

Cote 611

Chapter 611: Punishment for Violations.

Ryuen was now bewildered.

Just one night had passed, and he was still waiting for Kaoru to be embarrassed when his own plan backfired.

Who would have thought Ishizaki Daichi would drug Kushida Kikyo? And to be caught in the act?

In front of everyone in the café, Ishizaki Daichi fled in panic, reportedly running all the way back to the dormitory—so fast no one could catch up.

He ran away, but carelessly left the laxative behind.

Initially, upon hearing the news, Ryuen Kakeru thought, "We're done for."

It must be Ishizaki's fault.

He had told them to stand down—why were they caught?

Though shocked, the café's surveillance footage didn't lie.

The figure in the video really looked like Ishizaki Daichi, and everyone present could recognize him as Ishizaki Daichi.

Faced with this situation, Ishizaki Daichi had no way to defend himself.

He kept insisting he had been sleeping in the dormitory—how could he have been in the café drugging Kushida Kikyo?

Watching Ishizaki argue with Class D first-years, Ryuen gradually calmed down.

He understood Ishizaki's character—essentially a simple-minded fool who was good at fighting but lacked brains.

There was no way this guy could be a spy.

Besides, who would employ such an idiot as a spy?

Publicly administering drugs? Causing such a huge scene that immediately drew the attention of both the school and the Student Council?

Ryuen suspected Kaoru had set a trap, but that made no sense.

He had already ordered Ishizaki to withdraw—how could he have been caught?

Had Kaoru bribed the entire café staff to provide false testimony for him?

The surveillance footage hadn't captured Ishizaki's face clearly, giving Ryuen a sliver of hope.

Otherwise, he couldn't make sense of today's events—they were utterly baffling.

"Damn it! Normally we tolerate Class C's harassment, but why target Kushida with drugs?" Sudo was furious with Class C.

He had initially assumed Ryuen would at least cast his Praise Vote for his close friend, but that hadn't happened.

"This is a frame-up! I was sleeping in my dorm at the time—the person in the café definitely wasn't me!" Ishizaki's face flushed crimson as he swore he'd truly been asleep.

After all, Ryuen had told him to stand down—why would he have done it?

"You can keep denying it, but we don't care about your excuses," Horikita crossed her arms.

"Or perhaps you should explain to us what this is?"

Sudo immediately chimed in: "We also found laxatives in your dorm room! What were you planning to do?"

Indeed, Sudo had led the group that dragged Ishizaki from his dorm, and Ayanokoji, who accompanied them, had discovered a packet of laxatives in his room.

"I... I..." Ishizaki's face turned beet red, but he couldn't form a coherent sentence, eventually casting a pleading look toward Ryuen.

Ryuen felt utterly exasperated, but he detected something off in the opponents' statements.

He had only given Ishizaki one portion of laxatives.

If Ishizaki had already used one, how could another portion be found in his dorm?

"Silence." Kaoru cleared his throat. "As vice-president of the Student Council, I now require Ishizaki to provide an explanation."

Sae Chabashira, who had been observing quietly, added coldly.

"The school is also awaiting your explanation. Such behavior is absolutely intolerable—I hope you understand this clearly."

Ishizaki's face turned pale.

He felt certain he was doomed this time, though he still couldn't comprehend why everyone believed he was the culprit.

"Everyone, I request to speak," Ryuen declared.

Kaoru smiled faintly, "As a member of Class C defending Ishizaki, you have the right to speak, Ryuen."

Ryuen asked: "How does the Student Council intend to handle this matter?"

"If proven true, first—apologize to Kushida and seek her forgiveness. Second—administer appropriate punishment to Ishizaki, such as suspension." Kaoru added, "However, considering Spring Break is approaching, the Student Council's punishment may be adjusted depending on the involved parties' perspectives."

"I have a question," Ryuen said, turning toward the Class D first-years. "Who claimed to witness Ishizaki allegedly administering drugs?"

Horikita Suzune said calmly, "It was me. At that time, Kushida went to the restroom, leaving only me at the seat. Ishizaki spilled some powder as he passed by."

"Was any testing done?" Ryuen asked.

At this point, Kaoru spoke up, "The school has sent some of the powder for testing. The specific results should be out this afternoon."

Ryuen suddenly smiled, "It seems there's been a misunderstanding."

Everyone was taken aback—what was there to misunderstand?

"Are you trying to deny the facts?!" Sudo glared at him with clear displeasure.

"Heh, that's not my intention," Ryuen replied dismissively. "Actually, the responsibility for this lies with me. I wanted to play a joke on Kushida, so I instructed Ishizaki to pull this prank."

As he finished speaking, he bowed slightly to Kushida. "I apologize to you, Kushida."

Kushida was stunned, clearly not expecting Ryuen to take the blame voluntarily.

"Ryuen!" Ishizaki was deeply moved, almost wishing he could take the punishment in Ryuen's place.

In contrast, Horikita Suzune quickly regained her composure and said coldly, "A joke? Drugging a classmate can hardly be called a prank. I can't agree with that. You knew perfectly well that the exam is tomorrow and that Kushida is our Command Tower. You wanted her to miss the exam."

"I simply don't like Kushida," Ryuen avoided addressing her point directly. "Every time I think about how such a cute girl like Kushida can't be my girlfriend, I get angry, and that's why I made this mistake."

Everyone knew he was lying, but no one could refute him.

"How does the Student Council plan to handle this?" Ryuen narrowed his eyes, as if trying to see through Kaoru.

Kaoru smiled, "Don't rush. I've already asked Katsuragi to represent the Student Council in investigating the source of the laxative. We will definitely find out who sold the laxative to students and who received it."

Ryuen's expression stiffened for a moment before gradually turning serious.

Although he had purchased the laxative online, if they seriously investigated the package delivered to the school, they might indeed trace it back to him.

He had intended to take the fall alone, and being caught might not matter, but if Kaoru discovered he had so much laxative, even if he were expelled, Class C of the first year might also be implicated.

After all, this guy was the vice president of the Student Council and the next Student Council president.

Ryuen gritted his teeth.

Shouldn't Nagumo be stepping in at a time like this?

Damn it, this guy had him cornered!

If he didn't offer something now, Kaoru would have him completely at his mercy.

Wait, just yesterday he had been thinking about how to enjoy seeing Kaoru humiliated—why had the situation reversed so suddenly?

"Can I discuss this with Class D?" Ryuen asked.

Kaoru didn't seem surprised and instead nodded with a smile.

So, Ryuen called Horikita Suzune outside.

"What does Class D want?" His directness caught Horikita slightly off guard, though she showed no outward reaction.

The severity of the drugging incident depended largely on whether the victim was willing to forgive the perpetrator.

With the victim's forgiveness, the school was unlikely to take it too seriously.

But if Ryuen refused to cooperate and Class D of the first year insisted on pursuing the matter, the school would probably handle it strictly.

Therefore, Ryuen could only reach a private settlement with her.

"Compensation—give us 5 million Personal Points." Horikita Suzune stated.

Ryuen laughed in anger.

It was indeed a case of jacking up prices and making exorbitant demands.

"Hah, do you really think you have me cornered?" Ryuen said, "To be honest, the trap you set is full of holes. The laxative was prepared by you yourselves, wasn't it?"

Horikita Suzune remained silent.

She was shrewd and guarded against Ryuen secretly recording her.

Seeing her tight defense, Ryuen snorted coldly and bluntly said, "At most, I'll give you 1 million Personal Points."

Horikita Suzune couldn't be bothered to continue the conversation and turned to leave.

"1.5 million."

"I might as well apply to the Student Council to penalize you with 200 Class Points."

"Worst case, I'll just drop out."

The two stared at each other, each testing the other's psychological limits.

"At least 2 million, or no deal."

If he didn't agree now, Horikita Suzune would really leave.

Ryuen had no choice but to accept the outcome—after all, he was the one caught with a weakness.

The two returned to the office, and Horikita Suzune immediately presented Class 1-D's demands to Kaoru: Ryuen Kakeru and Daichi Ishizaki were to publicly apologize to Kushida Kikyo, and Class 1-C was to compensate with 2 million Personal Points.

Faced with these demands, and under the witness of the Student Council and the school, Ryuen, representing Class 1-C, agreed.

Additionally, considering the severity of the incident, the school issued its own disciplinary decision.

Class 1-C was deducted 100 Class Points as a warning for violating the rules.

Chapter 612: Winning Over Koenji.

Frustration couldn't even begin to describe Ryuen's mood.

He had been particularly looking forward to seeing Kaoru's expression, but who would have thought he'd be the one carelessly outmaneuvered by Kaoru?

Even before the exam, Class 1-C had to compensate Class 1-D with 2 million Personal Points.

Moreover, they had lost 100 Class Points.

So frustrating!

As soon as they left the Student Council office, Ryuen's expression was as if he had swallowed a fly.

Beside him, Ishizaki was timid and hesitant, unsure whether to explain himself.

"Ryuen-kun, it really wasn't me. I wasn't even fully awake at the time—how could I have drugged the coffee? They're framing me... I don't know what's going on either."

As he spoke, Daichi himself grew confused. It wasn't just Class 1-D, many others claimed to have witnessed him drugging the coffee.

Because of this, the school and Student Council acted swiftly, apprehending him and bringing him to the Student Council office within an hour.

"I know it wasn't you."

Ryuen actually suspected Manabe Shiho and was almost certain that Kaoru had caught wind of the plan.

Although today's events had caught him off guard, they hadn't deviated much from his judgment yesterday—Kaoru would definitely strike first to disrupt his plans before he could act.

"Ryuen-kun!"

Ishizaki was deeply moved, feeling that he had chosen the right leader.

Not only did Ryuen take responsibility for him, but he also showed no sign of blaming him.

Ryuen glared at him and was about to call Mio Ibuki when he spotted Sakagami's figure appear before him.

"You went too far this time." Sakagami Kazuma was their homeroom teacher, fully aware of Ryuen Kakeru's methods and usually turned a blind eye.

But now the situation was different. "If the school seriously investigates this, you'll definitely be expelled."

Ryuen held some respect for this teacher, merely smiling faintly.

"Before expulsion becomes reality, I'll certainly use my Protection Points to test whether the school's rules actually work against the school itself."

Sakagami was speechless.

Hadn't the school already penalized him for previous fights? Did he think he could use the school's own sword against it?

"That vice president certainly has some skills," Sakagami Kazuma said. "Before you arrived, he strongly demanded the school investigate the laxative's source. Starting today, the school will likely strengthen supervision in this area. Be careful."

Ryuen's eyes glinted as he watched his homeroom teacher's retreating figure.

Next, he sent Mio Ibuki to investigate the café witnesses, discovering everyone could identify Ishizaki from photos.

Learning this, Ishizaki appeared deeply shaken, even wondering if he'd been sleepwalking.

Ryuen pondered for a long time but couldn't figure out how Kaoru had managed to make over twenty people consistently stick to the same testimony.

Was it some kind of cash superpower?

Then he began considering why Manabe Shiho would work for Kaoru.

Money? He'd checked Manabe Shiho's phone and found her personal balance was low with no transfer records - Kaoru clearly hadn't paid her.

Connecting this to Kaoru's harem, Ryuen could only attribute it to Kaoru's personal charm.

Surely he didn't actually possess some hypnosis app?

After sending away Ishizaki and Ibuki, Ryuen Kakeru immediately sought out Koenji Rokusuke.

"Interested in cooperating?" Ryuen Kakeru watched Koenji lying in a senior's embrace. "I have the ability to get you to Class A."

Koenji Rokusuke who's enjoyed being fed by the gentle senior, glancing casually at Ryuen.

"I'm not interested in class matters."

"No, you are interested," Ryuen Kakeru said. "Because if you get expelled from Class D, everyone will assume the heir of Koenji conglomerate is worthless."

Koenji seemed genuinely intrigued, squinting at him for a moment.

"So, Ryuen Boy, do you have 20 million?"

"Want to cooperate?"

"Betray the class to help you?"

"Do you care about Class D's trash?"

Koenji left the senior's embrace and sat opposite Ryuen.

"Heh, seems like a fascinating proposal," Koenji said. "If you want to defeat Kaoru Boy, wouldn't Horikita Girl be more suitable than me?"

"It appears I've found the right person," Ryuen smiled. "I haven't even stated my purpose, yet you already know what I want to do. If not you, then who?"

Truthfully, Ryuen was pleasantly surprised.

He'd approached Koenji merely seeking a competent Class D student - Hirata Yosuke, Sudo Ken and others weren't suitable.

Thus, Ryuen Kakeru had chosen Koenji.

"One million - don't go all out in this exam," Ryuen stated bluntly.

Koenji replied indifferently, "I won't lose to anyone."

"If it's too little, just say so." Ryuen raised an eyebrow. "I recall you didn't achieve first place in either the sports festival or the training camp exam."

Koenji's gaze instantly turned cold, but Ryuen acted as if he hadn't noticed and continued, "Don't even think about reporting this to Mitoma later. Even if Mitoma could offer more Personal Points than me, your value to him is too low. He wouldn't give you 20 million."

"But I'm different." Ryuen laid his cards on the table. "I'm someone who will stop at nothing to secure first place. As long as you help me, you'll get 20 million. Whatever you want, I'll give it to you."

Koenji remained silent for a moment. "Class D's value isn't high. Even if I help you win once, what could you possibly squeeze out of them?"

"Will Horikita find out?"

Ryuen said, "That girl only has Class A on her mind. She'll keep climbing upward. Just knowing what she'll do next gives me half the victory."

Koenji understood his reasoning.

With his own presence, subtly guiding Horikita Suzune's thought process would allow Class C to influence Class D's decisions.

This way, Ryuen would wield the power of two classes while Kaoru remained completely unaware, likely leading to his downfall.

Should he help?

Koenji seriously considered the question.

He truly didn't want to get involved—what did these class rivalries have to do with him?

He had his own rhythm in life, and no one could disrupt it.

Yet, Ryuen's words demanded consideration.

The recent voting exam had indeed put Koenji on alert.

If Class D truly intended to vote him out, what could he do?

He could eliminate those instigating trouble, but what if something unexpected happened?

What if the next expulsion exam was even more unreasonable?

After some thought, Koenji decided to observe the situation for now.

Ryuen definitely didn't have 20 million points currently, and even if he did, he wouldn't part with them easily.

He might as well agree temporarily.

If circumstances changed, Koenji would withdraw immediately—he had no intention of actually breaking his back for Ryuen.

Whether he graduated from Class A or not genuinely didn't matter to Koenji.

"2 million."

Koenji opened with an extortionate offer.

Ryuen indeed hesitated for several seconds, likely believing Koenji was already onboard, and ultimately accepted the demand.

Chapter 613: Kushida the Little Rich Girl

"They really compensated us this much!"

Kushida Kikyo was astonished, refreshing her account multiple times.

Her personal balance had increased by 2 million points.

Though she felt somewhat embarrassed, Horikita Suzune insisted she keep all the points since she had been the target of Ishizaki's drugging.

At that moment, numerous classmates were messaging Kushida, having evidently received the school's notification.

Seeing Class C deducted 100 Class Points was particularly satisfying.

"This is already quite a severe punishment," Chabashira Sae remarked with a complex look in her eyes

"If they pursued it seriously, the perpetrator would definitely face expulsion."

Drugging could be considered intentional harm against a fellow student when viewed seriously.

If someone would drug others for exam results today, they might resort to causing serious injuries tomorrow.

The school had always been vigilant against such unscrupulous behavior. What the school expects is to achieve goals by any means within the rules.

Even if something outrageous happens, it's fine as long as the school remains unaware.

Ryuen's biggest mistake was getting exposed.

Drugging someone immediately puts the school in an awkward position.

This is an institution for cultivating national talent, not a breeding ground for criminals.

In other words, Ryuen nearly caused serious trouble for the school.

If not for the Student Council's swift response, with Vice President Kaoru promptly summoning the involved parties, the situation would have escalated and undoubtedly angered the school administration.

Ryuen admitted his mistake quickly, so the matter was reluctantly considered closed.

Fortunately, this happened at ANHS.

In any other school, Ryuen would have faced either suspension or transfer.

"Is it really that serious?"

Kushida Kikyo recalled that Class C had been involved in fights before, but there hadn't been such severe consequences back then.

"Drugging can harm the body."

Horikita Suzune shook her head.

While one packet had been confirmed to contain laxative, the contents of the other remained unknown.

If it contained something dangerous to human health, the consequences could have been disastrous.

Kushida began to feel frightened.

She felt fortunate she hadn't drunk the coffee, then instinctively glanced back at Kaoru.

Indeed, she would have been drugged today.

It was Kaoru who had warned both her and Horikita Suzune in advance, telling them not to panic.

As predicted, Ishizaki had indeed come to drug them before fleeing back to his dorm in a panic - behavior that was highly suspicious!

"You were quite lucky this time."

Chabashira Sae vaguely sensed something amiss, but since her class had benefited from the situation, she didn't dwell on it, merely casting a glance at Kaoru.

His timing had been too perfect.

"Yeah, it's thanks to me and Ayanokoji being nearby."

Sudo wholeheartedly agreed, trying to make Horikita Suzune acknowledge his contribution.

He had been the first to charge into Ishizaki's dorm and bring him to justice.

"Sudo-kun, if not for you..."

Kushida Kikyo quickly put on a deeply moved expression, "Thank you so much!"

This being the first time a girl had thanked him, Sudo felt all his recent frustrations vanish instantly.

He then looked expectantly at Horikita Suzune, hoping for her praise.

Horikita showed no reaction whatsoever, leaving him deeply disappointed.

...

No sooner had the drugging incident caused a stir than it was suppressed by the joint efforts of the Student Council and school administration.

However, Ryuen and Class C's reputation deteriorated further.

"How did you know he would actually drug us?"

Back at the dorm, Kushida couldn't wait to question Kaoru, "Is Ishizaki working for you too?"

Horikita Suzune was equally curious about how Kaoru had foreseen Ishizaki's attempt against them.

"Someone did tip me off, but I can't tell you who for now."

Having just evaded Ichinose Honami's questioning yesterday, Kaoru had no desire to undergo another interrogation by these two girls.

Horikita contemplated his words - so there was another person involved, not just Ishizaki?

"A girl?"

Kushida Kikyo's eyes widened, her tone almost accusatory, "You must be colluding with some girl from Class C!"

Kaoru looked stunned.

What kind of image did he have in Kushida's eyes?

"Don't think I don't know what you've been up to."

Kushida snorted several times, "Is it Shiina?"

The little angel was extremely popular, so of course she could find out any information she wanted.

It wasn't exactly a secret that Kaoru occasionally had private dates with Shiina Hiyori in the library.

Kaoru often hung out with girls, and in a way, he could be considered someone who lived off women's favors.

Naturally, he could obtain some information from Shiina Hiyori.

However, Horikita Suzune seemed confused and couldn't follow the train of thought.

"No, anyway, I'll tell you all when the time comes."

Kaoru still couldn't bring himself to say it.

The secret involving Shiho Manabe and the others, along with today's incident, were all results he had personally orchestrated.

Yes, this time he had used the [Black-rimmed glasses] - an item that made everyone around believe in the fabricated identity he created.

He had disguised himself as [Ishizaki], and with some additional styling and camouflage to prevent cameras from capturing his full face, everyone would believe he was indeed [Ishizaki].

Not even Ryuen would suspect the truth behind this.

He could only speculate whether Kaoru had bribed everyone, as there was no other logical explanation.

Since he couldn't obtain laxatives on short notice, Kaoru had instead given Kushida an [Aphrodisiac].

While it looked identical to the laxatives Ryuen possessed, the effects were completely different.

If Kushida consumed it, she would simply turn into a lewd fool.

Of course, aside from him, no one else knew about its actual effects yet.

"How stingy."

Completely unaware that her master possessed such a secret weapon, Kushida happily gazed at her personal balance.

"What should I do? I'm so rich now - I'm wealthy!"

To her, this was nothing short of a windfall - completely risk-free, with some classmates even offering her comfort.

"Rather than money, I'd prefer you to focus more on the exam the day after tomorrow."

Horikita slightly frowned. "You remember everything I've discussed with you these past few days, right?"

As the [Command Tower] of Class 1-D, Kikyo Kushida needed to exercise her authority at critical moments.

Horikita had invested considerable effort, devising multiple strategies for her reference and reminding her to remain vigilant about on-site developments.

"Stop nagging. It's not like I have amnesia."

Kushida put down her phone. "But Class C clearly wants to challenge us to a showdown. Are your methods really effective?"

"We will win."

Confidence shone in Horikita's eyes - this was her final battle in first year, the last one her brother could witness.

"Even if he wins five rounds, the ultimate victory will still be ours."

Kaoru felt an inexplicable sense of déjà vu, as if he had heard Sakayanagi say something similar before him.

However, he currently felt somewhat frustrated.

Although he had managed to thwart Ryuen's plan in time, he knew the secret couldn't remain hidden any longer.

The moment Ryuen suspected there might be a spy in the class, he would undoubtedly begin endless probing until the real spy was uncovered.

What should he do?

As Kaoru pondered solutions, his phone suddenly vibrated, displaying a message from Tsukishiro.

Chapter 614: The First-Year Battle

"Good morning."

Kaoru greeted Masumi Kamuro before taking his seat.

"You're almost late."

Kamuro initially wanted to tease him, but noticing what appeared to be dark circles under his eyes, her heart softened.

"Who were you with last night?"

Though she tried to question whether he had been up all night partying, Kamuro could sense his listlessness.

Normally he would sneak glances at her thighs, but now he didn't even look - quite unlike his usual self.

"Ran into some trouble." Kaoru replied.

Kamuro thought about the incident where Shizaki had drugged someone.

Could that be what was bothering him?

"Where's Sakayanagi?"

"She already went to the special teaching building earlier. The exam will begin soon."

"...Destiny is about to unfold."

"What?"

Kamuro Masumi looked puzzled at Kaoru, who offered no explanation, leaving her to assume he was having another chuunibyou episode.

Ding—

The bell signaling the final Special Exam of the year rang out, marking the official start of the Selection Project Exam.

Instantly, the classroom fell into complete silence.

Everyone waited for the broadcast announcement, through which the school would communicate the exam subjects, participant names, and Command Tower assignments.

Kaoru had no insight into the other side's situation and could only speculate that exam subjects and participants were currently being assigned.

Although he hadn't participated in the exam discussions, Katsuragi Kohei had briefed him on the specifics.

Sakayanagi Arisu had selected Chess, Mental Arithmetic, Modern Literature Exam, Memory Cards, and volleyball as the chosen subjects.

Written exams were undoubtedly Class A's forte, but Sakayanagi Arisu wasn't entirely confident about defeating the opposing class's model students, so she cautiously included the Modern Literature Exam.

Notably, the Memory Cards subject required memorizing one hundred irregular numbers within 30 seconds, with victory going to whoever recalled the most digits.

Kaoru didn't know who in the class had the best memory, but considering Sakayanagi Arisu was the Command Tower, she likely intended to participate herself.

Surprisingly, the Command Tower's intervention method allowed them to assist with memorization before the countdown ended.

It seemed somewhat unreasonable, but the school deemed the Command Tower's intervention fair, as it applied equally to both sides.

"Please note, the draw results are out. The first subject for Class A and Class B is—Mental Arithmetic."

Simultaneously, the rules corresponding to the subject surfaced in Kaoru Tōru's mind.

Mental Arithmetic: Each side would send two students, with a time limit of 30 minutes.

The specific rules involved competing in accuracy and speed using Abacus Mental Calculation, with the winning class determined by the top performer.

Additionally, the Command Tower could alter the answer to any question at any time.

...

Seeing the first subject displayed on the screen before her, Sakayanagi Arisu allowed a faint smile to curve her lips.

"It's finally beginning, Ichinose-san."

Ichinose Honami was pondering whom to send when she heard the voice and turned her gaze to the girl opposite her, who wore a white hat today.

"Hmm, were you too nervous to sleep last night, Sakayanagi-san?"

"For me, this is the moment I've been most anticipating all year, though it was quite unexpected at first."

"Unexpected?"

"What was your reason for nominating Class A?"

Chabashira Sae, overseeing and proctoring the exam, didn't interrupt their conversation.

This was the room for Class A and Class B, with the other two classes in adjacent rooms.

Sakayanagi Arisu seemed indifferent to whatever answer Ichinose Honami might give and simply stated, "If you believe having him here means you can easily defeat me, you might be in for a disappointment."

In her view, Kaoru had already informed Ichinose Honami about their wager, and perhaps this nomination was orchestrated by Kaoruhimself.

With Kaoru manipulating Ichinose Honami, a direct confrontation was entirely possible—exactly what she had been anticipating all along.

However, Ichinose Honami refuted Sakayanagi Arisu's words.

"He didn't help me, and I didn't ask for his help."

The girl spoke frankly, but Sakayanagi Arisu didn't believe a single word of it.

They were often seen together in places she didn't know about—would Kaoru really not care about this exam?

"Are you saying this nomination was entirely your decision, with no involvement from him at all? You only want to defeat me?"

Sakayanagi Arisu smiled faintly.

She wasn't looking down on Ichinose Honami; she just found it utterly absurd.

Because if Ichinose Honami defeated her, Kaoru would gain another little maid.

As his girlfriend, would Ichinose Honami really be so proactive and enthusiastic about this?

Even if Ichinose Honami could accept Kaoru's Harem, she wasn't originally part of it.

Who would willingly help their boyfriend expand his Harem?

Therefore, Sakayanagi Arisu was more inclined to believe that Kaoru was manipulating Ichinose Honami.

He had always held strange intentions toward her.

"Yes, that's exactly it."

Ichinose Honami met Sakayanagi Arisu's gaze. "The bet between you and him is your own affair. I only want to defeat you and your Class A."

Sakayanagi Arisu suddenly tightened her grip on her cane. She saw Ichinose Honami flash a radiant smile.

"It's not just me. Everyone wants to work hard to rise to Class A and show the school, which arbitrarily assigned these rankings, what we're capable of. That's a feeling you probably can't understand, right?"

Chabashira Sae glanced over.

She noticed the tension between the two—what she initially thought was just rivalry now seemed to conceal an unusual relationship.

"Everyone?"

Sakayanagi Arisu sounded as if she'd heard something amusing. "You're quite optimistic, Ichinose-san. I truly can't understand your feelings. Right now, I just want to quickly wrap up today's events."

It was utterly absurd.

Not only could she accept her boyfriend's Harem, but she remained completely unchanged, brimming with optimism that she would continue leading her class toward the goal of Class A.

The most ridiculous part was that Sakayanagi Arisu had already revealed part of the truth to her.

Yet she showed no reaction at all.

Sakayanagi Arisu only felt a tightness in her chest. Why didn't she care?

Had Kaoru used hypnosis on her?

"I'll give it my all today."

Ichinose Honami smiled apologetically. "I hope you'll do the same, Sakayanagi-san. It would be a shame if you lost like this."

"Heh, with you saying that, how could I possibly hold back?"

Sakayanagi Arisu's tone was slightly sarcastic, perhaps interpreting Ichinose Honami's words as a provocation.

Ichinose Honami had already selected her participants.

Seeing this, Sakayanagi Arisu finally sent out Katsuragi Kohei and Tamiya Emi.

Chapter 615: Much Obligated.

It started off smoothly, but Class 1-B quickly faltered on the subsequent questions.

Katsuragi Kohei was undoubtedly the top scorer, not even giving Sakayanagi Arisu, the Command Tower, a chance to intervene.

With a 70% accuracy rate, he achieved the highest score on both sides.

"The first event goes to Class A."

Chabashira Sae announced the result flatly, though her gaze lingered intentionally or unintentionally on the two Command Towers.

Sakayanagi Arisu wasn't surprised by this outcome at all, appearing completely at ease.

"Didn't you specifically practice Class A's events?"

The winner naturally had the capacity to deliver well-deserved taunts to the loser, as if retaliating against Ichinose Honami's earlier empty talk.

This subtle mockery didn't stir any emotional turbulence in Ichinose Honami.

Abacus Mental Calculation was quite niche, and Class B students had no prior exposure to it, so losing was understandable.

"I've been contemplating countermeasures against Class A's events every day," Ichinose Honami said.

"You excel in written exams and overall have higher comprehensive abilities than us. I believe a direct confrontation would be hopeless."

Sakayanagi Arisu slightly furrowed her brows as she watched the screen flicker, the school's system randomly selecting the next event.

Class A had chosen Chess, Mental Arithmetic, Memory Cards, Modern Literature Exam, and Volleyball.

Class B had decided on Chemistry Exam, English Exam, Tennis, Sketching, and Texas Hold'em.

If one could glimpse each side's intentions through their selected events, Sakayanagi Arisu hadn't yet deciphered Ichinose Honami's strategy.

It was perplexing that Ichinose Honami would include two written exam events despite knowing Class A's proficiency in them.

Moreover, the latter two events were even more surprising.

While Sketching was somewhat understandable, what was the reasoning behind Texas Hold'em?

Were they counting on luck to secure a victory?

Sakayanagi Arisu had some understanding of Texas Hold'em's rules and didn't believe high school students could play at an exceptional level.

They were probably hoping luck would help Kaoru win one event.

To be honest, she had initially intended to use intelligence gathered by Kamuro Masumi, Yamamura Miki, and others to carefully analyze Class B's potential event choices.

Sakayanagi Arisu had assumed events like Chemistry Exam, English Exam, and Texas Hold'em were merely Smoke Screens, with the real events being Tennis and Sketching which relied on minor techniques.

Instead, she had been proven wrong.

"By the way, Sakayanagi-san," Ichinose Honami looked at Sakayanagi Arisu with a gentle smile, "you've been keeping an eye on our events, haven't you? Kamuro-san sometimes wanders around the library, and some classmates have privately approached me, saying Class A members have been contacting them."

"Apologies, did that make you uneasy?" Sakayanagi Arisu responded with a smile, though her tone carried a slight upward inflection.

"Not at all. It's because Sakayanagi-san doesn't want to lose, so you're giving it your all."

Sakayanagi Arisu couldn't discern how much mockery was hidden in that smile - perhaps all of it, just like Kaoru who believed she couldn't achieve a grand slam.

Whenever this realization struck, her chest would feel tight with an indescribable sensation. Was it resentment at the possibility of losing?

Or perhaps regret for having been too lenient with Kaoru, resulting in her current inability to control him?

No, Sakayanagi Arisu stubbornly believed she wouldn't lose.

The reason she had indulged Kaoru was because she trusted that, at equal levels, she had no reason to be defeated.

If she lost to Kaoru before burying her Greatest Masterpiece, what right would she have to reclaim the words she'd previously spoken to her father?

No matter what, Sakayanagi Arisu had reasons she couldn't afford to lose.

"The second event: Chess."

...

Following instructions, Kaoru soon arrived at a classroom.

A chessboard had already been set up with both sides' pieces in position.

An unfamiliar teacher stood nearby supervising, accompanied by a camera.

Sakayanagi Arisu and Ichinose Honami were likely monitoring every move here through cameras.

Kaoru glanced at the student opposite him, never expecting it to be the boy Kanzaki Ryuji.

Only the two of them were present, each carrying a walkie-talkie, with the Command Tower able to direct them for half an hour at any time.

"Long time no see."

Kaoru initiated the greeting.

Kanzaki Ryuji looked toward the teacher and, seeing no objection, spoke up.

"Have you studied Chess before?"

"No."

Kaoru shook his head. His victory over Sakayanagi Arisu was entirely thanks to the Wish-Granter.

Kanzaki Ryuji seemed puzzled but quickly regained his composure.

"I've studied Chess, though my level isn't as high as Sakayanagi's."

Kanzaki Ryuji paused, glancing at the camera, "I look forward to learning from you."

Kaoru felt he was saying this to Sakayanagi Arisu through the lens.

Did they know each other before?

Kaoru didn't dwell on it too much, soon making the first move after the teacher announced the start.

[Hehe, another amateur. Hope he knows his place and ends the match quickly.]

[Entertain me, mortal!]

[Ha! Ha!]

[Your brain seems a bit small—do you ever use it?]

Kanzaki Ryuji's expression gradually grew serious, pondering for a while before each move.

[Ara ara, did I hurt you? Gomen ne, I was just joking earlier. I didn't realize you really couldn't play Chess. I'll be more careful in the future~]

Kaoru silently endured the Wish-Machine's trash talk.

She seemed to particularly enjoy pressuring opponents, always trying to get Kaoru to relay her words.

Of course, Kaoru paid her no mind.

As the match neared its end, Kaoru's walkie-talkie crackled to life.

"Thank you for your cooperation, Kaoru-kun~"

Though it wasn't Sakayanagi Arisu's voice, Kaoru could imagine her tone.

"You really haven't studied Chess?"

Kanzaki Ryuji's expression was off, likely thinking Kaoru had been toying with him.

"If it weren't for her, I probably wouldn't have been exposed to Chess."

Kaoru gave a half-truthful reply.

Kanzaki Ryuji frowned, though his expression softened slightly.

If Sakayanagi Arisu had taught him personally, it wasn't entirely unacceptable.

"I lose."

Kanzaki Ryuji cleanly resigned by tipping over his king.

The match was unsustainable—Kaoru would have captured his king in a few more moves.

Kaoru was somewhat surprised, it seemed Kanzaki hadn't used his walkie-talkie at all.

"I'm the most knowledgeable about Chess in our class."

Kanzaki Ryuji guessed his thoughts, "If I can't beat you, Ichinose can't either."

Probably even Ichinose Honami hadn't expected her boyfriend to be this skilled—likely at a professional level.

"Thanks for the game."

Kaoru ignored the Wish-Machine's constant "small fry, small fry" taunts.

He couldn't actually read the board, but he understood Kanzaki Ryuji's feelings.

The teacher confirmed both sides' conditions and announced the second event as Class A's victory.

Before leaving, Kanzaki Ryuji paused briefly at the doorway.

"Though I don't know the specifics between you and Ichinose, I have something to tell you."

Kaoru stopped before him, meeting his unwavering gaze.

"If you're just playing around, you'd better stay away from her."

After saying this, Kanzaki Ryuji turned and left.

Kaoru recalled the words of Amikura Mako and Ichinose Honami - Class B had a terrible impression of him, once suspecting he simply wanted to toy with Ichinose Honami's feelings.

"Will I get beaten up later?"

Chapter 616: Utterly Boring.

Meanwhile, the exams for Class C and Class D were proceeding simultaneously.

"The combined results show Class D with 532 points and Class C with 446 points. Class D wins the second event."

Hearing Mashima Tomonari's announcement, Kushida Kikyo breathed a sigh of relief.

Their class had won two consecutive events - it was practically a perfect start.

"Terrible luck, huh? So far it's been all your events."

As if unaffected by the pressure, Ryuen Kakeru showed Kushida Kikyo his usual smile.

For this exam, Class C didn't even bother pretending - all their chosen events were about fighting.

Karate, Judo, Taekwondo, Kendo, and Wrestling - these were the events Ryuen Kakeru personally selected, filling them out without hesitation earlier.

Kushida Kikyo suspected he chose these simply because they were at the top of the list - he just wanted to save effort and didn't care what they were.

"Hehe, I've heard good luck is also a key factor in winning."

Kushida Kikyo put on her little angel act, her face full of innocent smiles.

What a joke - how could she not show innocent smiles to Ryuen Kakeru? This guy had given her a full 2 million points!

"That's true."

Ryuen Kakeru turned to Mashima Tomonari, "Teacher, please hurry to the next event. Everyone's waiting to finish this quickly."

Mashima Tomonari glanced at Kushida Kikyo, who nodded slightly.

Soon, the third event was displayed.

Karate.

Kushida Kikyo slowly withdrew her smile - they had finally drawn a Class C event.

The events Class D had chosen were English Exam, Math Exam, Basketball, Typing Skills, and Archery.

Horikita Suzune's thinking was simple - since Ryuen Kakeru was clearly challenging Class D to a direct competition, she might as well skip practicing his events and focus on training their own instead.

You fight your way, I'll fight mine - it all came down to whose events got drawn more often.

The worst outcome would be drawing five consecutive Class C events - no matter how hard they tried, Class D would have difficulty winning.

However, Horikita Suzune considered this impossible - the probability was too low. It was more likely both sides would draw three or four of their own events.

This way, Class D would have a chance to win.

The best outcome would be Class D drawing four or five of their own events, followed by drawing three, and then winning one of Class C's events.

Of course, besides probability, another key aspect of this exam was the reasonable allocation of human resources.

Horikita Suzune had prepared multiple plans, allowing Kushida Kikyo to adopt the most reasonable approach based on the situation.

As long as it wasn't the worst-case scenario, Horikita Suzune believed their chances of winning were better than Ryuen Kakeru's.

In fact, Class D had already drawn two of their own events consecutively.

The first event was Typing Skills - they had a science nerd named Hokamura Hideo on their side, so they sent him up to type furiously, and sure enough, they won.

The second event just now was the English Exam, which gathered top students led by Wang Meiyu. Since Class C of the first year likely hadn't reviewed, they secured another victory.

The consecutive successes steadied Kushida Kikyo's confidence.

Even if it were Class C's Karate event now, she wouldn't panic.

"Alright, it's finally our turn, Kushida. Want to pick a few people you dislike to step into the ring?"

Ryuen Kakeru casually selected several students.

The rules of Karate were simple: anything was allowed except for direct strikes against the opponent.

Moreover, it was an elimination format—only one student could make it to the end.

"Eh, no way, I wouldn't do something like that."

Kushida Kikyo restrained her desire and refrained from putting Horikita Suzune in.

Instead, she threw a few boys into the mix.

However, she knew these boys were just cannon fodder. Very few in the class understood Karate, with only Horikita Suzune being skilled at it.

Even if they practiced for a week, they probably still couldn't beat Class C of the first year. It was better to just give up.

As expected, the boys Kushida Kikyo sent up were quickly beaten to the point of kneeling and begging for mercy.

She couldn't even bring herself to use the Command Tower's intervention—which allowed any match to be replayed.

"The third event goes to Class C."

Mashima Tomonari flipped the scoreboard, similar to those used in many ball games. The current score was 2:1.

"Tsk tsk, what a terrible performance. Why didn't you send out Sudo from your class?"

Ryuen Kakeru seemed to be taunting, "When it comes to who can take the most beating, I only remember him."

"Ryuen-kun, saying things like that will make people dislike you, you know?"

Kushida Kikyo suppressed her anger, wearing a smile that held no warmth. "Everyone still remembers what you did with the drugging incident."

Although she wasn't particularly invested in the class, Ryuen Kakeru's constant mockery was enough to make even the most patient person angry.

Ryuen Kakeru didn't care at all. The angrier Kushida Kikyo got, the more it amused him, as if he were teasing a cat or a dog.

If he could provoke this Command Tower, it might yield some unexpected results.

"Mashima-sensei, another one, please."

With a slightly flippant tone, Ryuen Kakeru acted as if he were switching TV channels, treating it all like a comedy show on screen.

Mashima Tomonari pressed the lottery button expressionlessly, and the screen began flashing the next event.

Basketball.

'Perfect.'

Kushida Kikyo immediately breathed a sigh of relief—this was their class's event.

To secure this victory, they had compiled a list of students in the class, noting who excelled at what and which events were most likely to yield wins.

Miyake Akito was skilled in Archery, Hokamura Hideo in computers, Onodera Kayano in swimming and sprinting, and Sudo Ken's specialty was basketball—reportedly with qualifications to compete at the national level.

For caution's sake, Horikita Suzune had included basketball, hoping Sudo Ken and a few other athletic boys could secure a win.

Thus, Kushida Kikyo unhesitatingly submitted the names of Onodera Kayano, Makita Susumu, Ayanokoji Kiyotaka, and others.

Ryuen Kakeru, of course, noticed this and remarked, "My, my, what a fearsome strong team. Not only are you lucky, but you're also sharp-minded. Is Horikita guiding you?"

"Yes, all our class's strategies are thanks to Horikita-san's efforts."

As a little angel, Kushida Kikyo has a gentle side, but naturally also possesses a thorny side.

"She hopes to win the match fairly and squarely, rather than resorting to petty tricks."

Although she genuinely dislikes Horikita Suzune as a person.

"I see. It seems my chances of winning here are quite slim."

Ryuen Kakeru casually submitted several names while speaking discouraging words, yet his eyes showed no trace of defeatism, still maintaining considerable composure.

On their screens, the basketball match quickly began.

Kushida Kikyo stared intently at the match footage.

They hadn't deployed Sudo Ken immediately, instead keeping him as a reserve player.

The Command Tower's intervention method allowed substituting one player at any time.

If Class 1-D could smoothly win the match, Sudo Ken could be preserved as combat strength.

If unexpected situations arose, deploying him wouldn't matter either.

The players Ryuen Kakeru sent were Daichi Ishizaki and several other boys who seemed somewhat skilled at basketball, creating an almost evenly matched situation between both sides.

"Hey, this looks a bit dangerous, Kushida. Want to bring up your class's ace?"

Ryuen Kakeru wore a teasing smile. "At this rate, it's completely unclear who'll be the final winner."

The basketball match lasted twenty minutes, with the first half being only ten minutes that would pass quickly.

Kushida Kikyo had to make a decision within this short time, especially when the scores were close.

Ryuen Kakeru watched her troubled expression with amusement.

As expected, she decided to deploy Sudo Ken during the second half.

The current score was 2-1. Winning one more match would make it 3-1, and another victory after that would mean final triumph.

Kushida Kikyo had no reason not to stake Sudo Ken. Class 1-D currently had no choice - they couldn't afford to lose.

Just as predicted, shortly after Sudo Ken took the court, Class 1-C's formation collapsed, allowing Sudo Ken to charge through unimpeded and secure the final victory.

"The result is twenty to twelve, Class D's victory."

With Mashima Tomonari's announcement, Kushida Kikyo couldn't help but show a slight smile.

Whatever the case, they just needed one more win.

However, her smile immediately vanished.

"Next event: Judo."

Chapter 617: Why Aren't You Anxious?

Bang!

The screen showed Hayato Kito swinging his tennis racket, the camera capturing the tennis ball smashing hard into the ground as Class 1-B's student failed to intercept it.

Thus, this tennis match concluded.

"The score is five to three, Class A's victory."

Chabashira Sae's voice was quite indifferent.

After all, this was a match between Class 1-A and Class 1-B, and it was already decent that she wasn't slacking off.

"Hehe, this is the third victory, isn't it?"

Sakayanagi Arisu looked at Ichinose Honami. "What a pity, Ichinose-san. I didn't go easy on you."

Tennis was Class 1-B's event.

Losing to opponents on their home ground was truly inexcusable.

Ichinose Honami lightly pressed her lips together.

Who could have expected that Hayato Kito, whom Sakayanagi Arisu substituted in, would be so formidable, completely overwhelming their class's student.

"Class A's students are indeed amazing. Kito-kun's athletic reflexes are so strong."

Though a trace of unwillingness flickered across her expression, the girl soon wore a warm smile and sincerely praised her opponent.

"That serve just now carried an overwhelming momentum, quite different from Hashimoto-kun."

Her expression seemed genuine, which inexplicably irritated Sakayanagi Arisu.

Still, she maintained a deliberately indifferent facade and said coolly, "Even if you praise them here, they can't hear you."

The implied meaning was: Stop putting on an act here.

"I know. But as an opponent, I truly respect them."

Ichinose Honami gazed at the screen, where Shibata Sō was pestering Kitō Hayato, trying to invite him to play soccer.

A faint smile lingered on her lovely face.

Sakayanagi Arisu took a deep breath, finally understanding the source of her irritation.

Despite having lost, Ichinose Honami wasn't showing the expected reaction, making Arisu feel as though she had punched cotton—utterly powerless.

"The next event is—the Modern Literature Exam."

Chabashira Sae announced the result of the draw.

For the Modern Literature Exam, each class would send four participants.

The competition would last 50 minutes, covering questions from the first-year curriculum.

The side with the highest total score would win.

As an interference method, the command tower could substitute an answer for one question.

This was Class A's forte. When it came to written exams, Sakayanagi Arisu was 90% confident she could defeat Ichinose Honami.

"Ichinose-san, if you lose this match as well, Class B will have no chance of defeating Class A."

Sakayanagi Arisu narrowed her eyes.

She was speaking the truth—only four victories were needed to establish the basic winning formula for this exam.

Currently, Class B still had zero points, while Sakayanagi Arisu had already secured three victories.

The situation was extremely unfavorable for Ichinose Honami, especially after losing in tennis—their own specialty—to the opponent. The circumstances couldn't be worse.

Unexpectedly, Ichinose Honami simply nodded.

"The gap between us and Class A is indeed significant. Class A has too many outstanding students. In a straightforward clash, we would inevitably lose."

From a purely student-oriented perspective, Classes A and B didn't seem vastly different.

Neither had obvious weaknesses, unlike Classes C and D, which were composed of either delinquents or average students.

Although both Classes A and B had weaker students, their numbers were small.

In terms of overall capability, the two classes were nearly on par.

Ichinose Honami had initially believed her classmates weren't too far behind, but facing Class A now, she was gradually realizing where the gap lay.

The reason the school had placed them in Class B, not Class A.

"Finally realized the problem?" Sakayanagi Arisu said coolly. "You're not actually weak—it's just that the cards I hold are too good."

Class B was only slightly flawed compared to Class A, like a student who could score 99 points versus one who could achieve a perfect score.

The difference might seem negligible, but the latter was fundamentally superior to the former.

"Yes, without a direct confrontation, I might never have noticed this issue."

Ichinose Honami smiled. "Still, I believe in everyone in Class B."

Sakayanagi Arisu watched her selection of participants in silence before speaking coldly, "Do you think I can't see through this? You're trying to exchange pieces with me - three out of ten events are written exams: Modern Literature Exam, Chemistry Exam, and English Exam."

Ichinose Honami's movements paused slightly as Sakayanagi continued, "You've already forced me to sacrifice two of my top players in Chess and Mental Arithmetic. For the upcoming Modern Literature Exam, I'll have to deploy another top player, while you can just send some weaker players to trade with my best."

Indeed, to ensure victory in every event, Sakayanagi had to go all out.

Even knowing Ichinose might be exchanging pieces, she still had to deploy her top players.

Otherwise, she risked losing.

Once Sakayanagi's top players were exchanged, if the next event turned out to be English Exam or Chemistry Exam, Ichinose could deploy their class's top players to secure the first victory.

"Your Tennis exchange also took out my top player. If we draw Volleyball next, we'll likely face a fair fight where no one can predict the outcome."

Sakayanagi finished in one breath, "This situation is unfavorable for me, but it's your opportunity."

Kito was one of Sakayanagi's strong cards, one of her so-called top players, but because Ichinose had deployed Shibata Sō, he had to be substituted in.

After three consecutive victories, Sakayanagi had already lost Katsuragi Kohei, Kaoru, Hashimoto Masayoshi, and Kito Hayato.

If she lost four more top students in this Modern Literature Exam, Class A might face a complete reversal.

"Not just Volleyball - your Sketching and Texas Hold'em are also aimed at this."

Sakayanagi seemed to have completely seen through Ichinose's scheme, "Sketching avoids Class A's strengths, while Texas Hold'em can level the playing field between us. Both have elements of clever maneuvering - even I can't guarantee a hundred percent victory."

If she had been unaware, Ichinose might have actually succeeded.

However, Sakayanagi had already seen through the plan.

"Ichinose-san, don't you want to win?"

Sakayanagi's expression remained impassive.

This plan was clearly meant to help Kaoru, "Even if you succeed, what would you gain?"

This plan couldn't bring Class B ultimate victory because Class A's advantage was too great - it would only leave them with a slightly respectable defeat.

Strangely, Ichinose showed no guilt or panic at being exposed.

"Well, Sakayanagi-san really can see through my thoughts. That's exactly what I was thinking."

The girl smiled gracefully, "So I gave up."

Gave up?

Sakayanagi tried to maintain her smile, but it only made her expression appear stiff.

She clearly hadn't expected this response from Ichinose.

"Although this might have been our only chance at victory, it was too easily seen through by Sakayanagi-san, and there was no guarantee we could win four consecutive matches."

Ichinose smiled playfully, "So I simply gave up!"

Sakayanagi's breath hitched for a moment before she tightly gripped her cane, "Can I interpret this as surrender?"

She tried desperately to remain calm, even considering dismissing Ichinose's act, but Ichinose's expression didn't seem like she was joking.

"How could I possibly admit defeat? I've said it before—Class B will go all out this time."

A trace of defiance flashed in Ichinose Honami's eyes. "If... if we can't even win a single match against you when giving our all, what right would Class B have to chase after Class A in the future?"

Sakayanagi Arisu was momentarily taken aback, then an inexplicable emotion surged within her.

After all that talk, she really just wanted to help him!

Chapter 618: The Final Moment

Seeing Ichinose Honami's roster, Sakayanagi Arisu finally felt a wave of incomprehensible anger.

She truly wasn't engaging in sacrificial exchanges—instead, she had staked all of Class B's chips without leaving herself any room for retreat.

What exactly was this person trying to do!

Sakayanagi Arisu realized things had once again exceeded her expectations, just like when Ichinose Honami had publicly confessed her past.

She simply couldn't predict Ichinose Honami's thoughts.

It was like snowflakes falling from the sky—you reach out to catch them in your hand, only to see them melt into water stains, while someone nearby gazes at the sky and marvels at how beautiful the snowfall is.

To Sakayanagi Arisu, this snow felt utterly hollow, something that would vanish completely once the sun emerged.

She shouldn't be snow.

As rivals, Sakayanagi Arisu truly couldn't understand.

Sacrificial exchanges! Didn't you say you wanted to defeat her? Quickly make those exchanges!

Clearly caring about winning this exam, yet wearing such an indifferent expression—was it because you knew you'd been seen through, and that's why you're adopting this attitude?

Or was it deliberately meant to disrupt her plans?

Sakayanagi Arisu pressed her lips tightly together.

She knew she shouldn't care so much about Ichinose Honami's reactions—this exam was her competition with Kaoru, and her opponent wasn't Ichinose Honami.

That's right, Ichinose Honami just wanted to help Kaoru win one event, so she didn't care whether her class won or not.

"The final score is 388 points to 351 points—victory for Class A."

While Sakayanagi Arisu was feeling unsettled, Chabashira Sae had already announced the results of the Modern Literature Exam.

"We lost. I thought we could at least win by a small margin."

Ichinose Honami had used her Command Tower authority to answer one question, but the result still fell short against Class A.

Sakayanagi Arisu snapped back to attention and stared intently at Ichinose Honami.

"You have no chance of winning anymore. Are you planning to help him win next?"

Ichinose Honami looked puzzled for a moment, then smiled.

"Sakayanagi-san really cares about him, doesn't she? Just as he said—your eyes only see winning and more winning."

Sakayanagi Arisu found this somewhat absurd.

If she didn't think about winning, was she supposed to become Kaoru's little maid?

Like Ichinose Honami, bowing her head, obediently kneeling at Kaoru's feet, learning to please him like a puppy?

How could she possibly do that? How could she ever be willing to share her man with others?

"The reason I care about him is because he holds secrets that interest me."

Sakayanagi Arisu said, "After I win, I'll slowly pry out his secrets, one by one."

"You're not denying that you care about him?"

Ichinose Honami seemed genuinely surprised.

Sakayanagi Arisu fell silent for a moment: "It's different."

She didn't specify how it was different.

Perhaps even she herself didn't know—it was just different, that's all.

"I won't interrupt your casual conversation, but the next event requires drawing lots."

Chabashira Sae interjected, "Or would any of you like to take a temporary break?"

"That's fine, please continue."

Ichinose Honami expressed her opinion.

Sakayanagi Arisu seemed to have noticed something, remaining silent.

Thus began the fifth event.

Chemistry Exam.

Unlike the Modern Literature Exam, both sides would send eight participants this time.

Sakayanagi Arisu looked at Class A's roster. Although they had reviewed for some time, eight participants...

She thought Ichinose Honami would trade pieces with her, so she planned to conserve strength by sending average performers to counter Ichinose's weaker ones.

But Ichinose Honami didn't do that.

Since Class B sent four top performers, she had to send four top performers as well.

They had nearly lost just now - the difference was only about thirty points, merely two or three questions apart.

Sakayanagi Arisu suddenly smiled, turning her gaze to Ichinose Honami.

"Dragging your opponent down to your level - that's your tactic, isn't it, Ichinose-san?"

With both sides sending eight participants, combined with previous events, about half of both classes' students had already been deployed.

Not only would this exhaust the top performers, but likely wipe out most of the average ones too.

"There's no other way," Ichinose Honami smiled apologetically. "In a direct confrontation, we stand no chance. If I used subtle tricks, you'd probably notice quickly."

"The only thing I never expected was Class A being this strong, capable of winning four consecutive matches."

Her strategy was clearly to forcibly drain Class A's combat strength, pulling both sides to the same level - she just hadn't anticipated Class A's formidable ability.

"If that's the case, why didn't you just fill all events with written exams?"

Sakayanagi Arisu suppressed her anger and a trace of unease.

Ichinose Honami froze for a long moment, her eyes seeming to say "Was that actually possible?"

"Heh, even if you had done that, I wouldn't care."

Sakayanagi Arisu said coldly, "As long as tasks are assigned properly beforehand, Class A students can defeat Class B."

She was bluffing. She knew this was impossible - winning seven consecutive events was extremely difficult to begin with.

If Ichinose Honami became desperate just to make her lose one event, she couldn't stop it.

Therefore, Ichinose Honami also knew she was bluffing.

"Sakayanagi-san, perfect people don't exist in this world, just as there are no people who never fail."

Ichinose Honami's gaze was complex, as if she wanted to say more but stopped herself.

"I'm not denying the possibility of my failure."

Sakayanagi Arisu said, "I just don't want to lose."

The two locked eyes, then each submitted their Chemistry Exam participant lists.

The competition lasted one hour - excruciatingly, unbearably long.

Sakayanagi Arisu stubbornly waited for the final result. After she announced the answer to the last question, the outcome was already clear.

"Final score: 711 points to 698 points. Victory goes to Class A."

Announcing this result, Chabashira Sae seemed surprised - even she hadn't expected Class A to win five consecutive victories.

Yet Sakayanagi Arisu felt no joy whatsoever.

She knew she was finished.

If the next event was the English Exam, she would lose.

If it was volleyball, she might also lose.

It had to be Memory Cards.

No, even with Memory Cards, she would still lose.

The first five events had already exhausted all her ammunition.

Who would have expected Ichinose Honami to engage in such a head-on battle of attrition?

"This is the fifth one. You're really strong, Sakayanagi-san."

Ichinose Honami spoke softly, "I heard you've been helping classmates review chemistry, English, modern literature, mathematics, and social studies. You've also been practicing tennis and volleyball. You're really working hard."

Sakayanagi Arisu fell silent.

While she was observing Ichinose Honami, wasn't Ichinose Honami equally observing her every move?

"You're not worried about sketching because of Kamuro-san, aren't you?"

Ichinose Honami smiled faintly, "What a coincidence. Chihiro-chan is also an art club member, just like Kamuro-san."

From the beginning until now, Sakayanagi Arisu had been holding back Kamuro Masumi, not fully utilizing her.

Even though Kamuro Masumi was merely a ghost club member in the art club, she still had some basic understanding.

"You trust Kamuro-san, and I trust Chihiro-chan."

Ichinose Honami said, "Shall we look forward to it?"

"I've always been looking forward to Ichinose-san's counterattack."

Sakayanagi Arisu stared stubbornly at her, her eyes conveying only one message: show me what you've got!

Thus, Ichinose Honami turned her gaze toward Chabashira Sae.

Understanding the cue, the latter pressed the lottery button.

"The next event: sketching."

Chapter 619: Overestimating Herself

'How troublesome' Kamuro Masumi thought as she rubbed her temples as if suffering from a headache.

Although she was an art club member, she had only been there to pass time!

Sakayanagi Arisu truly held too many unrealistic expectations of her.

Just recalling how Sakayanagi Arisu made her practice sketching gave Kamuro Masumi another headache.

She knew exactly what her skill level was.

Merely an amateur who had just started learning.

Meanwhile, Shiranami Chihiro on the opposite side had reportedly learned drawing in middle school, making her more experienced.

The school would provide the theme, requiring them to complete a sketch both quickly and well within 60 minutes, with the Command Tower only allowed to provide guidance from the side.

Wasn't this purely a competition of experience and technique between the two?

The sketching model was the supervising teacher.

Kamuro Masumi alternated between observing the teacher's face and making strokes with her pencil, occasionally hearing Sakayanagi Arisu's guidance.

Yes, the short girl also knew some drawing techniques.

Despite this, Kamuro Masumi felt she still couldn't catch up with Shiranami Chihiro opposite her.

Though both were in the same club, they rarely exchanged greetings.

However, Kamuro Masumi knew Shiranami Chihiro's skills were considerably better than hers, as the senior members seemed quite fond of her.

"No, your perspective is off. Darken the side a bit more..."

Sakayanagi Arisu suddenly stopped because Shiranami Chihiro on the opposite side had already put down her pencil.

Kamuro Masumi looked at her own drawing board, then turned her gaze toward the camera.

"I really want to help you, but drawing isn't something you can master with last-minute practice."

Sakayanagi Arisu seemed to remain silent for a moment before speaking through the intercom.

"Finish it."

Kamuro Masumi picked up her pencil and continued drawing, though she knew her chances of winning were slim—not just because of her lack of skill, but also because of the limited time.

The shorter the time, the higher the demands on the artist.

One hour was barely enough for her to manage the composition normally, let alone compete against Shiranami Chihiro.

This wasn't speed sketching.

...

Watching the screen before her, Sakayanagi Arisu's eyes burned with unwilling flames.

She never expected Ichinose Honami would actually use sketching as a real competition event.

No, even if it was sketching, she had once thought she had a chance.

With Masumi... no, she should have approached this Chihiro beforehand, slowly breaking this little girl down so she couldn't participate in the exam.

Sakayanagi Arisu regretted it.

She had actually done nothing and simply watched her opponent take the stage.

She had actually made this particularly grave mistake.

However, she forgot one thing.

Even if she had really approached Shiranami Chihiro, what could she have done?

Drugged her like Ryuen did?

Or tried to bribe Shiranami Chihiro?

Going further, like how she dealt with Ichinose Honami, uncover Shiranami Chihiro's past and deliver a heavy blow?

All these possibilities flashed through Sakayanagi Arisu's mind, only to vanish one by one, leaving behind a single thought.

It seemed she wasn't as unscrupulous as she had imagined herself to be?

She really hadn't done enough.

Because she hadn't done enough, she lost.

She should have been more ruthless, should have left her opponent with no opportunities at all, so she wouldn't be here filled with regret and resentment.

No, she should have acted earlier.

During the training camp exam, if she had cooperated with Nagumo Miyabi, she could have made Kaoru lose once.

During the sports festival, she could have made Kaoru suffer heavy losses.

No, no, she could have acted even earlier.

During the summer vacation on the uninhabited island, if she hadn't just watched from the sidelines, if she had intervened sooner, Hashimoto Masayoshi wouldn't have disappeared like meat thrown to dogs.

If from the very beginning, if she could have...

"The score is ninety to seventy-six, Class B's victory."

Chabashira Sae announced the score given by the art teacher, which was also the result of the sixth event.

Hearing this, Sakayanagi Arisu's heart trembled slightly.

She knew this was her failure, her lack of ruthlessness.

"Sakayanagi-san." Ichinose Honami suddenly spoke, "You're too proud. Even now, you're only thinking about Kaoru, aren't you?"

"Yes, because you helped him defeat me."

Sakayanagi Arisu looked at her coldly.

"That may be the result, but that wasn't my intention."

Ichinose Honami said, "I'm just very dissatisfied that your eyes never once looked at me. You treated this exam as a game with him, without caring about anyone else's thoughts."

Sakayanagi Arisu found this absurd and retorted, "Whose thoughts should I care about?"

"You don't even care about your opponent. How could you possibly win?"

Ichinose Honami fired back with another question.

"Sorry, I can't understand what you're saying."

Sakayanagi Arisu sneered. She didn't care?

If she didn't care, she wouldn't have studied Class B for a year, and she certainly wouldn't regret not having eliminated Shiranami Chihiro in advance.

"Haven't you noticed how particularly focused you are on winning and losing right now?" Ichinose Honami asked.

Of course she cared - if she lost, there was only one outcome waiting for her.

How could she not care?

"The more you care, the more afraid you are of losing, the more likely you are to lose, Sakayanagi-san."

Ichinose Honami's eyes seemed to convey sympathy.

Sakayanagi Arisu immediately flared up. What was with that look?

"I won't lose the final match!"

"You've said that countless times already."

"Heh, stop putting on that smug, conceited expression."

"..."

Ichinose Honami sighed softly.

In truth, from the moment Sakayanagi Arisu voiced her original plan aloud, she had subconsciously known that she couldn't possibly win all seven matches in a row.

She was simply resisting this thought.

So, Sakayanagi Arisu is getting anxious.

This little princess is inherently extremely proud—she believes that if she wants to win, she will undoubtedly win.

But since she considers herself a genius, she would never resort to methods like those of Ryuen Kakeru.

Her pride is so immense that she doesn't even bother to give Ichinose Honami a proper glance.

Because of this, the more Sakayanagi Arisu realizes she might lose, the more she finds it unacceptable.

Unable to accept the possibility of defeat, she tries to rationalize—if only she had dealt with Shiranami Chihiro earlier, if only she had taken action against Kaoru sooner.

Unfortunately, there are no "what ifs."

Even if given another chance, Sakayanagi Arisu would continue to lose for the same reasons.

Her pride prevented her from eliminating Kaoru early on, and now, of course, she can't eliminate Ichinose Honami either. It's her nature—unchangeable.

"Chabashira-sensei, please begin the final event." Ichinose Honami said.

Chabashira Sae nodded.

She seemed to have gathered some interesting gossip and wondered if she could use it to pressure Kaoru.

"The final event is Texas Hold'em."

Almost simultaneously, both girls were somewhat surprised.

"Heh, it seems your luck is slightly better."

Sakayanagi Arisu showed a fearless smile.

She only allowed herself to lose one match—losing another would mean defeat to Ichinose Honami.

"I hope so."

Ichinose Honami smiled gently.

Texas Hold'em—some say it's a game that tests both luck and mental fortitude.

Chapter 620: The Prank of Fate.

After Judo, it was immediately followed by Taekwondo.

Kushida Kikyo found it shocking—they had lost two matches in a row.

The score was now tied at three to three.

What was once a favorable situation had deteriorated so badly—it was truly unexpected.

However, Kushida Kikyo knew it wasn't the classmates' fault.

After all, in Judo, they had to face Albert. She doubted anyone could defeat that burly foreigner.

Taekwondo was even more exaggerated. A girl named Takeko Nishino charged around recklessly, even beating boys to the point where they knelt and begged for mercy.

One could only say, as expected of a class full of delinquents.

"Ah, only the math exam, Archery, Kendo, and Wrestling haven't been drawn yet."

Ryuen Kakeru said with a smile, "I'm really looking forward to which event will be drawn for the final one."

"I'm a bit nervous, but I'm curious—does your class still have some ace up its sleeve?"

Kushida Kikyo displayed the innocence and curiosity befitting a young girl, hoping to gather some information.

"Ace?" Ryuen Kakeru stroked his chin, "I'd like to know how effective that card is now, but more than that, I'm looking forward to what surprises he'll bring in the future. I hope it'll be worth the cost."

Kushida Kikyo was taken aback, unable to grasp his meaning.

"Heh, but it's enough to deal with your class for now."

Ryuen Kakeru was brimming with confidence because Class D of the first year hadn't yet utilized Koenji Rokusuke, seemingly saving him as their final trump card.

No one would likely expect that their own class's trump card would betray them.

Just when they needed him most, he would stab his own class in the back.

The thought of those fools' expressions, especially Horikita Suzune's reaction, filled Ryuen Kakeru with genuine delight.

Just like the last time he provoked Sakayanagi Arisu—it was truly delightful, absolutely wonderful.

"The next event is the mathematics exam."

Mashima Tomonari's voice interrupted Ryuen Kakeru's train of thought.

'It was the opponent's event?'

Ryuen Kakeru was momentarily stunned, then let out a wry smile.

Though this was the worst possible scenario at the moment, did he really care?

In contrast, Kushida Kikyo was ecstatic - the goddess of fortune was smiling upon them!

Without any hesitation, Kushida Kikyo placed Horikita Suzune, Hirata Yosuke, Koenji Rokusuke and others on the field.

There were reasons why these individuals had been kept until last.

Hirata Yosuke's performance had declined due to Yamauchi Haruki's expulsion, relegating him to substitute status.

As for Koenji Rokusuke, nobody could figure out what he was thinking, so he too remained a substitute.

This was Class D's final combat strength.

Horikita Suzune had deliberately saved them for today - even if it hadn't been a mathematics exam but something like Kendo instead, she would still have deployed these individuals.

"Finally bringing out Horikita, are we? Your trump card?"

Ryuen Kakeru remarked, "It seems I'll have to send out Hiyori."

Shiina Hiyori and Kaneda SaMitoma were Class C's two top academic students with exceptional grades.

During the previous English Exam, Ryuen had only dispatched students led by Kaneda.

Now was the perfect time to deploy Shiina Hiyori.

Yes, he had been holding back as well.

Soon, the screen showed Horikita Suzune and the others sitting in the examination area, with supervising teachers distributing test papers.

Class C and Class D were in separate areas, with cameras unable to show each other's answer sheets - only capturing images of students diligently working.

Simultaneously, exam questions would also appear on screen.

Kushida Kikyo could understand the earlier questions, but the last couple gave her some trouble.

Thus, she shifted her gaze to her own class.

Her expression froze - what was Koenji doing?

The guy had answered only one or two questions before stopping, then closed his eyes to rest. Even more absurdly, his answers showed no working process!

Wasn't this just too perfunctory?!

Kushida immediately became furious.

Koenji's usual laziness was one thing, but at this critical moment, he was still slacking off!?

"Finished all the questions already?"

Ryuen commented, though it was unclear whether he was praising, "As expected of Koenji. It seems we're really going to lose this time."

Definitely sarcasm - how could anyone finish all questions right after the exam started?

Ryuen knew this perfectly well, yet was subtly mocking them.

Fortunately, Kushida was a little angel who could forcibly suppress her anger, otherwise she would have exploded right then.

Today's outcome was crucial - Horikita Suzune had promised her certain things.

If they lost like this, Kushida felt she would never forgive Koenji for the rest of her life.

...

Horikita Suzune noticed Koenji's actions - after all, he was the only one resting with closed eyes in the entire venue.

However, Horikita Suzune wasn't the least bit angry.

Although Koenji had been considered part of their final combat strength, she had never actually expected him to contribute meaningfully.

There were six participants in the mathematics exam, with a total possible score of six hundred points.

Without Koenji's contribution, Class D only had five hundred points available.

This was going to be a difficult match - competing with one hundred fewer points than their opponents.

For anyone else, this might have been discouraging, but Horikita Suzune had faced far more setbacks with Kaoru and Class D before—this didn't affect her mindset.

A mere hundred points short? Horikita Suzune refused to believe the opposing class could exceed five hundred points.

With Kushida's assistance, she had long analyzed Class C's information and knew exactly which participants Ryuen could choose.

Shiina Hiyori was exceptional, but she stood alone.

The rest averaged around seventy points, putting their total score at roughly four hundred fifty at best.

Calmly, Horikita Suzune looked up at the camera, aware that Kushida was monitoring every move.

Ryuen Kakeru probably assumed she was unprepared.

...

'Interesting.'

'This woman seemed to have improved.'

Ryuen Kakeru observed Horikita Suzune's expression.

He had thought Koenji Rokusuke's actions would disrupt her rhythm, causing panic like Kushida Kikyo. Yet, there was no fear in Horikita's eyes.

"But how will you break this deadlock?"

Ryuen's interest grew.

He knew precisely the caliber of participants he'd sent.

Indeed, surpassing five hundred points was difficult—they'd likely hover around four hundred.

However—

With only five members, to exceed Class C, each would need to score over ninety points.

Ryuen shook his head, deeming it impossible. Horikita Suzune had already expended some of her top performers in the prior English Exam.

Academic achievers weren't like leeks—you couldn't just cut them and expect regrowth.

Once used, they were spent.

"I'll exercise the Command Tower's interference right," Kushida Kikyo suddenly declared. "The answer to question three is 42."

Ryuen was momentarily stunned.

The Command Tower's interference allowed substituting one answer, so Kushida's move was valid.

"So that's it..." Ryuen understood abruptly and burst into loud laughter. "You even accounted for this? If Koenji won't answer, you answer for him? How amusing!"

Since Koenji Rokusuke left blanks, Kushida simply solved one question for him—at least securing some points.

Thus, Kushida as Command Tower was essentially a hidden asset.

"But with only one question interference, how many points can you gain?" The more excited Ryuen became, the harder he laughed.

"Is this your final plan?"

Kushida shot him a glare but maintained her angelic smile. "I believe in doing everything possible. Even if we lose, I can comfort myself knowing I tried my best."

"Judgment of fate?" Ryuen had no interest in her act and turned to the screen.

Class D was becoming intriguing now. Had Kaoru intervened?

Yet, if they truly lost... Ryuen felt a dull ache in his chest.

Two million Personal points were at stake. So this was what it felt like to be extorted?

Soon, as the exam concluded, the judgment of fate arrived.

"Final scores: 448 points versus 444 points. Victory goes to Class D."

Hearing the result, Ryuen fell silent.

A mere four-point difference—it seemed Lady Luck hadn't favored Class C.

"Though it might sound a bit arrogant, Ryuen-kun..."

Kushida Kikyo smiled sweetly, her voice honeyed, "As expected, we're going to win. Because I've always believed in everyone in our class from start to finish. Even playing fair and square, we can still win."

The implication being, unlike someone who needed to drug others.

Ryuen had been somewhat composed, but he couldn't help recalling the recent losses—Year C Class had already forfeited 100 Class Points and 2 million Personal Points, plus Koenji's 2 million Personal Points.

Losing this exam would cost them another 130 Class Points.

Ryuen's brow twitched slightly, it seemed Year D Class had unknowingly surpassed them.

Watching Ryuen's expression gradually darken, Kushida could barely suppress the smile at the corners of her mouth!

This felt amazing—finally, she got to mock Ryuen mercilessly!