

Cote 591

Chapter 591: Rejected Before Even Confessing

The situation wasn't particularly serious.

Though the methods were disgusting, Ryuen knew this kind of probing wouldn't yield any valuable information.

Hasebe Haruka told Kaoru that their Class D now discussed exam matters exclusively in group chats, basically never consulting in public places.

Therefore, Ryuen was openly sending people to harass Class D students simply to annoy them.

Not only him, but Sakayanagi had also sent people to gather intelligence.

The reason Yamamura Miki felt guilty earlier was because she too had been following someone—a student from Class B of the first year.

This was an unavoidable situation.

If they could learn in advance what exam items the other side had prepared, it would give them a significant advantage in the upcoming test.

After finishing the meal, Yamamura Miki cautiously confessed her actions to Kaoru before returning to the classroom, perhaps worried that he might misunderstand her.

How could Kaoru possibly hold it against her?

Instead, he was curious about why Yamamura Miki would follow Sakayanagi Arisu's arrangements.

"I... I don't know either... Maybe it's because very few people smile at me."

Yamamura Miki hung her head dejectedly, "Someone like me... doesn't really deserve to be with all of you..."

Kaoru had almost forgotten her intense self-loathing.

She must have gone through something in the past.

However, Kaoru didn't press about her past.

Instead, he asked, "Miki, have you ever seen a really ugly apple?"

"Ugly apple?"

Yamamura Miki tilted her head, not understanding why he was bringing this up.

"Typically, these apples often have scars and uneven colored spots on the surface, looking completely unappealing."

Kaoru smiled, "But I've eaten them. Beneath that unpleasant exterior lies a sweet flavor, crisp texture—one bite and you'll think of the word delicious."

At first, Yamamura Miki didn't understand what he meant.

Noticing he kept looking at her, she eventually realized, her eyes flashing with flustered light from embarrassment, her pretty face gradually blushing.

"In my eyes, it's sweet, and Miki is sweet too."

Kaoru maintained his smile—it was just some inspirational talk, something he was quite experienced with.

"I-I-I..."

Yamamura Miki stammered, partly because she rarely heard anyone comfort her like this, and partly because Kaoru was being too direct.

Yes, Kaoru hadn't considered the issue of appropriate distance.

Even between friends, such words clearly teased a young girl's heart.

Fortunately, she didn't know what distance true friends should maintain either.

"You're really good at compliments."

Just then, Kaoru suddenly heard someone speaking.

Beside the path where the two were walking stood a rest bench.

Morishita Ai sat up from the chair, eyes drowsy, lazily stretching her somewhat slender waist. The girl's full chest could be seen forming a pleasing curve.

She yawned, completely unconcerned about Kaoru's gaze, and asked, "Is Yamamura Miki your girlfriend too?"

As these words fell, Yamamura Miki—who had been wondering why she was napping here—immediately short-circuited, steam seemingly rising from her head as if her CPU had overloaded.

"Which answer would you like to hear?"

Kaoru saw the desires on her.

After some observation, he finally understood why she had those wishes.

Sleeping in every day, lying around snoring everywhere—she really should be...

"I overheard a bit of your conversation earlier. Is this how you win over girls?"

Morishita Ai carefully examined Kaoru, "Actually, you're quite good-looking. Most girls would like you."

"Morishita-san thinks highly of me." Kaoru was also sizing her up.

Perhaps because she had just woken up, her hair was slightly messy.

Her school uniform was neatly worn, and beneath the skirt were slender legs clad in black tights.

"You always seem very interested in my gossip. Should we find a place to sit and chat?"

"Kaoru, there are rumors about me involving you."

Morishita Ai was somewhat displeased.

She didn't know who had been loose-lipped on the forum, actually counting her as one of Kaoru's people.

Moreover, since Kaoru had previously assigned her to manage the class's Personal points, it seemed everyone basically assumed she was one of his people, no matter how much she protested.

Morishita Ai knew that Kaoru had been secretly watching her, but the two of them truly had little interaction.

She had a naturally aloof disposition, often enjoying the world alone in her daily life, with no place for Kaoru in it.

To the girl, Kaoru was merely a classmate.

If she had to say, Morishita Ai acknowledged that his existence made her life easier, sparing her the trouble of dealing with class conflicts.

"Just explain it to them. We usually have no relationship anyway."

Kaoru understood she held a faint hostility toward him, but teasing her was just too fun.

"I've already explained, but no one believes me."

Morishita Ai said, "So, I plan to make it clear to you—I can't accept someone like you existing like this."

Her serious expression was somewhat amusing, and Kaoru couldn't help but ask.

"Does this mean I'm being rejected before even confessing?"

"A reminder."

Morishita Ai pressed down her skirt—he was peeking at her legs again.

"I have no interest in romance."

Kaoru blinked: "So it's not because you find me particularly annoying that you're rejecting me?"

"I don't particularly dislike anyone."

Morishita Ai said, "Are you planning to return to the classroom?"

"Want to come together?"

Kaoru nodded.

Sure enough, Morishita Ai stood up and followed him, making Kaoru's expression turn peculiar.

He didn't know how to describe this girl.

She certainly had the wariness one would expect, yet she also gave the impression that she had no defenses at all.

She had just rejected Kaoru, but now she naturally intended to return to the classroom with him.

"Aren't you annoyed being associated with me?"

"Kaoru, do you think I should be avoiding you right now?"

"Shouldn't you be?"

"I know I haven't done anything wrong, why should I avoid you?"

Morishita Ai glanced at Yamamura Miki beside him and greeted, "Hello."

Yamamura Miki hid behind Kaoru, lightly tugging at his sleeve. Having listened from earlier, she felt Morishita Ai was a strange person.

Rather than strange, it was more like she was self-centered; otherwise, she wouldn't persist in doing as she pleased despite knowing about the rumors.

If she felt she hadn't done anything, then she hadn't—no one could tell her otherwise.

The reason she warned Kaoru was because he really had been peeking at her.

Sure enough, after returning to the classroom, Morishita Ai paid no attention to Kaoru or the surrounding gazes, quietly sitting at her own desk.

She simply wanted to return to the classroom.

Kaoru rubbed his chin.

This scenario felt familiar to him.

As a producer, he had dealt with many girls of different personalities.

However, he scoffed lightly—why was he thinking about this?

Wasn't things troublesome enough already?

Morishita Ai didn't even want to join the Student Council, so how could there possibly be any chance for the two of them to interact, unless he forcibly pushed this relationship forward.

Chapter 592: She's Really So Annoying.

'I saw him today.'

'Though his appearance hadn't changed at all, my heart raced even more than before.'

'No, it seems like every time it beats even faster.'

'I can never suppress this impulse—the urge to get closer to him.'

'Once I see his face, the lens can't help but lock onto him.'

'Everything around him weaves into the most perfect composition and lighting, making me restless with excitement.'

Sakura Airi lay on her bed, clutching a stuffed toy in her arms.

Her braids had been undone, and her long hair cascaded over her shoulders.

Her fair, delicate collarbones peeked out from her collar, while her full, heaving chest pressed tightly against the toy, as if she were embracing someone.

Her gaze was fixed on the wall ahead, covered in numerous photos.

Anyone present would surely recognize the person in those pictures.

However, his presence was absent from this room.

There wasn't a single frontal shot—every photo was taken by Airi in secret.

Among them, Airi's favorite was his face, captured in the glow of the setting sun as he passed by the special teaching building.

The regret was that it was a stolen shot.

Even so, Airi hadn't achieved much—only a pitiful dozen or so photos that were barely acceptable.

Regardless, the girl still felt a thrill looking at these pictures.

Perhaps, having experienced it herself, she finally understood why some fans could become extreme.

Some would maintain a proper distance, while others would develop a strong interest in their crush's private life.

She happened to be the latter.

Airi recalled the scene from not long ago—the first time she encountered a man's scent.

At the time, it only made her blush, but now, in the quiet of the night, she replayed his reactions over and over.

As the scene flashed before her eyes, the girl squirmed restlessly on her bed.

Even though she usually tried to ignore the rumors about him, she could no longer evade her own emotions.

With so many girls around, what harm would one more do?

Airi roughly squeezed the toy in her arms.

Besides feeling resentful, she sometimes wished the others would just disappear—if only she had met him earlier, if only he liked her alone.

Her thighs rubbed against the bedsheet, her hair tips brushing her cheeks and neck.

Though she wasn't doing anything particularly special, her restless body radiated waves of heat.

As if catching a whiff of that once-sweet scent, Airi unconsciously licked her lips.

Her hands gripped the toy's ears, her soft, delicate fingers still seeming to retain that warmth and pulse.

If he were to treat her roughly, things might get even worse.

Just as Airi was sinking deeper into her fantasies, her phone rang from nearby, abruptly cutting off her thoughts.

Flustered, Airi sat up and grabbed her phone.

Her pupils trembled at what she saw.

He was coming over!

Her heart pounded as if struck by something, and a foolish smile spread across her face without her realizing.

She threw herself onto the bed, rolling around in excitement until her already disheveled shirt became even more untidy, revealing a glimpse of her charms.

The next moment, she froze.

No—her room was a mess! He would find out!

Airi hurriedly got up, not bothering to wonder why Kaoru was visiting.

In that moment, she moved with astonishing speed, packing away all the photos and anything suspicious into boxes!

Just as she finished sealing the last box, the doorbell rang.

Airi swallowed hard, instinctively tucking her hair behind her ears.

Then, remembering what she had just been doing, a blush gradually spread across her pretty face.

Oh no—she forgot about the scent on her! He'll notice... Waaah...

If he thinks I'm a shameless woman... Waaah...

Airi felt a wave of self-pity, but then she reconsidered. After what happened between them last time, it should be fine, right?

Eh, maybe this time he wants to take things further.

Realizing this, Airi grew even more panicked.

Should she take a shower? Change into something cute? If Kaoru wasn't satisfied, she'd regret it for the rest of her life!

Ding—

The doorbell rang again, clearly puzzled by her lack of response.

Airi paced around her room.

What should she do? Should she make up an excuse to delay him for an hour or two?

"Airi?"

Kaoru's voice came from outside the door.

And so, the girl obediently went to open the door.

More than any excuse, she feared making him angry or disappointed.

What if he turned and left?

"S-sorry... I was just... taking out the trash... I didn't hear the bell..."

Airi expected him to be upset with her, but seeing him standing at the doorway, her anxiety and unease melted away like ice and snow, leaving only the sound of her pounding heartbeat.

"I should be the one apologizing for bothering you so late."

Kaoru noticed the girl's slightly disheveled shirt and the way her chest stood out, drawing attention. He glanced past her into the room.

"Mind if I come in?"

"N-not at all..."

Airi nearly tripped over her words.

All sorts of strange thoughts flooded her mind.

After the ice melted, the meadow awaited the rising tide, eagerly anticipating the awakening of life.

Kaoru stepped into her room.

It looked mostly the same, except for the boxes piled in the corner—too odd not to arouse curiosity about the girl's secrets.

"W-would you like something to drink?"

"Tea is fine."

"I'll get it for you right away!"

Watching her slightly flustered and excited figure, Kaoru felt something was off.

The scene from not long ago flashed before his eyes, stirring a restlessness within him.

Could she be thinking he wants to do something?

"H-here's your tea!"

Airi poured him a cup of barley tea, then sat across from him, looking both embarrassed and eagerly expectant.

"Has anyone from Class C been bothering you?"

Kaoru cut straight to the point.

"Eh?"

Caught off guard by the question, Airi let out a rather foolish sound.

"What's wrong?"

Kaoru found it amusing. "Do you think my concern is unnecessary?"

Airi's face flushed bright red, and she waved her hands frantically. "N-no, that's not it! I just... wasn't expecting it... asking so suddenly..."

"It's not that sudden, is it? Honestly, when they started targeting you, I felt it was a bit dangerous."

Kaoru sighed.

In his eyes, Karuizawa Kei, Kushida Kikyo, and Sakura Airi were easy to handle—the others just hadn't figured out the situation yet.

Seeing this, Airi slowly lowered her hands, her voice tinged with dejection.

"Did I... cause you trouble?"

Though Kaoru never said it, she knew she was practically useless—average grades, terrible physical fitness, not particularly smart, no noteworthy talents, timid, shy, socially anxious, weak-willed, and reclusive.

Someone like her...

"No, it's not you causing me trouble—it's me causing you trouble."

Kaoru said, "If you were somewhere else, I guarantee most people here wouldn't shine as brightly as you."

His firmness left Airi at a loss.

Why did he always speak so highly of her?

"N-no, that can't be right... You've helped me so much... and I'm still..."

Kaoru smiled, making Airi swallow the rest of her words.

He then said proudly, "Because you're an idol. For every hundred people who dislike you, a thousand will love you. Even when you hate yourself, your fans will continue to adore you."

Though sometimes she'd argue with fans, sometimes comments would break her, other times she'd be moved to tears by their foolish devotion.

From debut to the final curtain, during Kaoru's time as her producer, he'd seen her cry, seen her laugh, watched her tremble with nerves before going on stage, only to burst forth with dazzling brilliance under the spotlight, and afterward, she'd endlessly scroll through the comments section.

Airi was no different. Even after she stopped updating her tweets, fans still waited in the comments for any news from her.

"I guarantee, Airi, you are absolutely not a burden."

Kaoru said, "Putting everything else aside, just debuting as an idol puts you miles ahead."

Airi could no longer hold back.

Since they'd met, this guy had never once blamed her for anything. Instead, he kept affirming her, nearly making her cry.

"Waaah... I... I understand... I won't say things like that anymore... Waaah..."

She grabbed Kaoru's arm, tears welling in her eyes.

The more she looked into his eyes, the more she loved him.

At this point, even if Kaoru were to push her down, she'd probably be eager for it.

No—even if this person didn't want to "cook," Airi would make sure he got the idea.

Was she supposed to keep humming to his photos in her room forever?

Chapter 593: The Idol's Downfall

Airi's reaction startled Kaoru.

He'd never seen her make such an expression before.

With tears shimmering in her eyes like this, it might easily be mistaken that he had bullied the girl to tears.

"Ahem, I almost forgot."

Kaoru quickly changed the subject. "Airi, are you okay with taking photos now?"

The reason Airi secretly played with her camera wasn't just because she had no friends—it was largely due to her personality, which prevented her from handling such things in front of others.

She'd once told Kaoru that when she shot her photobook, the photographer, manager, and all staff present were women, yet it still didn't cure her social anxiety.

"I... I don't know. It should be fine, right?"

Airi wiped her tears, sniffled, her tone utterly uncertain.

Before, she had no friends. Now, she had a few.

Maybe things would be different.

Besides, it was rare to take photos together.

No matter what, Airi felt she couldn't mess up at a crucial moment.

"If it's too much, it's fine. I've already explained your situation to Haruka-chan. She understands."

Kaoru knew that taking photos wasn't a small matter for girls—unlike guys who could just snap a quick selfie and be done with it.

Being that careless would never result in a good photo. Who wanted to take pictures without makeup?

Moreover, Hasebe Haruka wanted to take photos with commemorative meaning, so of course they'd have to go out.

Once they stepped outside, it was no small matter—makeup was essential, and nice clothes were a must.

In short, they could spend hours, even an entire day, just to get one good photo.

Airi felt a bit downcast.

She didn't dare deny it, nor could she guarantee anything. Was she really going to keep hiding her true self?

She wanted to play with friends, take photos together, and show her real side.

"During Spring Break, the school building should be empty."

Kaoru suddenly said, "I'm a Student Council member, so even if a teacher finds us, I have an excuse."

Airi's eyes instantly lit up, though a trace of unease soon followed.

She murmured softly, "Will... Haruka-chan and the others agree?"

"She never planned to go to crowded places anyway. We usually spend most of our time in the school building, right?"

Kaoru said without batting an eye, though in truth, the experience of taking photos while having fun was even better—it created more beautiful memories.

But given Airi's situation, they had to give up on that idea.

Sure enough, just hearing that there would be no one around, the girl broke into a happy smile.

It must have been a relief for her.

"I... I'm not a good photographer... How about you be the photographer, Kaoru?"

"I can do that, but are you sure you can face the lens normally?"

"Eh?" Kaoru sighed softly.

Had this girl forgotten her embarrassing past?

"When you shot your photobook before, wasn't it because you couldn't handle the pressure of being watched?"

In an instant, Airi became utterly dejected.

No matter where they took photos or how they did it, the core of the problem was always her.

Kaoru had come to see her tonight partly out of concern that Class C might affect her, and partly because he remembered the photo-taking matter.

Hasebe Haruka had called him privately, suggesting they should take this chance to help Airi step out of her comfort zone.

Taking photos was a good excuse.

Getting Airi to change out of her usual outfit, reveal her true self, and simultaneously face others' gazes—Haruka believed this could gradually help Airi overcome her timidity.

Her exact words were: "She's so pretty—she should be more confident."

"Airi, why do you hate being watched?"

Kaoru placed his hands on her shoulders, his gesture slightly forceful, making her instinctively avert her gaze.

"Are you afraid of embarrassing yourself? Or worried people will criticize you? Or even look at you with lewd eyes?"

Airi's shoulders trembled slightly.

Kaoru forced her to look at him, only to find her eyes weren't as shadowed as he'd imagined.

"B-because... someone disliked me before."

"They were just jealous of how cute you are."

"Th-that's not it... I'm... different from everyone else..."

"Of course you're different—you're cute."

"D-don't interrupt me... Waaah... you're so sly..."

"Airi, it's normal for someone to dislike you, just like it's natural for me to like you."

"Guh... I... I know I shouldn't keep dwelling on it... but I... I'm so scared... Am I just useless? Waaah..."

"An Airi who feels uneasy because someone dislikes her is just as cute. Even if you keep dwelling on it, I'll always be by your side."

"Guh..."

Airi was trembling all over now, looking at Kaoru as if on the verge of tears.

The next moment, she threw herself into his arms, holding him tightly.

"Waaah... I wasn't finished... You're too sly..."

Kaoru patted her head.

Honestly, the moment she said it, he already knew what was going on. After all, teenagers were so sensitive during puberty.

"Because I'm Airi's fan. To me, Airi just needs to be cute."

Of course, being a fan of her looks counted too.

Kaoru didn't see any problem with that—he genuinely admired Airi's face and figure. Otherwise, she wouldn't have debuted as a gravure idol.

However, Airi seemed to interpret his words differently.

Kaoru felt the girl in his arms stir, then saw her lift her tear-streaked face, looking at him pitifully.

"I... I'll do my best!"

For some reason, she suddenly shouted this.

Kaoru was baffled.

The girl stopped crying, her face flushed red as she quickly got up from his embrace and scurried to the corner to fiddle with the boxes.

A moment later, she pulled out a digital camera.

So she'd hidden the camera in the box?

But why hide it there?

Before Kaoru could ponder further, the idol eagerly shoved the camera into his hands, then looked at him with anticipation.

"L-last time... let's do it again..."

Airi said shyly, "You... be the photographer... you can shoot however you want."

No matter the pose, she would cooperate.

Kaoru fell silent for a moment, then said, "Airi, are you afraid of my gaze?"

"O-of course not."

Airi tilted her head.

"If you're not afraid of me, then me pointing the lens at you is meaningless."

Kaoru shook his head, then added, "If you want to build your courage, I have a better method."

"What method?"

Airi looked at him eagerly.

Kaoru countered, "Do you like me?"

The question short-circuited Airi's brain.

By the time she processed it, her entire face was burning red, like an overinflated balloon ready to pop at any moment.

"Y-ye... yes..."

Her murmur was even softer than a mosquito's buzz, yet it resonated louder than anything before.

"Mm, I see."

Kaoru smiled slightly. "I like Airi too, so please trust me."

Airi felt her heartbeat was unbearably loud.

She could no longer hear what Kaoru was saying, and even her own voice seemed stuck, unable to make a sound.

She just stared foolishly at him.

"Airi, could you go out with me... without anything underneath?"

In that moment, this room was no longer the most shameless place.

The person who claimed to be her fan bared his fangs just like before, instantly snapping her back to reality.

She was only pretending to be shameless—this guy was the real deal!

Chapter 594: Fidgeting

The night gently enveloped the entire campus.

The streetlights resembled flickering fireflies, while a light breeze carried the faint scent of cherry blossoms.

A slender crescent moon hung in the sky like a brushstroke on water.

Kaoru strolled along the path, his peripheral vision catching Airi's stiff, awkward steps.

Her small hands tightly gripped the hem of her skirt.

Under the clear moonlight, her cheeks were flushed an intense red.

Both were wearing their school uniforms. Though a bit odd, it wouldn't draw particular attention.

Yet, the girl's posture felt off.

Not only was she nervously clutching her skirt, her entire body fidgeting, but the slightest noise would startle her, making her instinctively move closer to Kaoru.

Considering Airi's feelings, Kaoru hooked his fingers around her small hand, then firmly held it in his.

"Scared?"

He seemed to be asking the obvious—the girl's hand felt cold.

Still, holding hands seemed to calm Airi down a little.

"Waaah... wh-why do we have to do this?"

Airi didn't want to care so much, but this feeling was completely different from usual.

With even a slight breeze, she felt goosebumps rising all over her body.

Without any barrier, the cool night air brushed against her skin.

Even though she was still fully clothed, it felt like she was strolling naked.

Kaoru glanced at her.

At 153 cm, her figure could truly be called petite and delicate.

Yet, her full, rounded curves couldn't be concealed even by her thick blazer and shirt.

Her heavy chest exuded a temptation unbefitting a girl her age, with an exaggerated curve that sharply narrowed at the waist before flaring out again at her small, perky bottom, sketching a shape like a full moon.

The pleated skirt seemed unable to contain it, while her plump, soft thighs swayed beneath the hem, reflecting the pale moonlight.

She naturally radiated a youthful vitality that drew men's eyes.

But she had tied her hair into braids and put on her usual glasses, lowering her gaze as if trying to bury her face in her ample chest.

No matter how carefully she tried to appear plain, this body was truly indecent—especially since Kaoru knew her current state.

If he were to lift it, Airi would surely explode.

"Stop clutching your skirt."

His words made her freeze. "Even if someone stares at you, don't panic. When you look back on today, you'll realize how narrow your old self was."

Airi was on the verge of tears.

Narrow? If Kaoru weren't holding her hand, she'd definitely flee back to the dorm.

"O-okay..."

The girl tremblingly released the skirt hem.

The smooth, delicate skin of her thighs seemed tinged with a faint blush.

"Waaah... I feel like the whole world is watching me... It's so embarrassing..."

"You'll get used to it gradually. There's a concept called 'exceeding the threshold stimulus.' If the impact is too great at once, your threshold will rise, and you'll find the old world wasn't so bad after all."

Kaoru gently stroked her small hand—soft and smooth. Why did girls always feel like this?

"Really?"

Airi didn't seem to fully believe him, the blush on her pretty face deepening.

"Really."

Kaoru had often used this method to deal with idols before, and it worked quite well—at least even a timid girl like Osaki Tenka could muster the courage to call him a pervert.

"I-I'll trust you just this once... D-don't you dare peek..."

Sakura Airi couldn't tell whether his words made sense, but the fact that he was a pervert remained unchanged.

"I won't peek." Kaoru smiled.

What was the fun in peeking? The girl's reactions were the real prize.

Worried that someone might appear at any moment, she would startle at the slightest rustle.

Occasionally, the evening breeze would lift her skirt, revealing a large expanse of pale, delicate thigh, making her blush and hurriedly press it down.

"N-no, you can't!"

Sakura Airi seemed a little angry—how could he actually not peek?

Then she flusteredly tried to cover up her emotions. "Anyway... I-I... I can only accompany you for half an hour!"

Kaoru held her small hand and said with a gentle smile, "It's fine. We're just going to the convenience store."

Sakura Airi widened her eyes.

They had been taking small paths all along, with few people around, which was why she had gradually relaxed.

Who knew Kaoru was taking her to a convenience store? How terrifying!

"H-how about... we go back, waaah..."

"We're already here. Why rush back?"

"Aww... someone might see us!"

"Does Airi usually get seen by people?"

Sakura Airi's eyes welled up with tears.

Usually was usually, and now was now—how could they be the same?

"If no one usually sees you, just act as you normally do now. How could anyone notice?"

Kaoru smiled. "Besides, I'll be by your side."

Perhaps she believed his words, or perhaps she could feel warmth from his hand, but Sakura Airi's unease gradually faded.

She muttered softly, "You really are a pervert."

"Airi is a pervert too. Otherwise, why would you agree to a pervert's request in the first place?"

"I-I'm not a pervert!"

Sakura Airi hurriedly denied his words, but when she saw his smile, she felt both embarrassed and angry.

Truthfully, she didn't understand why she had agreed.

It was as if she had lost her head in the moment, completely swayed by his earlier words without any thought.

But Sakura Airi quietly pressed a hand to her chest.

Her pounding heartbeat wasn't just from fear of exposure—it was also cheering.

Holding his hand like this, strolling through the campus together, was a girl's dream.

The neon lights cast the convenience store's shadow on the ground.

Just then, someone walked out carrying items, and Kaoru released her hand.

"Can you go in and buy something for me, Airi?"

Hearing this, Sakura Airi froze in place, staring at him in disbelief.

"Just some snacks and gum. You can decide what exactly."

"W-why do I have to go?"

Sakura Airi was already blushing furiously.

What if she got exposed? She really wasn't wearing much.

"It's too embarrassing! I don't want to!"

"There's no one around at this hour. I'll wait for you at the entrance."

Kaoru wasn't lying to her.

Thanks to the effect of the Marauder's Map, he already knew the convenience store was empty except for the clerk.

However, Sakura Airi had no idea.

"Hiks... Do I really have to go?"

The girl looked at him pitifully, "Can't you come with me?"

Kaoru blinked: "Wasn't it you who wanted to train your courage?"

Sakura Airi covered her pretty face. While she did have that idea, more importantly she wanted to seduce him!

Making her go to the convenience store alone like this was just too embarrassing!

How was this any different from those doujinshi she'd read?

Guh, she'd rather he just pinned her to the ground - at least then she could play dead.

Damn it, maybe she should just punch this pervert and knock him out instead!

"You... you'll really wait for me at the entrance?"

"I'll be watching you the whole time."

"Hiks... okay, fine... I'll go..."

Sakura Airi didn't even consider resisting him. If this could satisfy him, it might not be so bad after all.

Besides, at this point, Airi could only completely trust his words, believing that such intense stimulation might help raise her tolerance threshold.

Chapter 595: Can't Be Gentle

"Welcome."

The clerk's greeting the moment she entered startled Sakura Airi.

She instinctively averted her gaze, both hands clutching her skirt, her heart pounding as if about to explode.

But she immediately realized this wouldn't do - it would make the clerk suspicious.

She had to lower her head, pretending not to see the clerk, and quickly head toward the inner shelves.

Airi didn't even know what snacks to buy, just wanting to quickly end this thrilling adventure.

Fortunately, he hadn't lied - there really weren't many people in the store, which made the girl feel slightly more at ease.

As she walked toward the snack section, Airi's pocket suddenly vibrated slightly.

In her current state, she could even feel the vibration against her thigh, causing her pretty face to flush crimson instantly.

"Guh..."

Airi frantically pulled her phone from her pocket.

The screen showed a message from Kaoru, telling her to watch her step.

Watch her step? Why?

Airi felt confused.

She looked down and saw the convenience store floor was so clean it clearly reflected the ceiling lights, along with her own shadow.

Instantly, the girl's face turned bright red as she covered her skirt, tightly clamping her legs together.

She turned back angrily and saw Kaoru standing not far from the entrance.

The guy nonchalantly placed his index finger on his lips, signaling her to keep quiet.

'Damn it, he did it on purpose!'

The previously somewhat relaxed Airi immediately tensed up again, starting to have second thoughts.

She only felt a chilling sensation below, as if she might float away at any moment.

Biting her lip, uncontrollable images flashed through Airi's mind - in some of those doujinshi, the female protagonists were always pitifully toyed with both physically and mentally.

Just like now, where the male lead controls the female lead's body with strange devices, watching her become unable to endure it.

Under the male lead's commands, the female lead casts hateful glances at him but shamefully complies anyway, revealing her hidden side - all in a busy convenience store where a third party could appear at any moment...

Sakura Airi frantically knocked on her head, trying to toss out these chaotic thoughts.

Ever since discovering Kaoru's alt account, she had inevitably become interested in strange things.

In the past, she would never have looked at such things, let alone fantasized about these meaningless thoughts.

Now, although she strongly wanted to deny it, deep in her subconscious, she was anticipating his next instruction.

[Roll your skirt up a little higher.]

"Wah!"

Sakura Airi's face flushed bright red.

She never expected him to actually send her such a message and hurriedly replied that it wasn't acceptable.

[If it's not acceptable, then why have you been spacing out there?]

Sakura Airi snapped back to reality.

So she had been lost in wild thoughts, standing foolishly under the shelf for several minutes.

She quickly grabbed a few packs of snacks without even looking at them and rushed to the checkout counter.

'What if someone came in later?'

"Alright, that will be 560 points."

The clerk flashed her a professional smile.

However, Airi didn't dare meet the other person's gaze, afraid she might reveal something.

"Um... please, please... add this too..."

Perhaps suddenly remembering Kaoru's words, Airi spotted gum on the small shelf at the counter and timidly took a pack.

"Alright, anything else?"

The clerk hesitated for a moment before maintaining their smile.

Airi felt as if their eyes saw right through her.

The flustered girl couldn't even bother to respond, hastily grabbing her shopping bag and darting toward the door like a rabbit.

Halfway there, she abruptly stopped and slowly walked toward Kaoru waiting outside.

"Simple, isn't it?"

Seeing his smile, Airi suddenly felt wronged.

He had no idea how nervous she had been just now—from the floor, certain views were completely visible.

"Why didn't you come in with me?"

Of course the girl would feel angry, thinking that if he had accompanied her, even if there was a chance of being discovered, she wouldn't have been afraid with him by her side.

"Because I wouldn't be able to control myself."

Kaoru had already taken off his jacket and used the opportunity to tie it around Airi's waist, instantly blocking the view of her skirt.

"Seeing your back from outside, thinking you weren't wearing anything underneath, I already had a reaction."

Just as Airi felt touched by his consideration, his words startled her.

Her gaze uncontrollably drifted downward, and her ears turned cherry-blossom pink.

"P-pervert."

After saying that word, the girl's mood actually began to improve.

What, he really is a pervert, only staring at her with lewd eyes.

Hmph, she wouldn't hold it against him now—after all, he's a pervert.

Airi shoved the shopping bag into his hands and said stiffly, "I didn't know what to buy, so I just grabbed some things randomly."

Kaoru hadn't paid much attention at first, but his peripheral vision caught something unusual.

'This is... condom?'

Instantly, Kaoru's expression turned strange.

It wasn't that he was overreacting, but Kushida Kikyo and Karuizawa Kei had left too deep an impression on him.

"Airi, you're not angry, are you?"

"About what happened just now?"

Airi still didn't realize she had picked up the wrong item.

"I am angry... clearly... you rejected me before, but now... hmph, I'm really angry!"

The more she thought about it, the angrier she became.

Back then, she had mustered immense courage to offer Kaoru her black stockings, only for him to reject them outright.

If she hadn't gotten serious later, Kaoru wouldn't have done anything improper to her at all.

On his alt account, he was always spouting nonsense—saying things like "I'd only ever get off to you in this lifetime," or "Anyone who can resist not jerking off to Shizuku-chan is a saint," or "I'd grab you hard and go at it."

Really, some of the things he said were too embarrassing to repeat.

Despite all his bold talk online, he never laid a finger on her in person.

Instead, he went after people like Ichinose Honami.

For a while, Sakura Airi thought Kaoru was just toying with her, and she fell into a depressed state for several days.

Today's incident was humiliating, but deep down, Airi felt a little happy—it meant Kaoru desired her.

If anyone else had treated her this way, she would have been disgusted and might have withdrawn into herself forever.

"Are you angry?"

Kaoru nonchalantly took the condom.

"I think if you can stay calm in a situation like this, you'll have no problem taking photos."

Airi felt both embarrassed and furious. This was way too extreme!

"You can have these snacks. I just want a piece of this."

"Go... go die."

"..."

Chapter 596: Can you still stand up?

It seemed she was genuinely angry—she'd even said something like that.

Kaoru tried to hold her hand, but she pulled it back. Her reaction made him raise an eyebrow slightly.

"Airi."

"Wh-what?"

"I can see underneath."

Airi was startled.

Without thinking, she instinctively looked down—only for Kaoru to suddenly wrap his arms around her slender waist and pull her firmly against his chest.

The girl froze, feeling her chest pressed against him, his scorching body heat seeping into her.

"Sometimes, you're so naive and adorable... I can't control myself."

Kaoru was already touching her.

Trembling in his embrace, she gradually softened, offering no resistance as he'd expected.

She stayed completely still.

"H-have you... been holding back all this time?"

She whispered the question.

Kaoru took a deep breath.

Was this girl an idiot? Here he was, barely restraining himself, and she was asking such a foolish question—did she want him to take her right then and there?

"Why do you care about my alt account, Airi?"

Kaoru said. "Most people would just find it disgusting."

"B-because... when I think it's you saying those things... I'm not scared anymore..."

Airi mumbled, her voice trailing off as belated shyness washed over her.

"What if I did something bad to you right now?"

Kaoru pulled out the condom. "Take a closer look at what you bought."

When Airi finally saw what it really was, her face flushed bright red.

She stammered, unable to form a single word, her mind going completely blank.

"So Airi had this in mind."

"I-I-I-I... It's not like that... Waaah..."

"Is it okay?"

Kaoru had meant to tease her—her reactions were always so entertaining—but instead of protesting, she just blushed, tightened her grip on his clothes, and stayed silent.

Swallowing hard, Kaoru couldn't help but imagine certain scenes, especially since the girl in his arms was barely wearing anything.

Fortunately, he still had some sense left. No matter how desperate he felt, he wouldn't actually do anything to her in a place like this.

"Let's go back."

Before releasing her, Kaoru gently lifted her chin and kissed her lips. "Consider this a reward. Next time won't be like this."

'What kind of reward was this?'

Though she thought so, Sakura Airi's mind was already in disarray.

She didn't dare look into his eyes, only managing to let out a soft "Mm" in response.

As Kaoru took her hand and led her a few steps forward, she suddenly asked.

"W-when will next time be?"

Somehow, the thread of rationality Kaoru had maintained seemed to snap.

He wasn't unaware of the girl's feelings toward him or her allure.

The reason he hadn't acted was because he didn't want her to think their relationship was solely about this.

However, Sakura Airi seemed completely oblivious to this, simply believing they were already ready to "cook."

"I don't know, but I've changed my mind now."

Kaoru looked toward her thighs. "It seems if I don't teach you a lesson, you'll never fear me."

Before Airi could react, Kaoru was already leading her toward a secluded corner—a blind spot for surveillance, under the silence of night, where the lights gradually faded and a shadowy grove appeared before them.

His sudden move startled Airi.

Her heart began to race, filled with strange thoughts—anticipating what would happen next, yet also afraid.

The next moment, Kaoru stopped and turned to face her.

Airi instinctively felt scared and stepped back, only to bump into a tree.

"W-wait, we can't do it here... Let's... let's go back..."

"It's too late to beg for mercy now."

Kaoru pressed her head against the tree. "Making an idol show such an expression is actually one of a fan's wishes."

Airi seemed to resign herself to reality.

Trembling, she handed him the earlier 'gum' and whispered, "P-please be gentle..."

Kaoru's gaze darkened.

This girl truly wasn't afraid of him.

Though she appeared to be trembling, it felt more like nervousness than fear.

She simply didn't believe he meant her any harm.

Even if Kaoru pinned her to the ground, she'd probably just think it was an uncomfortable first time, without actually disliking him.

"Y-you don't have to use it if you don't want to!"

Airi seemed to mistake his expression for anger and quickly put away the 'gum'.

"Today... today should be fine..."

Kaoru had originally intended to scare her and take the opportunity to do something unusual, but now—unless he acted a bit rougher, she wouldn't realize the problem.

Yes, Sakura Airi saw no issue at all.

She only thought Kaoru was a bit intimidating, and couldn't help feeling secretly pleased.

'Hehe, so she had such terrifying charm.'

Immediately after, Airi felt a heavy pressure on her shoulders, causing her to instinctively crouch down.

Then she saw something she would never forget for the rest of her life.

"Aah... Mmph..."

Tears welled in the girl's eyes.

The rough handling made her afraid to move, leaving her no choice but to let Kaoru keep her head pressed down.

After swaying for a while, Airi accidentally choked and gasped for air.

Kaoru nuzzled her cheek and wiped away her tear stains, an action that seemed to make her even more pitiful.

"Do you understand the consequences now?"

"Ugh... you pervert..."

"Then don't provoke a pervert."

Sakura Airi fell silent, glaring at him angrily, hoping he would understand her meaning.

'Didn't you promise to be gentler?'

'If you dare do this again, I'll really bite it off.'

She hoped he would understand her meaning.

Sakura Airi stared at Kaoru with clear dissatisfaction, showing no trace of fear, even secretly glancing at the place that had left such a deep impression on her moments before.

Idols naturally fear extreme fans, fear that terrible things might happen to them, to the point of fearing every man who approaches them.

But Kaoru had forgotten.

Before becoming Shizuku-chan, Sakura Airi was just Sakura Airi, and Sakura Airi wouldn't be afraid of a boy named Kaoru Tōru.

Sakura Airi naturally assumed what just happened was his peculiar preference, so she hadn't resisted throughout, even though she felt somewhat scared inside.

"Can you still stand up?"

Kaoru misinterpreted her reaction as resistance and was already feeling some regret.

Ever since he'd done so many bad things with them, it seemed he couldn't control his impulses anymore.

Every time, he would act on momentary impulse, desire breaking through the restraints of reason.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have fallen for the same trick twice in a row, feeling guilty in front of Kamuro Masumi.

Sakura Airi was somewhat dazed - was he not planning to continue?

Still, she felt relieved.

Although she didn't mind, given the location and from a young girl's perspective, she ultimately couldn't accept it.

Sakura Airi felt a little happy as she clung to Kaoru's arm.

Could tonight be considered a step forward in their relationship?

She just felt somewhat displeased, thinking about someone who had gotten there before her, and her mood soured.

Chapter 597: Valentine's Day

This weekend was Valentine's Day.

Kaoru had prepared chocolates early since he had many people to give them to.

Thinking carefully, today might be the busiest day.

"So this is why you woke me up so early?"

Kamuro Masumi looked at him with extreme displeasure.

It was only 7 AM, and since it was the weekend, many students were sleeping in - Kamuro Masumi naturally being no exception.

She had been sleeping soundly when Kaoru Tōru's phone call woke her up.

"No one's around in the morning. Someone might see us being affectionate if it were noon or evening."

Kaoru glanced at her thighs, surprised that she had answered the door in her pajamas, her smooth, delicate legs completely exposed to view.

Kamuro Masumi knew what he was looking at but couldn't be bothered to gouge his eyes out anymore.

"You're not planning to give Sakayanagi chocolates later too, are you?"

"Already did."

"Oh."

Kaoru glanced into her room and was about to enter when Kamuro Masumi looked at him with full alertness.

"No."

"I haven't said anything yet."

"Just no."

"Reason?"

"I wouldn't be able to stop myself from agreeing."

As she spoke, Kamuro Masumi quietly turned her face away.

She wasn't an idiot - she knew what would happen if she let a pervert inside, and she also knew she wouldn't be able to refuse this pervert.

Last time she could blame the alcohol, but this time they might go all the way. How could she pretend nothing happened around him afterwards?

Kaoru seemed to understand her meaning and fell into brief silence.

For some reason, Kamuro Masumi found this atmosphere unbearable.

"The day before yesterday was Sakayanagi's birthday, you didn't forget, did you?"

Kamuro Masumi was both diverting attention and expressing curiosity, "Didn't you get her a gift?"

"Of course I did, she was quite satisfied with it."

Kaoru didn't wish to discuss this topic further.

Kamuro Masumi was momentarily at a loss for words.

After holding back for a while, she said dryly, "The exam subjects will be announced tomorrow."

Kaoru suddenly smiled, a smile that made Kamuro Masumi somewhat uneasy.

"Don't worry, she won't get the chance."

...

Besides Kamuro Masumi, Kaoru then gave chocolates to Hasebe Haruka, Yamamura Miki, and Sakura Airi, who had secretly left chocolates at his doorstep last month.

"Would you like to come in?"

Hasebe Haruka accepted the chocolate but didn't rush to thank him.

Instead, she invited Kaoru in.

"No, staying too late might get me noticed."

Kaoru didn't take the bait.

Although both were pretending to be friends now, they were well aware of the true nature of their relationship.

Hasebe Haruka fell silent for a moment. "Do you have feelings for Airi?"

"In every sense, yes." Kaoru replied.

Hasebe Haruka corrected herself, "I meant as an idol. Although I'm not optimistic about it, you've had similar situations before, like with Osaki Tenka."

A shy, gloomy-type idol—it wasn't as if he hadn't encountered one before.

"No, I've never had such thoughts."

Kaoru denied it. "Airi is Airi, and Tenka is Tenka. Besides, I'm not a producer anymore."

Hasebe Haruka eyed him suspiciously.

This guy was known for persistently bothering others until they agreed to become idols.

"I don't mind. Airi is an idol to begin with, unlike an ordinary person like me who doesn't even get audition opportunities."

The girl sighed softly. "Now, when I try to be a good friend to him, he thinks I'm some kind of creepy stalker."

Kaoru's face darkened. "I've never stalked you. That time we met in the park was purely coincidental."

"I understand. After all, I'm quite cute. Boys have always had lewd thoughts about me."

Hasebe Haruka poked her cheek with her index finger.

Though it was a somewhat teasing gesture, it carried a natural charm.

"Here's a fun fact: first-year middle school students are still elementary school students until April of that year."

Yes, Hasebe Haruka was just a newly developed middle schooler back then.

Kaoru thought this would shut her up, but she blinked and brought up his embarrassing past.

"Ara ara, how come I remember someone recruiting an elementary schooler into their agency?"

Hasebe Haruka wore an expression of sudden realization.

"Aha, I get it now. You really are a pervert, aren't you? The so-called genius composer is actually a perverted foot fetishist who frequently harasses girls. How could such a person exist?"

It was over.

Kaoru felt like this had turned into a mutual roasting session!

"Let me think... After one particular performance, this genius accidentally dropped a pair of black stockings from his pocket. How strange—whose stockings were they? To think this perverted foot fetishist would carry them around with him."

As the saying goes, the most devoted fans are also the biggest haters, fully aware of all his embarrassing secrets.

"How do you remember all this so clearly?"

Kaoru had given up defending himself.

To a twisted fan like her, his explanations were nothing but pointless excuses.

"Ehehe, thanks for the compliment."

Hasebe Haruka smiled. "But I think it's someone's fault for playing around with so many idols and then just walking away without a care."

"If you're going to scold me, you could be more aggressive about it."

Seeing his expression, Hasebe Haruka suddenly felt somewhat disinterested.

The matters between him and them were actually not something she had any right to comment on.

The girl twirled her hair around her finger and smiled faintly at him.

"How do I compare now to before?"

"To be honest, you're like a completely different person."

Kaoru recalled his previous impression, "I remember you used to have such small breasts, yet your attitude was quite arrogant."

"Is that all you ever notice about girls? Their chests?"

Hasebe Haruka gritted her teeth.

Though she felt somewhat proud, couldn't he pay attention to other things?

Kaoru chuckled: "Your personality has improved too. The old you would probably have kicked me by now."

Hasebe Haruka felt slightly annoyed, though the corners of her mouth lifted slightly as she corrected him.

"I'm not some violent maniac. The problem was with you - who knew you were following me around and frequently harassing girls?"

Kaoru couldn't be bothered to argue with her about this.

The two of them hadn't seen each other often back then anyway, which was why he hadn't recognized her earlier.

"Here's your chocolate. I'm leaving."

Seeing this, Hasebe Haruka bit her lip lightly, but before she could speak, Kaoru had already turned and walked away.

How could their relationship progress further?

She keenly sensed that something had changed about Kaoru too.

This lecher who wouldn't even spare elementary schoolgirls was actually ignoring her.

Thinking carefully, he had only ever toyed with the idols from his own agency before.

Hasebe Haruka had never heard of him playing around with women outside.

Anyone else would probably think that having a harem of agency idols was enough, so it was understandable that he didn't mess around outside.

Hasebe Haruka had studied everything about him and discovered that whenever he approached any girl, he did so with a strong sense of purpose.

Especially during the early days of the agency's development, she'd heard he once caused a cold war between an idol and her producer.

By the time she came into contact with him, that crisis had already been resolved for several months.

Hasebe Haruka had no way to learn about it, and could only search for clues from past traces.

Additionally, Hasebe Haruka had taken the opportunity to collect a full set of merchandise.

The producer rarely appeared on camera, only in a few variety shows that had invited this legendary producer.

Hasebe Haruka had specifically saved these episodes separately and could practically recite the producer's lines from memory.

His expressions, his reactions, his movements, his voice, his gaze, his body, his thoughts, his experiences, every song he composed, every shot of him, every photo of him - and etched deep in her memory, his face.

Unconsciously, Hasebe Haruka had already opened his chocolate.

She gently bit off a piece, the bitter taste melting on her tongue, followed by a honey-like sweetness that felt somewhat addictive.

Friendship chocolate.

So this was friendship chocolate.

Come to think of it, he had said something similar to her before.

In a park near dusk, when she had a small conflict with her friend at the time and was hiding alone in the park sulking, she happened to run into him.

Her first thought was, this middle-aged man looked so familiar—probably the same one she'd encountered at the concert last time.

She recalled that Kazeno-senpai had referred to him as the Producer.

Since Kazeno had graduated from their middle school, once she became an idol, the entire school knew they had a moderately famous idol who was once their classmate or senpai.

Driven by intense curiosity, some classmates decided to attend Kazeno-senpai's concert and invited her along.

She must have lost her mind to agree to their invitation.

And so, at that day's concert, she accidentally ran into the Producer.

As Hasebe Haruka ate his chocolate, she wondered if he had ever tasted the chocolate she made. If he had, would he notice a different flavor?

If the brief glimpse at the concert was an accident, her chance encounter with the Producer in the park felt like fate.

The scene in the park was something Hasebe Haruka could never forget—after all, anyone would be deeply impressed after running into a pervert in the park.

The funny thing was, she must have been broken at the time, because instead of running away, she ended up arguing with this pervert, calling him a "trashy old man" one moment and a "perverted foot fetishist" the next.

Of course, Hasebe Haruka was also a bit angry.

When she mentioned her dream of becoming an idol someday, this perverted middle-aged man outright rejected her.

Later, she realized that if he hadn't rejected her, she probably wouldn't have paid so much attention to his agency.

Whenever any scandal broke out, she would rush to the scene to mock him.

But as she laughed, she ended up getting herself entangled in it all.

Perhaps only those who wanted the Producer to fail quickly would realize that he was constantly creating miracles.

Each time, Hasebe Haruka would witness it from the closest possible distance, watching as the Producer led the entire agency to grander stages.

The moment fireworks lit up the sky above Tokyo Dome, Hasebe Haruka realized she was jealous.

Every time she saw them happily enjoying themselves, a twisted monster would emerge in her heart.

How could they be so happy? How could they smile like that? It made Hasebe Haruka deeply envious.

In contrast, she felt herself drifting further and further apart from her own friends.

At one point, she even thought that friendship was nothing special—just passing companions in life.

Even if she had no friends now, she would make new ones later, so there was no need to care about such things.

Seeing their smiles, Hasebe Haruka once darkly assumed it was all just part of their professional performance—an act for the audience, devoid of genuine emotion.

But people can't deceive their own hearts.

Hasebe Haruka thought the Producer was amazing for being able to handle the emotions of so many girls and guide them so well.

Like most people, she believed the Producer was the soul of 283 Agency.

Originally, the idols were scattered across the country.

Some might have lived perfectly fine lives without the Producer, while others were content with their own small worlds.

It was the Producer who gathered these sparks and ignited a new generation's flame, unleashing a brilliance far beyond what they could achieve on their own.

Thus, after the Producer left, the once-thriving 283 Agency fell into a state of stagnation.

Hasebe Haruka thought she would gleefully clap her hands in dark satisfaction—after all, they didn't know how to cherish their Producer.

Instead, she found herself feeling utterly miserable. She had not yet possessed it, but had already lost it forever.

Even before losing it, her relationship with the producer had been nothing more than a fleeting encounter between strangers. She could only mourn the perverted uncle she had argued with from afar.

"If only I could start over"—Hasebe Haruka had this thought countless times.

If she could do it all again, she would definitely start as friends with him.

That's why, when she first saw Kaoru, she dared to swear she had no strange thoughts—she was simply overwhelmed by the shock of surprise.

After testing him, she confirmed it was really him!

Even so, Hasebe Haruka swore her intentions were pure.

She didn't know why he appeared here, nor how he had returned from the dead.

She just felt they should at least become friends, and then she began dropping hints and flirtations.

No one understood Kaoru's preferences better than her.

Just by seeing his gaze, she could immediately grasp his thoughts.

Rather than taking the initiative, Hasebe Haruka actually wanted to be a bit more reserved—she couldn't just throw herself at him upon meeting.

Her plan was progressing slowly, but it seemed she was a step behind others.

Though slightly annoyed, Hasebe Haruka wasn't discouraged.

She had long known this guy was the Harem Overlord.

However, her thinking underwent a slight change.

Since he was going to have a harem anyway, would adding one more person—herself—be too much?

By any measure, it shouldn't be excessive. It seemed she was the only one in the whole school who knew Kaoru's identity.

She was a living witness, holding all his dark secrets—wouldn't he have to silence her?

Since she was going to be silenced anyway, wouldn't it be better if he just pinned her to the bed?

Hasebe Haruka hinted this to Kaoru several times.

"You wouldn't want them to know you're here, would you, Producer-san?"

But Kaoru didn't seem to catch her meaning.

"Though I'd love to call you 'perverted uncle' again, you're probably not the same producer from back then."

Hasebe Haruka had finished her chocolate and muttered softly, "How strange. Did Ichinose drug you?"

The girl felt the current Kaoru lacked the strong sense of purpose he once had.

In the past, she suspected that if she just extended her jade feet, he would immediately kneel on the ground.

"He seems to care about the other person's feelings now... No, it's more like he consciously shoulders his responsibilities and deliberately restrains his desires, not acting rashly."

Hasebe Haruka fell into deep thought, especially since she recently noticed something odd about Sakura Airi.

Through careful probing, she deduced something must have happened between them.

But it didn't seem like they had "cooked"—more like they'd done something strange.

"He actually held back?"

Hasebe Haruka found it unbelievable.

This guy used to unapologetically condition idols, making them wear strange clothes and dance for him—sheer twisted taste.

If the idols were here, they'd probably share similar sentiments, as if they were dating a high school student.

Wait—dating?

Hasebe Haruka felt she had stumbled upon a blind spot.

She looked at the friendship chocolate in her hand, and a bold idea gradually formed in her mind.

"You... couldn't possibly be serious..."

She couldn't finish her words because she realized what had changed about Kaoru.

This time, he would take responsibility.

Hasebe Haruka only felt her heart beating rapidly—he might not leave again.

In that instant, the girl could hardly contain her emotions and quickly checked her calendar. Gradually, a smile surfaced as she made a special note on the date.

'Dangerous day.'

Chapter 598: Hello, Marriage

Kaoru had originally thought he wouldn't run into anyone by leaving early, but as soon as the elevator doors opened, he bumped into Amikura Mako.

Perhaps not expecting him to be here, the girl crashed right into his embrace, like a swallow returning to its nest, instinctively clinging to him and gripping his clothes.

By the time Amikura Mako regained her composure, Kaoru had already taken the opportunity to wrap his arms around her slender waist.

They were so close that she could feel his warm breath.

"Good morning, Mako."

Kaoru showed no awareness of taking advantage, instead seeming pleasantly surprised.

"What a coincidence running into you here. I was just wondering whether to message you."

The girl's soft chest pressed against him, the developed fullness carrying a faint warmth, while a pleasant fragrance drifted from her hair.

When he glanced down, he caught a glimpse of snow-white skin peeking from her collar, even noticing the contours pressed beneath her clothing—enough to make him hold his breath.

Amikura Mako initially blushed but, hearing his words, grew even more eager to escape his embrace.

She pushed against him several times but found him unmoving, so she bit her lip slightly.

"Has anyone told you this is the girls' floor?"

"I know, that's why I came specifically today to return your gift."

"Huh?"

Kaoru stroked her slender waist before releasing her and handing her the chocolate he was holding.

Though slightly annoyed at having been taken advantage of, Amikura Mako still froze momentarily upon seeing the chocolate, as if remembering what day it was.

"Is this for me?" The girl asked timidly.

"Who else?" Kaoru replied curiously. "Didn't you have Honami give me chocolate last month?"

Last month's Valentine's Day happened to coincide with Horikita Suzune's birthday.

Since they planned to celebrate together, Kaoru had overlooked several people's chocolates at the time.

For instance, Amikura Mako's chocolate had been mixed with Ichinose Honami's and given to Kaoru, though she herself hadn't attended the Sound party.

Additionally, Shiina Hiyori, Manabe Shiho, and others had also given him chocolates, but they'd been left in the dormitory mailbox, which he only discovered the next morning.

Noticing he still held more chocolates, Amikura Mako accepted the one offered to her and revealed her pearly white teeth with a smile.

"Ehehe, I feel kinda happy."

"Just 'kinda happy' after I specially brought you a gift?"

Kaoru tapped his cheek with his index finger. "Usually, girls would excitedly give a kiss by now."

Amikura Mako looked puzzled at first, then warily took a few steps back.

"Hey, even if you don't want to kiss me, that reaction seems excessive."

"Because it's strange! First you were touching me all over, now you're saying this—you've become so frivolous."

"Hehe, didn't someone once say kissing was our greeting ritual?"

As the words fell, a faint peach blossom hue spread across the girl's face, even her fair neck turning completely red.

She looked utterly delectable, making him want to kiss her.

Kaoru felt somewhat satisfied - this reaction was so innocent that he might enjoy teasing her like this more and more.

Then the girl's breath washed over him like leaping flames, carrying a warmth as she gently pecked his lips, leaving a slight dampness.

"Only if you don't act like a pervert."

Amikura Mako's ponytail swayed slightly, her voice seeming to come from somewhere distant.

"I don't mind giving you a kiss - I'm quite generous."

Kaoru couldn't see any generosity in her demeanor.

Though clearly extremely shy and blushing crimson, she was pretending to be composed.

But why did girls always prefer stealing kisses?

"What counts as acting like a pervert?"

Kaoru's gaze drifted to the girl's chest, then down to her waist and hips, finally settling on her bare, pale legs.

This kind of stare was downright lewd, almost openly telling her what he was thinking, making Amikura Mako puff up in irritation.

With a stern face she said: "Looking is fine, but no touching. You can only do what I allow."

Kaoru had always thought she was a bit old-fashioned, but hadn't realized she was truly conservative, especially since she'd secretly sent him photos before.

"What about kissing?"

"You can kiss me when I'm in a good mood."

"Are you in a good mood now?"

"Eh?"

Amikura Mako seemed to short-circuit, her clever little brain temporarily unable to process this.

Kaoru glanced around, confirming no one was nearby, then pulled the girl into his embrace again, taking full advantage without restraint.

"Aww..."

Only managing a pitiful sound, Amikura Mako found his assault so sudden she could barely catch her breath.

She struggled instinctively, though it felt more like rubbing against him coquettishly.

When his palm settled on her slender waist and hips, she felt both embarrassed and angry.

She'd just told him not to act perverted, and here he was doing this to her - truly too much.

Fortunately, Kaoru just wanted to tease her a bit.

Seeing the silver thread at the corner of her mouth, he smiled contentedly.

"I think this is what real kissing should be. What do you think, Mako?"

Under his gaze, Amikura Mako took a deep breath and met his eyes seriously.

"That's too lewd. We can't do that."

Kaoru made a strange face.

This subtle feeling was somewhat dissonant, like the victim telling the perpetrator he might break her if he continued.

Amikura Mako bit her lip, then suddenly reached out to poke Kaoru.

"This."

Kaoru felt somewhat awkward.

He'd almost forgotten his own physical reaction - perhaps from constantly teasing girls, his body had developed an instinctive response.

"Though I know boys all have these reactions, if I were to help you with it, we'd have to get married quickly, and it'd be best to take some time off school."

"Married?"

"If we have a child, we should get married, right? You're not planning to make me raise it alone, are you?"

"Wait, why would we suddenly have a child?"

"Eh? You don't plan to do it with me?"

After a long moment, Kaoru finally understood Amikura Mako's meaning - so this girl was truly innocent too.

"Do you know there's something called protection?"

Amikura Mako frowned and said discontentedly, "Do you think I'm a child? Of course I know such common sense!"

"If Mako wants it, I have some here." Kaoru reminded her.

"Eh, isn't this something only adults can play with?"

Amikura Mako seemed to have an incomplete understanding of sexual knowledge.

"Can we do it too?"

"Actually, there's no age restriction for this."

Kaoru suddenly laughed. "So Mako has been worrying about this all along?"

Amikura Mako finally realized she had exposed her bottom line and quickly corrected herself with a flushed face.

"No! I meant we can't do lewd things!"

"Why?"

Kaoru sounded somewhat displeased. "You can do lewd things to me, but I can't do them to you?"

"I haven't done anything lewd!"

Amikura Mako denied. "If we do lewd things... uwaa, it would become so strange!"

Kaoru found it puzzling.

Judging from her earlier words, she didn't mind marrying him and having children, so why was she resisting now?

Of course, someone had forgotten that he once tried to lick Kiryuin Fuka's feet right in front of Amikura Mako, an act that had left some psychological trauma on her.

Chapter 599: Playing Really Wild

Considering the elevator was behind them, the two didn't fool around for long and soon separated—after all, girls tend to be easily embarrassed.

"Speaking of marriage, where's the ring I gave you?"

Kaoru looked at her fingers but saw no trace of a ring.

"I... I keep it in my room. I don't usually wear it out."

Amikura Mako felt shy, especially since he associated marriage with the ring. "Anyway, we're just friends. Whether I wear it or not doesn't matter."

Although they rarely saw each other normally, they occasionally bumped into each other on the street.

However, most of the time, she would be with her girlfriends and felt too embarrassed to greet Kaoru.

An unexpected encounter like this left Amikura Mako somewhat flustered.

"Start wearing it from today."

Kaoru said. "Otherwise, next time I'll make sure you take safety measures."

Amikura Mako widened her eyes, unable to believe what she had just heard.

This person was really perverted, as if he could pin her to the ground at any moment.

"Entrusting little Honami to you is really dangerous!"

The girl was full of vigilance. "No wonder little Honami is always looking at lewd things. What exactly have you been teaching her?"

"You're next."

Kaoru flicked her forehead impatiently. "Didn't you hear what I just said? It's just a ring. If I tell you to wear it, then wear it."

Amikura Mako rubbed her forehead and fell silent. She had wanted to brush it off, but Kaoru wasn't buying it.

"Actually... I was just about to go find you."

Kaoru was slightly startled, then smiled. "It seems we're on the same wavelength."

"I'm not blind. The chocolate in your hand must be for someone other than me. I'm just one of them."

Amikura Mako didn't buy his act either. "As for the ring, you've probably given it to many people. Although I was really happy when you gave it to me, I don't really want it."

Kaoru looked into her eyes. "Next time I give you something, it'll be only for you."

Amikura Mako felt warmth in her heart.

She couldn't help but nudge Kaoru with her elbow, a soft smile she couldn't hide spreading across her pretty face, her eyes sparkling.

"Compared to lewd things, I really like you as you are right now."

"Actually, I'm even happier because you're willing to tell me these things instead of keeping them to yourself." Kaoru said, "If everyone were the same, there wouldn't be jealousy or resentment in my heart."

Amikura Mako really liked this side of him - always able to see through what others were thinking and understand their feelings.

This had made her fond of him from the very beginning.

"The Harem Overlord shouldn't say things like that. It sounds hypocritical."

Though she said this, Amikura Mako was actually quite happy. "If you said that to them, your harem might collapse immediately."

Her worry was unnecessary.

Kaoru had already warned Kei Karuizawa and the others, but they had all tacitly agreed not to expose their relationships, keeping jealousy and competition limited to doing mischievous things.

That's why they appeared particularly enthusiastic about mischief - essentially, it was their way of competing with each other.

"Mako, you're so clever. I can't deceive you anyway. It's better to speak from the heart - that way I might actually earn your favor."

"Hey, what do you want my favor for?"

"To see your legs."

"I told you, no lewd things!"

Amikura Mako puffed up her cheeks in anger, then sighed softly and whispered: "I want to be different from them."

Kaoru showed a troubled expression, gritting his teeth as he said.

"Although I've never experienced platonic love before, I'll do my best."

Amikura Mako was taken aback, then let out a soft chuckle, unable to hold back her laughter.

"What are you talking about? That's not what I meant, you idiot, hahaha!"

Seeing Kaoru's confused expression, the girl laughed for quite a while before speaking intermittently.

"What I meant was... I don't want to be with them together... I know this sounds strange, as if I'm saying I dislike them..."

"But."

Amikura Mako's voice softened, "If they don't know, if only you and I know, just the two of us - that would be enough for me."

She didn't want to squeeze in with Kei Karuizawa and the others. So she would stay outside this circle, separate from it. She and Kaoru would just be two individuals. She could be with Kaoru without any reservations, without worrying about their opinions.

After all, they still didn't know about Amikura Mako's existence, only thinking the two were very close.

It sounded like self-deception, or even like voluntarily giving up the chance to join the circle.

"So you mean I should hide this from them and cheat with you?"

Kaoru was beginning to understand her thinking.

"Hey, don't put it so harshly!"

Amikura Mako pouted.

Actually, she even wanted to hide this from Honami Ichinose. "Well, although it does sound a lot like cheating."

Since Kaoru currently had a nominal girlfriend, hiding this from them was indeed cheating behavior.

Thinking of this, Amikura Mako suddenly felt a bit embarrassed.

"If possible, I want to be the first to become a mother."

Her voice grew quieter, "At least faster than little Honami."

Kaoru glanced at her lower abdomen, feeling his blood boil. After a moment of silence, he said: "Don't tempt me like this in the future. Accidents might happen."

"Huh?"

Amikura Mako seemed not to understand what he meant. When had she been tempting him?

No good, Kaoru felt he wouldn't be able to control himself if this continued, so he simply handed her another box of chocolate.

"This is little Honami's chocolate. Please help me give it to her."

"Why?"

"I still have some things to do."

Amikura Mako watched in confusion as he turned and left, holding two boxes of chocolates, wondering why he was suddenly running off so quickly.

Then the girl suddenly trembled.

"Eh eh eh eh eh?!"

Without a doubt, Amikura Mako immediately thought of one possibility.

Kaoru and Ichinose Honami had done it!

Otherwise, why would he run off so fast?

Mako patted her cheeks, even suspecting they hadn't used protection - otherwise why would Kaoru have been looking at her stomach?

Did that mean she would be next?

"Th-this is too bold!!"

It was the first time the girl had ever been so flustered, steam practically rising from her head.

Meanwhile, Kaoru had already reached the first floor of the dormitory, where he happened to see cherry blossoms blooming outside.

The slightly warm sunlight cascaded down, with a gentle breeze stirring the shadows of the flowers.

Only half a month remained.

Carrying the chocolates and enduring strange looks along the way, Kaoru arrived at the second-year dormitory building.

After a while, Asahina Nazuna brought him to her room, then pressed him against the wall with a flushed face.

"Who told you to read love letters downstairs!!"

"Because you didn't reply to my messages, senpai. I didn't know where you lived."

Kaoru naturally wrapped his arms around her slender waist. "Don't be so angry. At least someone applauded for me."

"You idiot!"

Just thinking about how today's incident would soon spread throughout the entire school made Asahina Nazuna feel her shame was about to explode.

"You could have called me! You clearly did this on purpose, you meanie!"

"This is called making a declaration."

Kaoru said, "Valentine's Day should be like this - letting everyone know that senpai already belongs to me."

Asahina Nazuna released her grip on him, looking somewhat guilty.

"I-I get it already. Next time I'll definitely give you a gift, is that good enough?"

Because she hadn't given Kaoru chocolates last month, she actually felt quite embarrassed about it herself.

At this point, Asahina Nazuna had no grounds to scold him - it would be fortunate enough if he didn't scold her instead.

Kaoru stuffed the chocolates into her hands while asking: "How about now?"

"Wh-what do you want?"

Asahina Nazuna said dryly.

"I've built up some frustration earlier, and now I want to vent it."

Kaoru whispered close to her ear, "I heard there's a special way to eat chocolate. Could you teach me, senpai?"

With his breath tickling her ear, Asahina Nazuna's ears turned completely red. Biting her lip, she unwrapped the chocolate and picked up a piece.

Asahina Nazuna put the chocolate in her mouth, then immediately kissed Kaoru.

After the two tangled for a while, Kaoru looked at her panting appearance and couldn't help but smile: "I thought you wouldn't know how, but it turns out you really do."

"Sh-shut up. Tachibana-senpai told me about it. You two play really perverted games."

If she didn't know she was at a disadvantage, why would Asahina Nazuna cooperate with him? For a girl to take the initiative in something like this was just shameless!

"I want to eat another one." Kaoru blinked.

This was exactly why he had come today - if he didn't teach her a lesson, this senpai might run off who knows where.

As if resigning herself to fate, Asahina Nazuna picked up another piece of chocolate, then kissed Kaoru again.

Only this time, Kaoru became slightly rougher, taking the opportunity to get some advantages over his senpai's body.

"Ahh... Mmm..."

The two switched positions, and it was his turn to press Asahina Nazuna against the wall, savoring the taste of his senior.

Nagumo Miyabi probably had no idea that his senpai could make such an expression. Chapter 600: Changing Hats

Though somewhat heated, Kaoru didn't actually "devour" this senior.

However, just from eating a few pieces of chocolate, Asahina Nazuna already looked as if she was about to break, forcing Kaoru to stop.

Kaoru was quite satisfied.

If anyone had previously doubted his relationship with Asahina Nazuna, after today, everyone would likely believe that the senior had become nothing more than a cream puff.

In fact, after he left, Asahina Nazuna's friends couldn't wait to inquire about what had just happened, leaving her with no choice but to play dead.

Just as rumors were spreading in the second year, someone immediately spotted Kaoru appearing in the third-year dormitory building, and it was Tachibana Akane who cheerfully led him to the girls' floor.

Well, that settled it.

The rumor about the Harem Overlord had been debunked without a fight.

Wait, weren't we all just joking? Is this guy for real?

Some wanted to criticize Kaoru on the forum, arguing that as a Student Council member, he should lead by example.

How could he be so intimate with so many girls? It was utterly improper.

However, the criticism didn't last long before everyone started arguing.

The girls insisted that the boys were just jealous of Kaoru's good looks, and who were they to assume he was toying with women? Maybe the women were toying with him!

Most boys initially criticized him strongly but later seemed to accept the idea that Kaoru possessed a Hypnosis App, especially since even the girls who should have been criticizing a playboy were on his side.

Thus, everyone concluded that Kaoru either had a Hypnosis App or was a gigolo for Asahina Nazuna and others.

As a result, when Kaoru later went canvassing for votes, he often encountered a series of strange questions.

...

"Do you really have a Hypnosis App?"

The next morning, Kamuro Masumi seemed unable to resist her curiosity and asked Kaoru.

"Of course."

Kaoru took out his phone and showed Kamuro Masumi his account balance.

"Let me touch your legs, and this money is yours."

Kamuro Masumi was initially a little nervous, but after getting a clear look, she immediately pouted.

"Can't you be serious for once?"

"I am being serious. If I really had hypnosis powers, you'd be the first one I'd use them on."

Kaoru put his phone away. He was well aware of what everyone was discussing. "Putting that aside, I really want to lie on your lap."

"Just a lap pillow?"

Kamuro Masumi looked at him with deep suspicion.

"Masumi-san, think back carefully. What I've done to you is far less than what you've done to me."

Kaoru glanced at her thighs, then at her small hands, the meaning in his eyes all too obvious.

Kamuro Masumi blushed slightly and pretended not to notice.

After all, she was drunk at the time and remembered nothing.

Next was the usual homeroom meeting.

Since it was March 15th, Mashima Tomonari announced the exam events during the session.

Class 1-A vs. Class 1-B. The former's exam events were as follows:

Chess, Mental Arithmetic, Volleyball, Math Exam, English Exam, Modern Literature Exam, Go, Group Jump Rope, 100-Meter Dash, and Memory Cards.

Among these, only the group jump rope event allows 20 participants, while all other events are limited to 8 people or fewer, with Chess being strictly one-on-one.

Judging solely from the events themselves, it's difficult to determine Class A's true selections. There are events testing academic ability alongside those showcasing physical prowess.

Also, is the 100-meter dash event specifically prepared for Kamuro Masumi?

Looking at Class B's exam events, they're equally sophisticated.

Chemistry Exam, English Exam, Social Studies Exam, Tennis, Soccer, Sketching, Hide-and-Seek, Quiz, Texas Hold'em, and Cooking.

For events like Hide-and-Seek, Texas Hold'em, and Cooking, one wonders if Ichinose Honami is being serious.

What's more surprising is that she included three academically demanding events - an area where Class A undoubtedly holds the most confidence.

Is this a direct challenge to Class A, or merely a smoke screen?

Sakayanagi Arisu remained unfazed.

The exam events themselves weren't important; what mattered were the participants.

She had discussed with Katsuragi Kohei that the path to victory lay in defeating larger forces with smaller, superior ones - overwhelming the enemy with quality.

Defeating opponents in one's own area of expertise is simple. What Sakayanagi Arisu cared about most was how to achieve victory in the enemies' areas of strength.

Even in the most ideal scenario, Class A could only secure five of their own events, still having to face Class B's selections since the official exam consists of seven events.

For Sakayanagi Arisu to win all seven consecutive matches, she had to consider this problem carefully. That's why she had been sending people to gather intelligence on Class B these past few days.

"Ha, you want me to gather intelligence again today?"

During lunch break, Kamuro Masumi voiced a small complaint.

"Know yourself and know your enemy, and you will never be defeated."

Sakayanagi Arisu smiled gently at her. "I'm counting on you, Masumi-san."

Kamuro Masumi sighed deeply: "To be honest, even if you send me and Yamamura out, Ichinose isn't foolish. They've been keeping their exam events tightly under wraps."

"I know, but Masumi-san, intelligence isn't about how much you see, but how much you can deduce from it."

Sakayanagi Arisu said, "For instance, Yamamura reported to me that Class B students have been frequently appearing in the library recently."

Kamuro Masumi tilted her head: "What's the problem with that?"

"The final exams are already over. Why would they go to the library?"

Sakayanagi Arisu looked at her as if she were a fool. "It's not like they suddenly developed an interest in reading, is it?"

Kamuro Masumi pouted, then asked: "About that 100-meter dash - you're not actually planning to make me participate, are you?"

When this event was announced, everyone's first thought was of her.

After her spectacular performance during the sports festival, many people would probably remember it for life.

But she herself was frustrated. Kamuro Masumi had tried running again afterward, completely unable to replicate that state - it seemed like a fleeting miracle she could never reproduce.

Sakayanagi Arisu knew the truth about this situation.

"Psychological warfare is important. If they know they're guaranteed to lose one event, they'll have to reconsider how to win the remaining six. This can help disrupt our opponents' rhythm."

Kamuro Masumi was half-convinced and half-doubting. In truth, she vaguely sensed something was off—the other party should know her strengths well and couldn't possibly have overlooked them.

Moreover, the inexplicable games like hide-and-seek and riddles that Ichinose Honami had singled out might have already made Sakayanagi Arisu feel uneasy.

"Oh, by the way, what gift did he give you?"

As if trying to divert attention, Kamuro Masumi casually brought this up.

Last Friday was Sakayanagi Arisu's birthday.

Curious about whether anything had happened between them, she had asked Kaoru-kun yesterday but got no answer, which only deepened her curiosity.

"How do I look today?"

Sakayanagi Arisu wore a faint smile, her petite figure still utterly adorable as she sat upright across from Kamuro Masumi, openly inviting her appraisal.

Kamuro Masumi studied her quizzically for a long moment before finally noticing something slightly different about her today.

"Did you change your hat?"

Yes, the most noticeable change was that she had swapped her hat.