visuals had been far too impactful.

"It must be a specially prepared recording," Kaoru said helplessly.

The Keyaki Mall wasn't directly managed by the school but sponsored by certain financial groups.

To be honest, the very existence of such establishments near the school had always made him somewhat uncomfortable.

Considering there were teachers and staff around, he could reluctantly accept some discreet conveniences being provided.

The real issue was that the front desk had actually let them come up here.

This reminded Kaoru once again that Japan's social norms were different—for high school students here, visiting a love hotel might be as casual as going home.

If short on money, some might even use karaoke booth rooms.

Of course, Koudo Ikusei at least maintained surface-level decorum.

The front desk had charged him ten thousand yen.

Kaoru was too exhausted to complain, especially seeing how unfazed the staff appeared.

Still, he knew he had no right to judge—after all, he was part of this situation too.

"This is... too disgusting."

Karuizawa Kei's first impression of the room was terrible.

She had no intention of coming back, privately thinking Kaoru's dorm room felt much cozier.

Kaoru chuckled. "We can still check out now. Let's just pretend nothing happened today."

"N-no... We can't!"

Ichinose Honami's face flushed red. "We've finally come this far!" No matter what, I'm seeing this through!"

Finally, Kaoru understood—this must have been what she secretly discussed with Karuizawa Kei earlier.

Tonight was also the "surprise" Kei mentioned yesterday.

"I see. But does it have to be here?"

Kaoru sat down beside Karuizawa Kei.

The bed here was indeed different from the dorm ones.

"The best weapon against rumors is to overwhelm them with even bigger facts!"

Ichinose Honami huffed. "If reality becomes increasingly exaggerated, their rumors will cease to be rumors anymore."

Kaoru paused momentarily—there was some logic to that.

If people discovered two girls were here with him, it would likely shock everyone. Interactions in the dorm could at least be reluctantly explained as close friendships, but this situation was indefensible.

If Kaoru were to rotate through girls like Kushida Kikyo, Horikita Suzune, Tachibana Akane, etc., one after another, people would probably become desensitized.

Such scenarios would exceed most people's imaginations.

In other words, rumors emerged because people were instinctively curious about intriguing matters.

If all facts were laid bare, the loss of mystery would cause topics to lose their popularity.

However, Kaoru suspected some might become even more fascinated with hypnosis techniques afterward.

"So..."

Kaoru looked at the two girls with an amused smile. "Do we have plenty of time tonight?"

Although Ichinose Honami was the one who planned this, she suddenly became shy, burying her head in the bed and hugging a pillow like an ostrich.

Kei Karuizawa and Kaoru exchanged glances, her ears turning red.

"I... I'm the experienced one here, so... so we thought... I should slowly teach little Honami..."

The usual strong front she showed in public had completely vanished, leaving only a bashful young girl.

"Yesterday's portion... today's first time... can be on me..."

Kaoru understood—today, Kei was the teaching tool.

This was terrible. How exactly did Ichinose Honami persuade this adorable girl?

Since there were classes tomorrow, they didn't stay long.

Before midnight, Kaoru checked out at the front desk.

However, he couldn't help but feel the receptionist's gaze was somewhat strange.

Kaoru decided not to overthink it; he had already fulfilled his wish.

On the way back, Ichinose Honami's walking posture seemed a bit off, so he simply picked her up and carried her all the way back, taking advantage of the empty streets at night.

At first, Ichinose Honami tried to struggle, but realizing it was futile, she quickly gave up.

"You two don't have any more surprises, do you?"

Although the outcome was enjoyable, Kaoru was a bit concerned.

Every time, it ended up with both of them joining in.

Was this a birthday celebration or a sound party?

Would they start treating this as the norm from now on?

"N-No, we don't."

Kei Karuizawa felt somewhat embarrassed.

Truthfully, the reason she agreed to this was because Ichinose Honami had made a deal with her.

For example, Honami would invite Kei to her future birthdays as well.

If it meant spending more time together, Kei didn't mind the "two-person arrangement."

"Aren't you happy?"

Ichinose Honami felt awkward in his arms.

Although they were unlikely to run into many people at this hour, Kei Karuizawa was right beside them.

"Generally speaking, I am happy, but I thought you two wouldn't like this kind of birthday celebration."

Kaoru said, "Kikyo is one thing, but you two..."

"What do you mean, 'you two'?"

Ichinose Honami pouted, "In your eyes, should we be wearing crowns, blowing out candles, singing happy birthday, having a pajama party, and crying tears of joy over gifts?"

"I just feel like something's missing."

After Kaoru said this, both girls sighed simultaneously.

"If possible, I'd rather spend the whole day in the room with you."

Kei Karuizawa said, "Being a hot girl is fun, but sometimes I just want to laze around and not go out. It's not that I hate going out—having fun outside can be great too."

"But whether it's enjoyable or not depends on who's accompanying us."

Ichinose Honami wrapped her arms around Kaoru's neck, kissed him on the cheek, and smiled playfully, "Hehe, you can put me down now, my gentle boyfriend. We've already reached the dorm."

Their coordinated responses left Kaoru speechless, so he had no choice but to set her down.

"I won't go back with you two. We need to discuss exam strategies tomorrow."

Kei Karuizawa had spare clothes in Kaoru's room, whereas Ichinose Honami—the "official wife"—did not, so she had to return.

Otherwise, she would have to wake up early tomorrow.

After she left, Kaoru took Kei Karuizawa back to his room. "Don't you have any wishes for today?"

Kaoru asked with complete seriousness, "We can disregard earlier. You can treat me as a wish-granting machine now."

Karuizawa Kei, who had just taken off her shoes, froze momentarily.

"Can... can I ask for a hundred wishes?"

"I'll hear you out for now."

"Hey!"

Karuizawa Kei glared at him indignantly, only to have her cheeks pinched by him.

"I take back my previous words. This isn't a wish - it's a reward for you and Honami. What reward would you like?"

"Uwah, that sounds disgusting, like some lewd reward."

"Someone who thinks that way must have their mind full of lewd things."

"A foot fetishist has no right to say that about me."

"..."

Perhaps even Karuizawa Kei remembered Kushida Kikyo's appearance, as she couldn't help but laugh.

Kaoru hadn't minded initially, but her laughter made him somewhat frustrated.

"Hehe, foot fetishist."

Karuizawa Kei hugged his arm, "Though I don't understand your taste, if you let me hug you while sleeping tonight, I might just reward you?"

This girl was really pushing her luck.

With a dark expression, Kaoru simply scooped her up by the waist and in two or three steps tossed the exclaiming girl onto the bed.

"W-wait, I meant actual sleeping!"

"Same here."

"Re...really? Aah! No tickling! Uwahahaha yamero... gomenasai... hahahaha..."

Afterward, the girl's laughter continued for several minutes.

Kaoru would only stop when she was breathless, then resume tickling once she recovered slightly.

The result was Karuizawa Kei becoming desperate, bravely resisting Kaoru's devilish hands as the two engaged in battle.

During this process, some glistening trails slowly traced paths across the girl's pale, soft thighs.

In this particular battle, Karuizawa Kei accidentally gained more experience.

Chapter 586: Consider It a Dog Bite

When Kaoru arrived at the classroom, Sakayanagi Arisu and Katsuragi Kohei were already discussing strategies.

Since he came later than usual, he only caught a sentence or two, just enough to see Katsuragi Kohei preparing to compromise while Totsuka Yahiko glared resentfully at Sakayanagi Arisu, ultimately saying nothing.

"Aren't you planning to do something?"

Kamuro Masumi asked as if making conversation, though in reality Sakayanagi Arisu had begun acting since last night.

Using her position as Command Tower as pretext, Sakayanagi Arisu was attempting to seize command of the entire class.

Because the landmine of democratic discussion had been planted earlier, Katsuragi Kohei couldn't outright refuse her.

Thus, the situation had turned into a debate and before Kaoru's arrival, Sakayanagi Arisu had successfully persuaded most classmates.

"I feel like you're always inquiring about my affairs. Are you working for Sakayanagi?"

Kaoru sat beside her, stealing glances at her thighs.

"Couldn't it just be that I've gotten used to asking?"

Kamuro Masumi sounded somewhat exasperated, "Or do you want me to ask what you were doing last night?"

"You've been checking my location?"

Kaoru felt unsettled.

He'd always disliked the school-issued phone, probably because it allowed easy tracking of students.

But why would they make this location function available to students?

"Such inflated self-importance is disgusting. Who would look at your location?" Kamuro Masumi nudged his chair with her calf.

"You know exactly what you did last night, without even bothering to put up a superficial pretense."

Showing up at Keyaki Mall with two beautiful girls, holding hands no less—it was practically a Harem scenario with one arm around each, drawing far too much attention.

"Really? I thought hardly anyone saw us. Why are you and others so fixated on me and Kei?"

Kaoru was thoroughly exasperated.

He'd never understood this issue from the start.

"If they don't want people using love hotels, they should just shut down the facility. Making such a fuss..."

He trailed off as Kamuro Masumi's expression suddenly turned terrifying, forcing him to shut his mouth.

"Love hotel?" Kamuro Masumi whispered, "You went to a love hotel with them?"

'So this hadn't gotten out yet.'

Kaoru could only change the subject.

"Why don't you wear knee-high socks? I think they'd suit you quite well."

Kamuro Masumi's gaze was icy. "What I wear is none of your business, you perverted foot fetishist."

Kaoru closed his mouth and said nothing more.

Kamuro Masumi turned her pretty face away as if disgusted, and a heavy silence spread between them.

Kaoru glanced at her, wondering what he could say to fix the situation.

After a while, her voice suddenly broke the quiet.

"High school students can't get pregnant."

Kaoru swallowed hard.

This was arguably the girl's final boundary.

In the past, he could have answered without changing expression, but now he felt a moment of hesitation.

Kamuro Masumi noticed his hesitation and turned back, looking bewildered. "Wait, you can't even guarantee that?"

"No, of course I can guarantee it," Kaoru said tactfully. "It's just... I feel like only you and I seem to be aware of this common sense."

"Huh?" Kamuro Masumi nearly lost her composure.

This was basic knowledge—what did he mean only she and he were aware of it?

Kaoru found it hard to explain.

Though Karuizawa Kei and the others hadn't said anything, he had a vague sense that these girls might not share this common sense.

"If you have urges you can't control, suppress them!" Kamuro Masumi glared at him, then suddenly lowered her voice.

"If it's absolutely unbearable... then direct them at me. I'll just consider it a dog bite!"

Kaoru was startled, almost suspecting she'd been drinking again.

"Wait, you say we can't get pregnant, but then you want to..."

"What do you mean? I never said we could do that kind of thing. Like last time, I specifically allowed you to do certain things to me. After all, you're just a perverted foot fetishist."

"..."

True, that definitely wouldn't lead to pregnancy. Kaoru almost wanted to give her a thumbs-up.

Seeing Kaoru's expression, Kamuro Masumi's agitated mood cooled slightly.

She immediately averted her gaze—what had she just said?

Noticing this, Kaoru instead smiled.

So today she'd finally revealed her own progress bar!

"Masumi."

"Spit it out."

"About the question you asked me earlier—I can give you an answer."

Hearing this, Kamuro Masumi breathed a sigh of relief.

As long as he didn't press her about her own slip-up...

"Actually, I wasn't planning to do anything from the start. I don't need to lift a finger—she'll have to rack her brains to come up with a perfect countermeasure on her own." Kaoru said, "To win the bet, she must hit a home run without any mistakes in the process. I don't think she can do it."

Kamuro Masumi listened attentively, seemingly aware of the bet between the two, and spoke up.

"So, you think if Ichinose wins even one round against her, you win?"

"That's exactly how it is."

Kaoru smiled, "But I don't think Honami sees it that way."

"What?" Kamuro Masumi was puzzled.

Wasn't this exam a pas de deux between him and Ichinose Honami?

"She might genuinely want to defeat Class A." Kaoru replied expressionlessly.

At first, Kamuro Masumi thought she had misheard, but she quickly reached the same conclusion herself.

"What a strange person."

Kamuro Masumi looked at him with a peculiar expression, "You probably want to help her, right?"

Ichinose Honami wasn't just Kaoru's girlfriend or the first-year's "Great Angel"—she was also the leader of Class B.

Her desire to lead her class to advance was unquestionable.

The key issue was their relationship: whether they would betray their respective classes for each other, which had become one of the hot topics among students.

"I don't know." Kaoru answered honestly, "Even if I wanted to help her, she probably wouldn't agree."

Kamuro Masumi's eyes widened in surprise, "You're actually considering helping her?"

'Wait, why are you focusing on that?'

"Thinking about it carefully, if Sakayanagi loses, you'd gain a slave. That would be a huge benefit for you."

Kamuro Masumi began pondering seriously, "In that case, I have a reason to help Sakayanagi too."

Kaoru found it amusing, "You need a reason to help Sakayanagi?"

Normally, if Sakayanagi Arisu crooked her finger, Masumi would come running without hesitation.

Did she really need a reason?

Kamuro Masumi kicked his desk with a blank expression.

Since she couldn't kick him directly, the girl had switched to kicking his desk and chair instead.

Kaoru gritted his teeth and swallowed his frustration.

Since class was about to start, he had no choice but to let it go.

...

Soon, noon arrived.

"Wait, Mitoma-kun."

Sakayanagi Arisu stopped Kaoru, who had been heading to the cafeteria.

Carrying two lunch boxes, she slowly approached his seat and showed a faint smile.

"I accidentally made an extra lunch today. Would you like to try it?"

Kaoru looked at her lunch box, and Kamuro Masumi beside him couldn't help but speak up, "Isn't that from the conve—"

"Hmm?"

Sakayanagi Arisu turned to Kamuro Masumi with an apologetic expression.

"Sorry, I can't accompany you today, Masumi-san. Next time, I'll bring you lunch as compensation, so don't worry."

Kamuro Masumi obediently closed her mouth, gave Kaoru a "you're on your own" look, and nonchalantly left the classroom to eat at the cafeteria.

Facing the stares of many classmates, Kaoru smiled.

"That's great. I've always wanted to taste my Arisu's cooking."

As soon as he finished speaking, the surrounding gazes grew even more peculiar and suggestive.

Some couldn't stand the atmosphere and quickly left the classroom.

As for Sakayanagi Arisu, she seemed completely unfazed by Kaoru's teasing and instead sat in Kamuro Masumi's seat.

"I'll take that as your agreement, Kaoru-kun." She smiled faintly, "Since I'm a girl and not as strong as you, a boy, could you move the desks together?"

Kaoru didn't quite grasp her intention at first, but he cautiously pushed the desks closer anyway.

Chapter 587: Sakayanagi Arisu Really Wants to Win

Although many students headed to the cafeteria for lunch, some remained in the classroom, and Sakayanagi Arisu wasn't the only one who had brought a homemade lunch today.

Normally, no one would pay much attention, but due to her actions, Kaoru could now sense a few envious glances directed his way.

He touched the lunch box—it was still warm.

Sakayanagi Arisu must have used some method to keep it insulated.

It seemed that even a convenience store bento had been prepared with a little extra care.

Moreover, Sakayanagi Arisu had repackaged it, making it impossible for Kaoru to understand how Kamuro Masumi had recognized it as a store-bought meal.

"I'll dig in."

Kaoru had grown accustomed to this pre-meal ritual.

If he didn't say it, she might think he was being disrespectful.

Sakayanagi Arisu also clasped her hands together, said "I'll dig in," and then picked up her chopsticks to slowly and methodically eat the bento in front of her.

Since they were sitting side by side, Kaoru could observe her movements from the corner of his eye.

She carried an indescribable elegance and slowness, reminiscent of a young lady from a wealthy family.

Without any unpleasant eating habits, she took small bites, giving off the impression of a kitten—unexpectedly adorable.

For no particular reason, Kaoru felt an impulse to snatch her bento away.

Perhaps this was why everyone enjoyed having meals with beautiful girls.

Sakayanagi Arisu remained unaware of his thoughts.

After they finished eating, she wiped her mouth with a handkerchief and noticed him watching her.

A faint, shy smile finally appeared on her face.

"How was it? Did it suit your taste?"

Kaoru thought for a moment before replying, "It was terrible, like a bento from a vending machine."

"Kaoru-kun, you really have no tact when it comes to girls. Saying things like that could easily end a friendship, you know?"

Sakayanagi Arisu let out an exaggerated sigh. "But you're right. I did buy it from a convenience store."

"At least try to cover it up. If you had said, 'This is a bento I made for you with my own hands,' I would have felt a little better."

"Hehe, it seems Kaoru-kun was really looking forward to a bento made by me."

"Actually, I'm curious whether you can even take care of yourself."

Sakayanagi Arisu slowly withdrew her smile and stared at Kaoru expressionlessly.

"Think about it—you rely on a cane to get around. When you're alone in your room, how do you manage things like bathing, using the toilet, or changing clothes?"

Kaoru remained completely unaware that he was trampling on the girl's self-esteem. "Honestly, I'm curious how you pull it off. Could you show me?"

Sakayanagi Arisu fell silent for a moment before breaking into a smile again. "Don't worry, that will be your responsibility from now on. Please serve as my attendant and remain loyal to me until death."

"I don't really mind. Would you like to try it out now?"

Kaoru glanced at her thighs.

Beneath her skirt, she wore white suspender stockings that tightly hugged her slightly soft thighs.

The tops of the stockings dug into her flesh, making them look remarkably elastic.

Sakayanagi Arisu placed a hand on her thigh, as if to block Kaoru's gaze, and pressed her legs together.

This created a subtle inverted triangle shape, causing more wrinkles to form in her skirt.

A faint ripple flashed in her eyes as she lightly pursed her lips.

Kaoru was taken aback.

Her expression, though not exactly shy, was somehow even more captivating than shyness, making his heart skip a beat.

"I'm a bit frustrated. It's always like this—whether I scold or hit you, it feels like a reward for you."

Sakayanagi Arisu murmured softly, "At least have some consideration for me. I'm a girl just like them."

"Sorry, it's become a habit from before."

Kaoru felt slightly awkward.

He was used to being scolded, so encountering her like this left him at a loss.

After a moment of silence, Sakayanagi Arisu spoke up, "After this exam ends... how will you treat me?"

Kaoru looked surprised.

Was she planning to yield to him?

"Although I had those kinds of thoughts before, I'm satisfied now."

Kaoru weighed his words, "From the moment you put on that ring, whether you become my maid or I become your servant, I don't really care anymore."

Sakayanagi Arisu instinctively touched her hand, then seemed to realize something as a faint smile graced her lips.

"Aren't you going to take the opportunity to do something strange to me?"

"Would making you wear a maid outfit count?" Kaoru asked.

"If that's your kink."

Sakayanagi Arisu chuckled, her eyes softening, "If it's just the two of us, I might be willing to indulge your fantasy."

Kaoru's heart skipped a beat before he asked. "What about elementary school swimsuits?"

"Pervert."

Sakayanagi Arisu didn't hold back, then sighed, "Have they been too indulgent with you? I can't understand how you could get excited about that."

Even though she held unusual feelings for him, she couldn't help but look at him like he was trash at this moment.

Just as Kaoru was about to defend himself, he saw her smile slightly.

"Would you play a game of chess with me?"

The girl said weakly, "If you win this time, I'll personally make you a bento."

Kaoru's face darkened.

He didn't know how to play chess at all—he had only beaten Sakayanagi Arisu before because the wish-granting machine was guiding him.

"Even... even this isn't acceptable?"

Sakayanagi Arisu sounded disappointed.

Being in the same class made it difficult for them to face each other directly, and she just wanted to relive that previous experience with Kaoru.

Kaoru couldn't bear to refuse.

Since he didn't care about wishes as much as before, he figured playing one game with her wouldn't hurt.

"Just a bento isn't enough. You'll have to feed me too."

Hearing his request, Sakayanagi Arisu froze for a moment before a blush slowly spread across her cheeks.

She pretended nonchalance as she said, "There's a chessboard and pieces in my bag. Could you bring them over?"

Kaoru felt something was off, but he didn't have time to dwell on it.

Under Sakayanagi Arisu's gaze, he had no choice but to bring her chess set.

While setting up the pieces, Kaoru tested the waters, "If you happen to win this time, what would you want from me?"

"Please don't think that way. You should have confidence in yourself before we begin."

Sakayanagi Arisu smiled, "However, if I do happen to win, you'll have to agree to my request."

"What request?"

Kaoru realized he had fallen into a trap.

"Break up with Ichinose-san."

Sakayanagi Arisu said without any change in expression, as if discussing something completely unrelated to her.

Silence fell between them once more.

Kaoru knew he could refuse, could even flip the table, but ultimately he just sighed.

"I'll take black."

His voice made Sakayanagi Arisu purse her lips slightly before she revealed a smile.

"Please take care of me, Kaoru-kun."

As her words fell, her knight began its assault.

[Your king has nowhere to escape, because I am the high-performance AlphaGo!]

Kaoru didn't need to think at all - his vast army quickly crushed Sakayanagi Arisu's kingdom, defeating her along with her king.

"Hehe, what a clean and decisive battle."

Sakayanagi showed no trace of disappointment.

Instead, she looked at Kaoru with some relief. "You've won again this time."

Kaoru sighed. "Are you planning to register for the chess event?"

"After all, I need to secure every possible factor for victory. Even you - I must account for your strength too."

Sakayanagi Arisu whispered, "Since you can defeat me, at least in my understanding, there shouldn't be anyone here who could possibly defeat you."

Her request for Kaoru to break up was clearly intended to make him fight with his full strength.

Kaoru glanced around the classroom.

Many people had returned by now, and though he didn't know if anyone had been watching their chess game, their chess-playing scene had definitely been noticed.

Without a doubt, Sakayanagi was using her own reputation to pave the way for Kaoru, making him the strongest chess master in their class.

"Fine, I'll have to participate eventually anyway."

Kaoru had no intention of going back on his word.

After all, he was also a member of Class A and would definitely need to compete when the time came.

In that instant, Sakayanagi's eyes grew complex.

She had actually been gambling that this guy would respond better to soft approaches than tough ones, which was why she had pretended to be weak earlier to lure Kaoru.

And indeed, Kaoru had taken the bait.

'So he's this easy to handle?' This thought flashed through Sakayanagi's mind but was quickly dismissed.

Because she knew why Kaoru had fallen for it.

Sakayanagi shouldn't have felt any emotional fluctuation.

For her, exploiting this fondness was only natural.

As long as she could win, who cared about the methods?

Moreover, this was his weakness - she should be delighted about it.

For some reason, the more she thought this way, the more restless she felt.

Sakayanagi only felt her chest tightening, as if something inside was leaping with joy.

Especially when she thought about how this fool had fallen for her trap, she could hardly suppress her laughter.

Usually so shrewd like a fox, yet blinded by her acting - would he surrender as long as a girl acted cute?

How dare he bully people like this?

Yet Sakayanagi still felt her chest constricting.

She recalled the scene earlier - when she mentioned breaking up with Ichinose Honami, Kaoru had mercilessly shattered her chess position without any hesitation.

Even though she had successfully tricked him, why did she feel this way?

It was like smelling fruit beginning to rot - her first reaction was disgust, with no happiness at all.

Her heart felt hollow, as if there was a large hole devouring her excess rationality and emotions.

"I'll bring a lunch box tomorrow."

Sakayanagi showed a smile.

What did it matter? As long as she could win, that was enough.

Kaoru shook his head. "No need. I'll be busy with Student Council matters from now on."

He planned to use the Student Council election as an excuse to wander around the school during this period, and he could even openly visit the upperclassmen areas.

Therefore, he didn't notice Sakayanagi Arisu's expression.

Sakayanagi Arisu lowered her head and remained silent for quite some time.

Then she lifted her face, maintaining an unchanged smile toward Kaoru.

"I wish you a victorious start here."

What does it matter?

As long as we win, that's enough.

From the past until now, hasn't it always been this way?

Chapter 588: The Despicable High School Student

After school in the afternoon, on the way to the Student Council office, Katsuragi Kohei deliberately waited for Kaoru for a while.

"Sakayanagi discussed the exam with me today. It seems she already has specific plans for which events to include."

"What are your thoughts?"

"To leverage the entire class's strength, team events are unavoidable. I think written exams could be considered."

"Our opponents are Class B. Written exams wouldn't guarantee a win, would they?"

"We could compete based on total scores or average scores. In that aspect, we have an advantage."

Katsuragi Kohei's confidence didn't stem from Class B's weakness in written exams, but rather from Class A having more top students.

While not claiming a hundred percent victory, at least it could be said to be seventy-thirty in their favor - this was their advantage.

Kaoru pondered for a moment.

Each class had ten events, with only five being the actual events on the final exam day - the rest were smoke screens.

As the Command Tower, Sakayanagi Arisu would likely deploy him on the Chess board.

Even if he slacked off, Sakayanagi had the authority to intervene, ensuring about a ninety percent win rate.

What would the other four events be?

"Sakayanagi seems quite interested in written exams. If the winning condition is based on participants' total scores, we have a probability of winning."

Katsuragi said, "The only consideration is that we need to account for the number of exam participants. According to the rules, each person can only participate in one event unless everyone has already participated."

Kaoru understood why Sakayanagi was interested.

Written exams test academically gifted top students.

'If we use them all up here, it would be difficult to participate in subsequent events.'

For example, he himself needed to participate in Chess, obviously unable to also take the written exam, meaning one less slot available.

However, if they could think of this, their opponent Ichinose Honami would certainly realize it too.

Would both Command Towers be willing to use their top students here?

This exam required considering not only what they were good at, but also how to win in areas where the opponent had advantages, knowing when to abandon unnecessary events.

The basic victory condition was four wins and three losses - this was Ichinose Honami's target.

Sakayanagi Arisu might be betting that Ichinose would abandon this event.

However, Class B happened to be equally skilled in written exams, so Sakayanagi couldn't make a firm decision.

"Sakayanagi proposed one event."

Katsuragi thought for a moment, "She asked if we knew Abacus Mental Calculation. I think this event could work."

"Using abacus?"

Kaoru was somewhat surprised.

The abacus was quite an ancient calculation tool, difficult to master without training.

"I can do it."

Katsuragi said, "You can pick it up after playing with it a few times. Class B might also have people who quickly master this tool. Now we can only bet on who has better skills."

The specific events won't be announced until March 15th.

Even if Class B wants to learn the abacus, we have more time to master it.

"We just need to find one or two students good at math to practice with."

Kaoru hesitated for a moment, keeping his thoughts to himself.

Everyone here is a high school student—what you know, most others know too. It's hard to break out of that framework.

Unless your hobbies and interests differ from the majority.

Like flower arrangement, tea ceremony, cooking, writing, painting, calligraphy, knitting, and so on. Even something like cat's cradle—a certain kid with a robotic cat could do that.

Of course, Kaoru wouldn't remind Sakayanagi Arisu.

It was already generous of him not to disrupt her plans.

Katsuragi Kohei, noticing his apparent lack of interest, sighed inwardly and changed the subject.

"About the election—when should we make our move? Even though Spring Break is approaching and everyone is busy with exams, this is actually a good opportunity.

No one will cause trouble, and our competitors are more focused on exams and their own classes. Our only real opponent is probably Nagumo Miyabi."

"In a few days will be fine."

Kaoru hesitated, then asked with some unease, "Did I mention before that I wanted you to be the president?"

"You did say that. At the time, you mentioned it was one of your conditions."

Katsuragi couldn't quite figure out what he was thinking but still spoke his mind.

"Actually, I think you're more suitable for the role. At first, I thought you might be like Nagumo-senpai—someone who might stir up some... hard-to-evaluate incidents. But now I'm sure you won't."

The "hard-to-evaluate incidents" referred, of course, to Nagumo Miyabi's reckless behavior in his second year and his attempts to push reforms after taking office.

In contrast, Kaoru might seem similar in style to Nagumo, but in reality, he hasn't done anything disruptive—except for buying points, which was frustrating, but he didn't harm ordinary students.

He doesn't go looking for trouble either, unlike Nagumo, who insists on challenging others and drawing hostility.

Katsuragi believed Kaoru was more suited to be Student Council President than he was.

"Besides, you're more popular than I am now. You could probably secure a lot of votes."

Katsuragi wasn't lying.

After all, Kaoru had so many girlfriends—his popularity was almost terrifying.

Many boys saw him as a master in that regard.

As for the girls who should have disliked him for it, they seemed to forgive this playboy simply because he was good-looking.

Don't underestimate that.

Compared to other potential candidates who left no impression, Kaoru was now a well-known figure schoolwide.

At the very least, students knew how to write his name.

The first step in running for election is to make sure people know you and can write your name.

Kaoru had already skipped that step.

Now, he only needed to focus on how to campaign.

"Let me think about it. There's no rush for now."

For once, Kaoru brushed it off vaguely.

He was well aware of his advantages, but back then, he thought he would be leaving the school soon.

Hoping to fulfill a few wishes before departing, he had decided to let Katsuragi take the fall.

Until yesterday, Kaoru still held that idea, though his reasons for leaving had changed.

He had to return to the agency at least once, otherwise, it would surely fall apart.

Kaoru planned to go back sometime before next year.

He wasn't sure whether he would continue at ANHS or simply stay at the agency.

Lost in thought, he had already arrived at the Student Council office.

There, he saw Ichinose Honami writing something.

She lifted her gaze, and their eyes met.

"Someone voted for you today!"

The girl happily told him this good news.

Kaoru quickly averted his gaze because through the window behind her, he could see a cherry blossom quietly blooming.

Its vivid red color held a slightly moist luster, reminding him of how the girl had looked last night.

Never mind, he was just an ordinary high school student here anyway.

Kaoru looked at the form the girl was holding up.

There were few voters today, only a handful of people, but his name stood prominently at the top of the list.

Chapter 589: The Little Angel Is Beyond Saving

"It's over, you have to take responsibility for me!"

Kushida Kikyo pressed her entire weight against Kaoru, her arms wrapped around his neck, her chest pressing against his back, creating a sensation of both pain and pleasure.

Her mood seemed more enthusiastic than usual, completely unlike how a little angel should behave, instead resembling a sulky girlfriend.

"What exactly am I supposed to take responsibility for?"

Kaoru, who had been about to call Horikita Manabu, felt somewhat exasperated.

"Mind your image. Although I don't mind, others might."

"Stop talking nonsense. I'm so cute, no matter what I do, someone will like me."

Kushida Kikyo clung to his back.

The room currently contained only her and Kaoru, whereas Kei Karuizawa, who would normally be present, was absent.

At this moment, it could be said to be a rare time for the two of them to be alone.

"It's been so annoying today. The Class C people have been following us like sticky plasters. I heard some people have been constantly harassed by them, and even I almost got stuck with someone."

As she spoke, Kushida Kikyo let out a big sigh.

"They might have seen me running into your room. Ah, my image is beyond saving now."

What would happen when a little angel enters a man's room?

Anyone with a vivid imagination could picture the scene.

Probably, in most people's eyes, she had already become a Cream Puff.

Kushida Kikyo felt a bit sad, though deep down she wished she could become Kaoru's Cream Puff.

"Haven't you been beyond saving since winter break?"

Kaoru played with his phone. "The boys in your class all think I've pinned you to the bed."

Kushida Kikyo pouted, "So, you have to take responsibility for me. No free rides."

"How do you want me to take responsibility?"

Kaoru chuckled. "How about we get married?"

Kushida Kikyo immediately pinched his neck, hiding her flushed face.

"Who wants to marry you? Save those words for Kei!"

However, she forgot that Kaoru was stronger than her.

In almost an instant, he retaliated.

Kaoru reached back to her waist, and a single tickle was all it took to make her unable to bear it.

"No, don't... not here... hahaha stop hahaha wuwuwu..."

With clear, ringing laughter, the girl collapsed onto the bed. Kaoru pinned her hands and continued tickling her waist.

The hem of her nightgown faintly revealed her snow-white skin, and her soft belly showed a slightly indented curve.

As the girl laughed, her abdomen continuously contracted without a trace of excess fat.

One could even see her somewhat exaggerated waistline, and her slightly raised hip line carried a touch of innocence—a feeling mature women don't possess, unique to a girl of this age.

Kaoru didn't continue bullying her for long and soon stopped.

Kushida Kikyo lay on the bed, breathing weakly with her prominently raised chest undulating like waves, her face flushed crimson.

"Aren't you going to play anymore, Master?"

Kushida Kikyo spoke with a slight sultry tone, her lips slightly parted, her eyes filled with seduction.

"I'm Class D's Command Tower. Would you like to interrogate me tonight?"

Kaoru tapped her forehead with a karate chop, amused. "Did your class discussion yield any results?"

The implication was clear—this little angel hadn't even participated in her class's discussion, instead staying in his room, making herself utterly useless.

Kushida Kikyo covered her forehead, somewhat displeased.

"I'm the little angel. I just need to maintain my smile and cuteness. The rest can be left to people like Horikita."

"Hmm, why would I interrogate you instead of Suzune?"

Kaoru pinched her soft, plump cheeks.

"Because she hasn't figured things out yet."

Kushida Kikyo swatted away his mischievous hand. "She ran into Ryuen on the way today and seemed to have talked about something. I don't think she can defeat that delinquent."

"Why?" Kaoru asked.

Kushida Kikyo gave him a strange look, as if stating the obvious. "Although I haven't had much contact with Ryuen, I usually hang out with people from Class C. They all think he's someone who glorifies violence and underhanded tricks. Horikita definitely can't handle someone like that."

"This is an exam, not a fighting ring."

"What if their event is a fighting ring?"

"..."

Kaoru studied Kushida Kikyo.

He had to revise his previous impression of this little angel.

Truly a case of "pink on the outside, black on the inside"—she was unusually sharp in this regard.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

Kushida Kikyo felt she hadn't said anything wrong. "Their class has so many delinquents—Ishizaki, Ibuki, Albert, Nishino, and others. Even if it's not a fighting ring, if we compete in sports, I doubt we can beat them."

It wasn't that the little angel lacked confidence in her class; she simply understood them too well.

Their cohesion was practically zero, utterly a case of "every man for himself" when disaster struck.

Moreover, ever since Yamauchi Haruki dropped out, Hirata Yosuke seemed to have suffered some major blow.

He had completely changed, remaining silent and withdrawn these past few days.

"I thought you'd at least cheer for your own class." Kaoru said.

"Of course I will. After all, I'm the adorable little Kikyo. I have to keep up appearances perfectly."

Kushida Kikyo giggled. "But there's no one here now. In front of you, I can't be bothered to pretend."

Kaoru blinked. "Can you call me 'Master'?"

"Master, your little puppy is here."

Kushida Kikyo naturally complied obediently, casting him a seductive glance.

A strange feeling arose in Kaoru's heart. His lingering rationality told him something was off.

"Did Kei say something to you?"

Kushida Kikyo immediately averted her gaze, feigning nonchalance as she studied the pillow beside her.

"I'm sleeping here for the next few days. The people in Class C are too annoying."

Her uniform was already in her bag, which was sitting on Kaoru's desk.

"If I'm a lecher, you're the lecherous girl."

Kaoru was somewhat speechless. Before, she had always resisted, but now she seemed to be actively enjoying it.

"Not at all. I haven't done anything. You're the one overthinking things, okay?" Kushida Kikyo naturally denied his words—she couldn't possibly admit how intensely she envied Karuizawa Kei, occasionally even wishing to forgo safety measures.

Kaoru ignored her, sitting beside her as he continued sending messages to Horikita Manabu on his phone.

After just a short while, Kushida grew bored.

She stretched out her foot and nudged Kaoru's back.

Seeing no reaction from him, she grew bolder, attempting to pinch his clothes with her toes and slowly lift the hem of his shirt.

Kaoru grabbed her foot, and she immediately froze.

"What are you doing?" Kushida asked, grasping for conversation.

"The election. I'm asking my senior to spare some time so I can campaign," Kaoru replied. "But I feel bad about troubling him so often, so I offered him five million Personal points. He's refusing to accept them right now—I'm trying to persuade him."

Kushida's expression turned peculiar. "Didn't your class spend twenty million to rescue someone?"

"These are my personal points. They have nothing to do with the class," Kaoru answered.

Kushida fell even deeper into silence, feeling a sense of emptiness.

As a member of Class D, she truly had nothing in common with someone like him.

After a moment, she muttered sullenly, "I need to pee."

Indeed, after playing for so long without Kaoru's permission, Kushida had grown unaccustomed to acting on her own.

She expected Kaoru to allow her to use the restroom, but instead, he calmly stated.

"Hold it for now."

Kushida widened her eyes, staring at him in disbelief.

"Hey, this isn't something you can just hold in!"

"Endure it until I'm done. If you last until the end, I'll reward you."

"Who cares about your reward? It should be me rewarding you!"

Kaoru touched her foot, and her originally small, cute toes instantly curled up as if an electric current had passed through her.

Her face flushed crimson as she glared at him.

"If you can't hold it, there will be punishment," Kaoru said with a faint smile. "Whether you get a reward or punishment depends entirely on your performance."

"You foot-fetishist pervert!"

Kushida trembled with anger, her gaze sharp enough to kill.

The blush on her delicate face had spread to her neck, though her fury seemed more like a mask for her excitement.

Like master, like pet.

She had even tensed her entire body, her legs tightly pressed together, eagerly anticipating what would come next.

Chapter 590: Leaving the Little Angel Be

She wore a slip nightgown, her slender shoulders boasting exceptionally smooth and delicate skin.

The strap hung halfway down, revealing her exquisite, adorable collarbones that accentuated her youthful beauty.

A vast expanse of pale, tender skin was exposed, and beneath the hem of her gown, her jade legs carried a slightly plump texture.

Her bare feet rested in Kaoru's hands.

No matter how she resisted, she could never escape Kaoru's grasp.

She could only watch helplessly as he did utterly outrageous things to her feet.

"Ahaha... stop, stop tickling... hahaha... it's so ticklish... no..."

Kushida rolled around on the bed while Kaoru firmly held her calf.

With just a slight tickle to the sole of her foot, her originally fair Jade feet gradually took on a soft pink hue.

Blue veins lay hidden beneath her skin, while the soles and ankles flushed a delicate red.

This was completely different from the roughness of a man.

The girl seemed to be made entirely of softness, and Kaoru felt as if he were touching a piece of fine jade—smooth and warm to the touch.

Her struggles made Kaoru feel as though he had caught a living creature, like a nimble fish that might slip away if he didn't hold on tightly.

Like carefully maintained porcelain, she was slender yet not lacking in delicate structure.

From her ten round toes to her slightly prominent ankles, there was a soft, lustrous glow, as if exuding a sweet fragrance that made one want to take a bite.

Hearing Kushida's pleas for mercy, Kaoru stopped and turned to look.

She lay on the bed, breathing heavily, her pretty face already flushed with a rosy hue.

Her eyes held a hint of reproach as she glared at Kaoru.

At this moment, there was no need for ambiguous or seductive thoughts—a naturally enchanting atmosphere enveloped them.

Suppressing the impulse in his heart, Kaoru asked, "Do you want a reward or punishment now?"

Kushida curled her legs, pressing down on her skirt, her cheeks puffed out.

"That didn't count! You were deliberately trying to embarrass me!"

It was too dangerous.

Who would have thought he'd start tickling without a word? The girl had nearly lost her composure.

"A master doesn't need a reason to embarrass his pet."

Kaoru pressed her hands against the bed with his left hand while his other hand gently stroked her cheek.

Soon, Kushida stiffened, then gradually relaxed. She bit her crimson lips, suppressing the urge to let out a soft moan.

"Now that it's just the two of us, Kikyō, what do you want me to do?"

"I... I want... to be like Horikita and the others..."

"Isn't what we usually do enough?"

"Wah... I want you, Master..."

Kushida could no longer hold back, but Kaoru withdrew his hand.

"To be honest, I don't understand your way of thinking."

Kaoru was somewhat exasperated. "High school students should act like high school students. Do you want to drop out?"

Regaining some of her senses, Kushida retorted with extreme dissatisfaction, "What right does someone who only bullies girls have to lecture me? I don't care! You've already done it with them, so I want it too. It's only fair!"

Kaoru pinched her cheeks and said irritably, "Are you all idiots? I'm protecting you. This isn't some childish game!"

Kushida opened her mouth wide, intending to bite him, but he dodged just in time.

"You're the idiot!"

Seeing this, the girl puffed out her cheeks. "Let me ask you, what is 'safety'?"

"Of course, it's to prevent you from getting pregnant," Kaoru replied matter-of-factly.

"Safety is about prevention, but we don't want to prevent it. Why bother with safety?"

Kushida argued, "None of us mind, so why should you?"

Kaoru was taken aback.

His first thought was that she was speaking out of anger, but upon reflection, he realized this might genuinely be their logic.

To avoid pregnancy, safety measures were necessary. But if they had no intention of avoiding it in the first place, why take precautions?

Moreover, they all believed Kaoru would take responsibility, which made them bolder and more nonchalant than he was.

Finally understanding, Kaoru flicked Kushida's forehead without holding back.

"You're done for. Tonight is punishment."

Kushida's eyes widened in shock, but before she could speak, Kaoru had already made his move.

This punishment certainly wasn't about bullying Karuizawa Kei.

To deal with Kushida, one definitely couldn't act according to her wishes - she needed to be made uncomfortable.

Thus, Kaoru spent the night calmly using Kushida as a hugging pillow, infuriating her to the point where she kept gritting her teeth all night.

...

With the arrival of spring, temperatures gradually rose, and the school's cherry blossom trees began blooming one after another, filling the air with a faint, elusive fragrance.

Kaoru found these days quite peaceful.

With Sakayanagi Arisu and Katsuragi Kohei handling exam arrangements, and the Student Council elections progressing steadily, everything seemed calm.

All grades were occupied with exams - third-years were fully focused on their final graduation exams, while second-years had their annual exams.

No one had any extra energy to spare.

Horikita Suzune wanted to defeat Ryuen Kakeru and earn more Class Points, while Ichinose Honami didn't want him interfering.

As a result, he suddenly found himself with nothing to do.

Aside from the elections, Kaoru had almost no responsibilities.

This led to him passing two days without any particular feeling, until suddenly it was Friday.

At noon today, Kaoru called Yamamura Miki to join Hasebe Haruka and Sakura Airi for lunch.

On the way to the cafeteria, he noticed several Class C students following behind two girls.

"It's harassment and stalking by perverts!"

After meeting up, Hasebe Haruka expressed her anger, "Ever since the exams started, Class C students have been inexplicably harassing our class. As if worried we wouldn't notice, they openly follow us around. It's so annoying!"

For some reason, Yamamura Miki lowered her head somewhat guiltily.

"Aside from following, have they done anything strange?"

Actually, Kaoru had been paying attention to this all along, but Ryuen was too cunning, never leaving any concrete evidence that could be used against him.

"How should I put it? They just simply follow behind you, or pester you meaninglessly."

Hasebe Haruka said gloomily, "I can understand them bothering Horikita, Sudo, and Hirata, but why do they even need to target small fries like me and Airi?"

Kaoru felt somewhat guilty at this point - Ryuen probably thought all the girls here were under his protection.

Hasebe Haruka seemed to notice his reaction, her pupils slowly widening as she likely figured out the answer.

"Is Airi okay?"

As if diverting attention, Kaoru timely interrupted Hasebe Haruka's train of thought.

"N-no, I'm fine. Haruka-chan has been accompanying me all along."

Sakura Airi smiled at him, though her smile contained a hint of strain.

Kaoru immediately understood - she was one of the targets Nagumo had selected, which naturally drew Ryuen Kakeru's attention as well.

For a girl as timid as a mouse, this sudden attention was truly frightening.