

STORY: **SYOUGO KINUGASA**  
ART: **TOMOSESHUNSAKU**

NOVEL

5

**CLASSROOM OF THE ELITE 2**  
YEAR





**CLASSROOM** **OF THE ELITE** **YEAR 2**

NOVEL 5



*“Welcome~ to the  
maid café Maimai!”*

*Three girls, each in a  
distinct outfit, greeted  
us simultaneously.*

*The first thing that caught my  
eye was the unexpected  
display of bright colours.*


*This is...*



*“Why...Why...  
Why...Why!”*

*kushida came close to  
me, grabbed me by my  
collar, and gave me an  
intense stare.*

*Despite Kushida’s furious  
demeanour, I continued in a  
business like manner.*



*"I had mentioned it during the exam...but when I was a third year student, I took the same exam."*

*"It looks that way."*

*Chabashira stared straight ahead  
at the sunset dyed outside.*

*"If you don't mind, would you  
listen to my true intentions."*

5

WELCOME TO CLASSROOM OF THE ELITE YEAR 2



**CLASSROOM**  
**OF THE ELITE** YEAR **2**

NOVEL 5

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STORY BY

*Syougo Kinugasa*

ART BY

*Tomoseshunsaku*



**CLASSROOM OF THE ELITE  
YEAR 2 VOLUME 5**

**SYOUGO KINUGASA**

**ROYALMTLS**



# CLASSROOM OF THE ELITE YEAR 2

5

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## Sae Chabashira's Monologue

**E**VER SINCE I became a teacher, or even before I became a teacher, I harboured trauma that I didn't dare tell anyone.

I keep having a recurring nightmare.

The nightmare has the events of... *that* day. I'll never forget them.

Each time I have that nightmare, it takes on a different form, changing my point of view, someone else's point of view; sometimes the chronological order of events is different. But there is one thing in common. No matter how many times I have that nightmare it ends the same way.

At that time, there was nothing to be afraid of. We were Class B and our momentum overwhelmed the other classes. We were well within reach of Class A. Of course, it wasn't a smooth road.

By the time I reached my third-year, the number of classmates who had left me had swelled to six. Even so, in my final year, I accumulated class points without letting a single student get expelled. I believed that I could graduate from Class A without having to leave anyone behind.

Until that day.

Until that exam.

At the end of the final semester, we were about to take the graduation exam, our last chance to turn things around. Our homeroom teacher stepped up to the podium with a stiff expression on her face and told us about a new special exam.

Of course, we didn't realize the danger of this special exam at first. The rules were simple and straightforward, and we had no doubt that we could succeed. But that optimistic mood lasted only until the exam started.

*The scene changes and I am screaming in class.*

My best friend, Chie, approaches me with an angry expression and grabs my chest.

*I scream in agony.*

The class, which had been united as one, collapsed in an instant.

"It's... over." He muttered, his face full of resignation and realization.

He had been my companion for the past three years, and he wasn't a trivial existence. He was my irreplaceable classmate, my irreplaceable friend. As the opposite sex, he was an... irreplaceable person. He may have been a bit of a jerk, but he was serious, kind, and more reliable than anyone else.

I saw a face he's never shown before.

That moment when he reached out his hand to me under the evening sky, somewhat shyly. As I held back the tears that were about to spill, I said a few words.

I said, “I look forward to working with you...”  
The relationship between the two of us ended just as it had begun.

## Chapter 1: The Footsteps of Chaos

**T**HE SUMMER VACATION is finally over and the second semester of the second year starts today; which means that we will soon be turning the corner into our three-year school life.

I tied my tie and put my arms through my sleeves. Looking in the mirror, I do my hair, make sure my appearance is in order, and head for the door. On my way to school, I was joined by Sudō, who was yawning loudly, and we exchanged greetings while walking, and headed out of the dormitory.

“Suzune warned me about the possibility of a written exam early in the second semester, so I’m staying up all night.”

“You were studying even up until the last day of summer vacation?”

“I’ve got a full curriculum to go through. I want to get higher scores so I can bring my OAA’s academic performance up to B or something.”

B or better is a big deal. I’ll honestly be impressed if he manages to achieve it. If he’s been studying hard during the summer break, it’s no question he’ll have improved his academic performance. Sudō’s become a man for whom the phrase “both literary and military arts” fits quite well. His tardiness, absenteeism, falling asleep, and other minor life problems have decreased dramatically. He still has a part of him that gets heated when the situation calls for it, but I guess that’s just Sudō’s personality.

“I’m going to ask you something weird, but do you think that Kanji guy has already kissed Shinohara or something?”

“Excuse me?”

“It’s great that he’s got a girlfriend, but it’s frustrating that he’s getting ahead of me. It’s been bothering me a lot lately, you know?”

“Why don’t you ask him directly? I think Ike would give it to you straight.”

“I can’t ask him that... if he says that he hasn’t even held hands yet or if he says he’s gone way further than that then my fists might start doing the talking.”

“Given Ike’s personality, he’s going to want to brag about it. If he doesn’t say it, then logically he hasn’t gone that far, right?”

“I guess you have a point. But maybe it’s different when it comes to love. I don’t know, I don’t have any experience. I’ve never asked, but have you ever had a girlfriend, Ayanokōji?”

I can’t help but feel Sudō’s passionate gaze on me as he asks, “What do you think?”

“There’s no use in lying to you, so I’ll confess to you that I got my first girlfriend a little while ago.”

“S-seriously? You’re serious?”

Faking it wasn’t a good idea, considering that it would soon spread from Kei herself.

When I answered honestly, Sudō sighed as he held his head. Right after that, he hurriedly grabbed me by both shoulders.

“No, no, no, no, no, no, no!”

“Don’t worry. It’s not who you think it is.”

“Really? You’re sure it’s not Suzune, aren’t you?”

“Yes. It’s not.”

“Oh, I see. Well, that’s okay then... I thought my heart was going to stop for a second...” He put his left palm to his forehead and wiped it messily, as if sweat had broken out. Then he showed me the sweat on his palm, showing off his impatience.

“Then who is it?”

“It’s...”

“Ah! I found you!”

Just as Sudō regained his composure, we could hear the sound of rushing footsteps from behind us. When those footsteps caught up with our walking speed, she looked up at me with a somewhat angry face.

“We were supposed to go to school together, but you didn’t tell me you weren’t in your room!” Kei complained, puffing out her cheeks and pouting.

“You never told me you wanted to go to school with me...”

“That’s because... I was nervous until the last minute.”

Sudō looked at us suspiciously as we suddenly started a mysterious exchange from his perspective.

“We were just talking about something important between men, so don’t interrupt us.”

Apparently, he hadn’t noticed the nature of our conversation. He didn’t seem to be happy with the fact that she had shown up here. When you think about it, the two of them hardly ever get along. They’re neither close nor bad. If anything, they’re just bad.

“Kei, are you going to tell them about us today?”

“Huh? Umm, hmm. I was considering the timing but... It’s not like I’m going to announce it as soon as I get to school. It’s surprisingly difficult to make an announcement like this. It’s not the same as saying, “Listen to me, I have to tell you something.”

“It seems like you were quick to declare when you were with Yōsuke.”

“Well, that’s the thing, isn’t it? This is a completely different situation.”

“Hey, hey, what are you talking about...?” Sudō, who had been showing signs of dullness, stopped and looked dumbfounded, as if he had caught on to the

fact that I was calling Kei by her first name and what I was saying.

“Yo, what? Why are you talking to her like that, Ayanokōji?”

He still couldn’t seem to make a connection, but he started getting an idea. In a sense, he was a good icebreaker in terms of who to tell first.

“We’re dating.”

Kei grinned and then bumped me on my shoulder with her own. I think she was just happy to hear me say it.

“Ha... hahaha! Oh my god!”

I guess he was taken aback, so he shouted out loud, more exaggeratedly than I imagined. There were no classmates around by chance, but other students turned their heads to see what was going on.

“Can you please quiet down?”

“Wow, my bad. But, no, eh! Hey, why is it Karuizawa?”

“What’s that, does that mean there’s something wrong with me?”

“It’s not that there’s nothing wrong with you but...”

He looked between the two of us as if he was a little taken back, and twisted his head in an unconvincing manner.

“What, did you want me to go out with Horikita?”

“Nah, screw that! No, that’s not what I meant but... hey.”

He grabbed my shoulder and put his lips close to my ear and whispered in a quiet voice,

“I’m sorry to say this, but... Karuizawa was dating Hirata, and before that, I don’t know what kind of flashy relationships she had in junior high school, you know? You’re not dissatisfied or uncomfortable by that? Isn’t she too much of a hurdle for your first girlfriend?”

I guess that’s the image that my classmates have of Karuizawa Kei. In fact, that’s how I perceived her too, until I learned about her past.

“What are you whispering about?”

“Nah, it’s nothing.”

I’m not going to push the matter further. I’m sure he felt bad for saying something so close to rumours in the first place.

“Ayanokōji and Karuizawa are dating...? I’m trying to make sense of it but I just can’t wrap my head around it. My sleepiness is getting to me, this is too much for me in the morning.”

I’m sure I’ll hear more from Sudō about it later on.

# 1

As we arrived at school, we occasionally passed third-year students, and they looked at me the same way they did when I was on the boat, but there is no sign of Sudō noticing.

During the summer vacation, I kept seeing this same scene whenever I went outside, but I don't think I'll ever really get used to it. The act of being watched gives a strong sense of oppression and blockage. This is something that will continue unless I erase the existence of the gaze itself.

Kei quickly gathered a group of girls to talk about the summer vacation, and Sudō started chatting with his good friends Ike and Hondo. I waited for the bell to ring while chatting briefly with the Ayanokōji Group.

Eventually, Chabashira-sensei arrived, looking the same as she did in the first semester.

“In this second semester, there are a few big events coming up for you guys. First of all, there will be a sports festival, similar to the one held last year. Obviously, it will be a test of the students' physical abilities. This will be held in October. Some rules will differ this time around, but the base concept is still the same. Testing of each individual students' physical ability.”

Right now, Chabashira-sensei was talking about a battle that would soon begin that would strongly require physical ability; a battle that could be troublesome for students who only excelled in their studies. The rules are different from those of the first year, which is also a concern.

“And in November, we will be holding a cultural festival, which will be our first cultural festival in the history of Advanced Nurturing High School. The details will be announced, just like the sports festival, but we'll take the time to do this in parallel starting in September.”

September will mainly be spent preparing for the festival, with an extra few hours of physical education classes per week. After the P.E. festival in October, the students should start practising for the cultural festival in November.

There's also a school trip coming up, although I'm not sure if it's related to a special exam.

“Furthermore, in between these events, there will of course be midterm and final exams.”

There was no doubt that it would be a busy second semester.

“I'll explain more about the sports festival later, but first let's talk about the cultural festival.”

In terms of order, the sports festival came first, but Chabashira-sensei began to talk about the details regarding the cultural festival.

“The cultural festival will be held with a large number of guests. You will have to compete with the classes of all years in the festival for the total amount of sales. You can apply for as many items as you like, but the budget is limited. Please look over your tablets for details.”

### **[Outline of the Cultural Festival]**

- Each second-year student will be given 5,000 private points that can be used only in preparation for the festival.*
- First-year students will receive 5,500 points and third-year students receive 4,500 points.*
- Additional funds will be given for social contributions such as student council service, and for contributions made through club activities.*
- Details will be announced for each class once they are finalized.*
- The initial cost and additional funds will not be reflected in the final sales, and will be confiscated if unused.*
- 100 class points will be awarded to the 1st through 4th place classes.*
- 50 class points will be awarded to the 5th through 8th place classes.*
- Class points for 9th to 12th place will remain unchanged.*

As for the rewards, a relatively large number of class points were available, and there are no penalties for finishing lower than 8th place. The rules are straightforward and easy to understand. It was clear why they announced the details of the cultural festival before the sports festival. I guessed it was because they couldn't start preparations until the rules were explained. As for the sports festival, there's not much to it besides training physically every day.

“Hey, it's kind of like a middle school cultural festival.”

It may not be exactly the same, but I could understand why Shinohara would say that.

I can't see any risk of losing class points or getting expelled. The fact that I'm tempted to wonder if there's more to it than what we see is probably evidence that I've become deeply ingrained in the structure of this school.

“It will also be important to determine which areas of the grounds are reserved. For example, if you want to set up your stall near the main gate, where visitors will definitely pass by, you will have to pay the school for the space.”

The students, including me, looked over the new information that had been sent to the tablet. It was a map of the grounds with the title ‘List of Possible Stalls on the Grounds’ and the names of possible stall locations combined with locations and numbers. The location closest to the main gate mentioned by Chabashira-sensei is labeled “Main Gate 1” and the cost of the location is 10,000 points. If the



location is far away from the main gate and difficult for guests to get to, it's low cost or even free. The budget without considering additional funds was about 200,000. If you think about it, 10,000 points isn't anywhere near cheap.

However, there is no doubt that it is a prime location that is expected to attract many customers.

“It is possible that there will be conflicts with other classes and grades regarding the location of the stall, but only one class per location can use that location. If there is a conflict of interest, a bidding war will be held, and the class that offers the school the highest bid will get the right to use that space.”

In other words, if you are forced to spend a high amount of points in order to secure a prime location, this in turn will drastically cut the budget that can be allocated to the show. The class will be spending the next two months figuring out how to fight efficiently with a limited budget.

“The school will not disclose which class will be doing what kind of performance or where the stalls will be until the day of the festival. However, be aware that you can't plug the ears of other students. If the information is leaked, you should expect to be faced with consequences.”

Even if you come up with an ideal exhibit, there's always the risk that other classes will copy it and take countermeasures.

“There will be things that you may need from time to time. If there's something you can't get on the premises, you can apply for and get it from outside if you gain permission. As long as it's within the terms of the agreement, you're free to use the budget however you want.”

I guess I'll have to look into that and other details sometime later.

“These are the descriptions of the cultural festival and its rules. The specific preparation and set-up period will start after the end of the sports festival, but please start discussing today and use your own time to decide what the events will be and how the budget will be allocated.”

It seems that the more time we have to devote to the festival, the more chance of success we'll have.

## 2

After school, most of my classmates were still in the classroom, except for those who were going to club activities. It was, of course, the first discussion for the cultural festival to be held in November. There must be a certain number of students who had experienced a festival in middle school. I don't have any particular information to share, so I'll be the listener as usual.

"First of all, I'll give you a list of the events that can be held."

Yōsuke, who had gotten permission to use the classroom monitor, typed on his tablet.

"When it comes to cultural festivals, food, haunted houses, and the like are the orthodox ones, aren't they?"

Food-related, haunted houses, mazes, cafes, live music, plays, etc. The obvious ones are added and listed one by one.

"The event will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. If we serve food and drinks, we can expect the adults of the guest house to come and take advantage of it. However, this may increase the competition..."

"It's just a matter of budget. Compared to things like haunted houses and mazes, which can be built once and cost less thereafter, it will inevitably be more expensive."

Some of the music equipment can be rented for a fee, but the number is limited, so the sooner we register the better. There is also the question of how many students are skilled enough to make a profit.

"We have 39 students in our class. That means that the budget we are looking at right now is 195,000 points. Honestly, it's not a lot to work with. It's not an easy decision to make when it comes to food."

"I have a suggestion, if you don't mind."

"I welcome your input, Horikita-san."

"As Hirata-kun said, the budget we can allocate for the festival is limited. But no matter how much we discuss it on the table, there are still many things we don't know. Even if we were to cook *takoyaki* at a food stall, we would need to know what ingredients to use, our skills, and many other things. If that's the case, maybe we should bring our ideas to the class and test them repeatedly, even if we have to use private points."

Many of the students nodded their heads in agreement at this suggestion.

It's true that it's important to actually try out cooking, serving, or whatever you do. Of course, there is a risk of paying for it out of one's own pocket, but it's easy to dismiss it as a necessary upfront investment if it will pay back in class points later on.

“But... Oh, I don’t mean to say anything bad about the current idea, but I think some people will be reluctant to do anything if they have to pay for it themselves.” Matsushita said, fearing that some of the students would be left to their own devices and not put any effort into the cultural festival.

“That’s fine. I don’t want to waste my time with a random idea. However, I can’t ignore the people who are trying their best to contribute. If you come up with an idea for an event that you think is a good idea, you should actively present it. If the idea is adopted, how about paying a reward to the planner?”

“Yes, that’s a good idea. It’s not a bad idea to reward people for their hard work and contributions.”

“We’ll work out the specifics later, but for example, if we get 100 class points for the festival, the entire class will get 390,000 private points per month. I’ll divide this by the number of people who planned it and give it to them as a reward. This way, there should be no complaints.”

If we were to have five events, that would be 78,000 points per person. If the number of people who came up with the idea or helped out is too large to divide, you can divide the total amount by the total amount for two or three months. This way, the students who are actively involved in the festival will benefit, and the students who cut corners will benefit later on. Most importantly, if it would increase class points, I wouldn’t be opposed to it.

“The other thing we need to do is to keep all the information private so that no one can steal our ideas. Whether you’re at school, in the dorms, or at the Keyaki Mall, be careful what you say.”

Thorough confidentiality. This was very important for the next two months of preparation.

### 3

For the next two weeks, our school life went on as usual. We were preparing for the school festival and the sports festival at the same time, and working hard on our schoolwork. It was a precious time when we could say that we were repeating the same routine as in a normal school. Surprisingly, the relationship between Kei and I did not spread from Sudō, and there was no sign of anyone new knowing about us.

It was the third Wednesday after school in the middle of September. I was seated at the back of the class, and I caught the sight of an unusual encounter. Someone was approaching Horikita who was sitting in the center of the front row.

“Hey, Horikita-san I wanted to ask you something.”

It was Satō, who was a bit reserved. She was one of the girls that Horikita never got involved with.

“I have an errand to run to the student council in an hour, so as long as it doesn’t take that long, I don’t mind. What is it?”

She didn’t show any suspicious expression, but I guess she didn’t have much experience being approached by Satō. When she asked her back curiously, she continued in a slightly whispered voice.

“We’ve been thinking a lot about what we’re going to do for the festival right? You asked us to let you know if we had any ideas.”

“Yes. I’d love to hear your pitch, but-”

“That’s it, let me make a pitch, I’ve come up with an idea that will really win this festival.”

Satō’s confidence peeked through, but Horikita didn’t look easily impressed. That’s because in the past ten days or so, many students have been coming to Horikita with their ideas. Both boys and girls have repeatedly proposed ideas to Horikita, as there is a reward if they are accepted.

The proposals range from the traditional to the bizarre, but one thing they all have in common is that Horikita won’t even take them seriously if all they have is a name for the exhibit. On the same day that the reward for the proposal was announced, Hondō immediately proposed that we sell fried chicken because it was delicious. However, Horikita shut him down, telling him to come up with an actual pitch. She didn’t even show any interest in accepting the idea.

The next day, undaunted, Hondō submitted a proposal for making fried chicken, but all it contained was a recipe for fried chicken that he must have picked up from the Internet and an impassioned speech about how much he would sell it for and how tasty it would be.

Looking at the low-level proposal, Horikita reiterated the importance of a proposal. If you were to open a fried food shop, how much would the cost be, where would the store be located, how many human resources would be needed, how much would the fixed price be, how many customers would be expected, and what would be the basis for that? After that, Horikita announced that she would only listen to the ideas of those who had put them together properly.

After that, it seemed that the number of people who simply approached Horikita with proposals would decrease, but surprisingly, the number of students who brought in well-developed proposals increased every day. Some of the proposals were actually put on Horikita's list for consideration.

However, none of the proposals had been adopted yet because they lacked a definitive message.

“Well then, let's see what you have.”

“Oh, yes. Of course, I've prepared something but... this isn't the best place for it. Can you give me some time to show you what I mean?”

“If you say so. Where do you want me to go?”

“Let's see, an empty classroom in half an hour. I've got permission from the teacher.”

“An empty classroom?”

Horikita asked back curiously, and after saying goodbye to her, Satō turned away and looked towards me. My eyes met hers and she started to approach me.

“Hey, Ayanokōji-kun. Do you have some time later...?”

“Me? I don't have any particular plans today.”

“You heard what I said earlier, right? I'd like you to come with me and Horikita-san in half an hour.”

“Why me too?”

“That's a secret for now. You'll know when you get here.”

Just like his attitude towards Horikita earlier, Satō's face was full of confidence. Since I had no reason to deny her request, I agreed.

“I'll be waiting for you then!”

After checking the time on her phone, Satō hurried out of the classroom.

“What's with her? She seemed so confident.”

“Doesn't that mean she's thought of a good idea?”

“Even if she did, why did she bother to call me?”

I don't know what the big deal was, but I'll find out in half an hour. Horikita and I decided to kill some time in the classroom before heading to the special building.

# 4

Since we were headed to the same place anyway, I walked with Horikita to the special building. When we arrived in front of the classroom designated by Satō, for some reason, we found Maezono there.

“Oh, I’m on guard duty. I don’t think there’s anyone coming to the special wing after school, but I had to make sure.”

“You were on guard...? This is a lot more elaborate than I thought.”

She seemed surprised that they had even set up a security system, although it was important to keep your exhibit a secret until the day of the event. Not only did they ask the teacher to rent a room in the special building, but they also set up a guard to prevent third parties from interfering. In addition, there was a simple but effective barrier to prevent people from seeing the inside of the classroom through shaded windows.

“Well then, I’ll take a look inside right away.”

“Oh, wait a minute. From here on, it’s going to be a practical format, so both Horikita-san and Ayanokōji-kun should experience it as customers.”

“Oh? I understand that you’ve planned this out quite thoroughly. This is easier to understand than looking at a poorly written plan.”

Seeing how elaborate the process was, Horikita would undoubtedly be raising her expectations. Whether or not she actually decides to adopt their idea is another matter, but it’s clear even at this point that they’re making a real effort to win the cultural festival. I’m sure Horikita will be happy to see the effort.

Horikita and I checked again to make sure there were no other people around, and then slowly opened the door. The first thing that jumped out at us was an unexpectedly colorful décor. The room was so brightly decorated that it was hard to believe that it was an inorganic and nondescript classroom.

“This is...”

“Welcome~. We’re Maimai, the maid café!”

All at once, three girls, each in a distinctive costume, greeted us.

The two girls who greeted us here, Satō and Matsushita, were dressed as maids. Mii-chan, who was looking at us shyly, was dressed in a Chinese style maid suit.

The classrooms are usually equipped with monitors, but the special wing, which is rarely used, still seems to have a whiteboard. The name of the restaurant was written on the whiteboard in a cute way with a marker.

We were shown to our seats and given a handmade menu list.

“What would you like to order, master?”

“Hold on. Can I ask you something before I order?”

“Go on.”

“Didn’t it take a lot of time and money just to prepare this?”

It certainly looks like it would be difficult to prepare on the same day. Even if they could do their best to decorate, what did they do about the costumes?

“Ayanokōji-kun has a point. How long did it take, Matsushita-san?”

“About four days of preparation. I think the cost I incurred is surprisingly reasonable. All in all, 13,200 private points. The three of us here and Maezono planned it and split the cost, so it’s 3,300 points per person. The breakdown is that we bought three rental outfits and some decorations such as origami and pens at the general store. The tableware was our own, so there was no cost.”

I see, that’s the reason why the tableware lacks a sense of unity. Of course, since we are still in the planning stage, this is not a negative factor. In fact, I’m impressed with how well they prepared the event while keeping the cost to a minimum.

“The impact was perfect, better than anything I’ve ever seen. But...”

Horikita praised the presentation, saying that it was perfect for grabbing the audience, but she wasn’t so naive as to make a decision based on that.

“I wonder if you’ve created a budget for the whole thing. I’d like to see a concrete process.”

Satō motioned towards Mii-chan sharply.

“Well, I’ve summarized as much as I can...”

Taking out a clear file from her bag satchel, Mii-chan presents it to Horikita. There were three pages of details written in beautiful, clean letters, probably written by Mii-chan. She said that she had rented the costumes, but that she had gotten quotes from three different companies and rented one costume each. The price, quality, and selection of items were compared. The difference in cost between the cheapest and most expensive tableware to be used on the day. The number of people to be expected, and the difference in guest capacity due to this.

“This is head and shoulders above any proposal I’ve seen so far. That’s quintessential.”

When I praised her honestly, Satō and Matsushita poked Mii-chan in the side and told her that she was being praised. He still looked embarrassed, but bowed his head to meet her lightly.

So far, the project proposal from Satō and the others could be said to be perfect. However....

“That’s certainly an interesting proposal. It may not be an uncommon genre, but I feel that it has potential if it’s put together properly. However, there are some disadvantages. The costume rental fee is 4000 points per outfit. If that’s the case as per the proposal, 40,000 points for 10 outfits. After that, the estimated cost of preparing snacks and drinks is 50,000 points. This alone is 90,000 in total.

Classroom decorations cost 5,000 points, and if you add in the cost of the location, you're looking at... that's not a cheap price to pay."

Even if the manpower doesn't require a wage and can be secured without difficulty, it would mean spending almost half of the current budget on one event.

"Yes, that's true, but I think we can raise the sales price to counter that."

The menu list that Satō and the others made, for example, cost 800 points for a cup of tea. The price is higher than what you would pay for a cup of tea at a café in the Keyaki Mall. Of course, the price could be revised downward significantly depending on future adjustments, but they still think it has a good chance of selling.

Horikita's face was serious as she read over the three separate proposals. However, the outfits of Satō and the others around her seemed strange and unrealistic, like a fairy tale. Eventually, perhaps having come to a conclusion, Horikita looks up.

"I'm going to check again, but no one saw this performance, right?"

"Of course not." She nodded her head, looking confident. Satō and Mii-chan followed suit.

"Very well. I'll do my best to make sure this maid café goes through. Can you guys further scrutinize this proposal, including thorough cost reduction?"

"Really? Yes!"

The three of them exchanged a touch each for joy.

"It's too early to rejoice. Don't forget that we're still in the process of reviewing the proposal."

Although she said this, it was still a big leap forward that Horikita was even seriously considering this idea.

As the two of us walked out into the hallway, Maezono, who had been watching us, waved happily at us. The commotion in the classroom must have reached Maezono's ears as well.

"I'm kind of surprised how well that went."

"I wouldn't readily admit it was a good idea if I didn't feel that way. In fact, most of the ideas that were brought to me were rejected on the spot, or at best, put on hold. That's how powerful their presentation was."

The idea of a maid cafe is not that unusual. However, it seemed that Horikita was willing to help because she saw the potential for our class to show off its strengths and impress the guests.

"So, even if some other class adopts the same maid cafe, we can win?"

"I'm fairly certain we have a good chance."

Even if you open a store with bad food, you'll be fighting against several rivals. On the other hand, even if one or two maid cafes are covered, you might be



able to screw them over with your strength. Aside from the three people who wore the same costumes, there are still other students who could be useful.

“I’m going to ask for your help Ayanokōji-kun to ensure that the girls’ project is a success.”

“My help? Don’t tell me you want me to cosplay as well?”

“Why are you so stupid? I’m going to give it my all, but I’ll also need some help from the boys, right? I think that kind of thing should be handled by you.”

“No well... I know what you mean, but... I’m sure there are other suitable people.”

“Right. Ike-kun, Hondō-kun and the others may have better eyes for this kind of thing. But if you tell them about this, it could lead to a leak. They seem to be light on their feet.”

“Can’t deny that.”

“I don’t want to unnecessarily increase the number of people who know what’s going on inside. You understand, don’t you?”

“I see.”

Maybe it was just my bad luck that Satō had called me here, and I was destined for this.

“So, I’ll leave the selection of people to you first. Of course, you can tell whoever takes the job about the case, but remember to keep it a secret. If anything happens to you, the project will be shut down.” That’s how important it was to keep the information safe. “In that sense, I want to keep the number of people sharing information to a minimum. Can I leave everything to you? I’ll set up a formal budget later, and I’ll need you to arrange people, pay for everything, and manage it.”

“Wait, wait. You’re taking a big leap at once. You’re just going to leave it to me?”

“There’s no single program for this festival. In terms of the balance of men, women and human resources, multiple stalls are a must. It’s also going to be quite a challenge to figure out how to increase sales on a low budget, and I’d rather focus on that.”

I was tempted to let her handle the entire thing at this point but she strongly felt I should share some of the burden.

“So, you’re accepting my offer, right?”

I don’t remember showing any pretense of wanting to accept, but I didn’t have much of a choice.

“I suppose so.”

I wonder if it is possible for me to run an ideal maid cafe. I can’t say I’m very confident. I’m not sure how many more waitresses I’m going to be able to

recruit. Still, for now that I've got Satō and Matsushita down. Even though it is still a long way off, the list will need to be compiled in the near future.

"I'm going to head to the student council room. I'll see you later." Said Horikita interrupting my thoughts.

"I'll head back too then."

I was about to leave the special building when I spotted Chabashira-sensei; who didn't seem to be passing by chance, given the location.

"You've seen Satō and the others? I heard about the performance. And what they're planning to do. Not a bad idea."

"It was great. For Satō and the others, they had to make sure that pitch was good enough first before they can even start actual preparations"

It's no laughing matter to have prepared so much in earnest without knowing if they'll get permission.

"I was wondering how you were doing personally, so I thought I'd come check on you. How have things been going?"

"Horikita was positive, so I suppose things are going fine. I guess they figured the odds were in their favor. We're working out the details now."

"I see. Then it looks like it's an easier road from here on out.

"They got me involved, though, so things got a little tricky."

"What do you mean?"

"Under Horikita's direction, I've been assigned to direct the performance.

"Ayanokōji leading a maid café...?" Chabashira-sensei laughed somewhat mirthlessly as she gave me a pitiful look. "Horikita makes some pretty interesting suggestions."

"I think people like Ike and Hondō are many times more suited to this kind of thing to be perfectly honest."

"As for understanding otaku culture, that may be true. But what's important at a cultural festival is sales. They may be able to improve the quality of their performance, but they aren't good at calculating and making a profit. That's why it's important for you to supervise them. It's a problem that can be solved by asking them for their opinions if necessary."

Easy for you to say. In order to absorb opinions, we must also acquire a minimum level of knowledge. If we only listen to advice in ignorance, there's no guarantee that we'll arrive at the right answer, and conversely, it's difficult to point out what's wrong.

"You've got to be hungry for the opportunity to learn something other than studying. The manager of the maid café sounds like a hefty role."

"I guess so."

I was about to leave, but Chabashira-sensei stopped me in my tracks.

“Ayanokōji. Next time you’re free... can you give me a few minutes of your time?”

“Next time? When?”

“I’ll send you a message soon. Would that be okay?”

“Well, I don’t mind. If I have plans, I’ll make myself available.”

I could have refused, but after receiving a serious look from Chabashira-sensei, I decided to accept.



## Chapter 2: 2 Teachers, and the Special Exam of Fate

**T**HE NEXT MORNING, I was assigned to be the manager of a maid café.

As Chabashira-sensei entered the room, the students immediately noticed something was off when they saw her face.

This time, however, the word “special exam” probably didn’t come to mind first. The main reason for this is that they probably thought that the next exam would be the sports festival. And then, after that, the culture festival.

“Before the sports festival in October, you will have to undergo a new special exam.”

The students were a little upset. This time last year, everybody was already preparing for the sports festival, and there were no other special exams, but this year is different.

“I’ve just got through the gruelling deserted island exam and now I’ve got to take another special exam...”

As is becoming the norm, Ike’s frustration leaking out was the first thing that could be heard. For Ike, who had overcome the fear of being expelled from the school to go out with Shinohara Satsuki, it must be a daunting prospect. No matter how well you get to know each other or how close you become, as a result of special examinations, sudden expulsions could happen. Students with low overall OAA performances are undoubtedly at particular risk of this.

“What the hell guys. We’ll just have to get through a few extra exams before we get to the sports festival.” Sudō, who has absolute confidence in his athleticism, pumps his fist.

“Please don’t get carried away Sudō-kun.”

“Oh.” Immediately, Horikita’s warning made Sudō a little sullen, and he fell silent.

What a good master-servant relationship development- I mean, friendship.

“If we’re being honest, there are few cases of special exams at this time of year. In fact, there is no special exam for the first-year or third-year students.”

“Does that mean that only us second years will have to face a special exam before the sports festival?” Satō asked, leaning back in her chair.

Chabashira-sensei nodded with no objection.

“The school is giving you the recognition you deserve; you second years

have performed very well.”

“Isn’t that strange? You’re giving us a special exam because you’ve evaluated us positively?”

“It’s true that special exams come with risks that you need to be wary of. Some students may lose class points, private points, or even be expelled. However, on the other hand, they also provide you many opportunities to live a more fulfilling school life. The more special exams you undergo, the more chances you have of being promoted to Class A, which we believe is the most important thing.”

It’s true that it’s extremely difficult to earn class points in your everyday life. If anything, the period when special exams are *not* being held is a time where class points can only be lowered. Whether it be the deserted island exam or something else, it is only when special exams are held that we get the chance to move up to a higher class.

“Happiness and sadness are two sides of the same coin. So the risk is the benefit, right?”

Horikita, who listened from beside Chabashira-sensei, calmly accepted the situation.

“That’s how it is.”

“There’s nothing to be afraid of. We’re definitely closing in on Class A now. We’ve got a chance to escape from the three-way battle for Class B, which is currently underway.”

The more opportunities you have, the better. That’s a sentiment we all share when it comes to moving up.

“That’s true... And complaining isn’t going to stop the special exams.”

Horikita’s words were met with approval by Satō and the rest of the class.

Although still incomplete, Horikita’s growth as a pillar of support has certainly had a positive influence on her classmates. Inwardly, I think Chabashira-sensei is also happy, but she doesn’t show it on her face. She’s never been one to show her sweet side, but this time I feel like she is showing it more than ever.

“You’ll be taking part in what’s known as the ‘Unanimous Voting Exam’.”

The monitors light up and the explanation begins with customary visuals.

“This special exam is very simple. As such, I will be taking questions from you if you have any concerns at any time. The special exam will be held tomorrow, and as you can probably guess from the name, it will consist of a series of multiple-choice votes which you will have to repeat as a class until you reach a unanimous decision.”

“Tomorrow? That’s quite sudden.”

There was no time to prepare. Of course, there is no advantage or disadvantage, as every class shares equal conditions, but Class C, which had just started to settle down, began to buzz again.

“As I said before, this test is simple. There is no need to spend a lot of time discussing it beforehand, so the school sees no problem in doing it tomorrow.”

Repeat the vote in class until it is unanimous.

With that alone, there certainly didn’t appear to be any complexity in it.

“So you’re saying that we aren’t competing against another class this time?”

More importantly, Yōsuke immediately asked for clarification on this point.

“Yes. You will not be competing against students from other classes, as this is a special exam that will only be conducted within each class. On the day of the exam, the school will give you five questions to complete. The questions are the same for all classes, so there is no imbalance.”

This is not surprising, as the difficulty level would vary from class to class if the questions varied.

“I’ll get right to it and provide you with an example to help you understand.”

### [Example:]

*You lose 5 class points, but all your classmates gain 10,000 private points. You can vote for or against.*

The question was displayed on the monitor. The content was simple and straightforward, as advertised.

“Hmm? What’s this? Well... we’ll lose 5 class points, but gain 10,000 private points instead... What kind of question is this? Is it a gain? Is it a loss?”

Shinohara said aloud, folding her fingers and trying to calculate the gain and loss in her head.

It wasn’t surprising that a number of unexpected questions came up. Even if it was just an example, I was expecting more of a choice. Each class point equates to 100 private points. That means that the value of 5 class points is 500 private points. At first glance, the 10,000 private points are by far more valuable.

However, the class points themselves will continue to have value. In one

month, 5 class points are only worth 500 private points, but over the course of a year, just 5 class points become 6,000 private points. If we consider the time remaining until graduation, there will be 18 months where we receive private points between October of the second year and March of the third year. This means that 5 class points can be thought of as 9000 private points.

You can either gain 10,000 private points immediately, or you can gradually earn them until graduation and gain a total of 9,000 private points. The former is slightly more profitable in terms of private points alone.

But it's not that simple.

If we chose to lose five class points here, and missed out on Class A at the end of the race by that margin, we would have made the worst possible choice here, and would look back on it that way.

Of course, the odds of five points being the difference between Class A and Class B are slim-to-none, so it may well be that it is better to take the 10,000 private points.

In the end, there are advantages and disadvantages no matter which perspective you take.

“In response to this question, thirty-nine people will vote from the options presented to them in full anonymity. A hundred questions are as good as one answer, so let's give it a go. I know many of you have questions, but I want you to try it out without any discussion. You can vote for or against from your tablets.”

The tablet screens of the students in the class, including mine, are switched by Chabashira-sensei.

The tablet presented the contents of the question, and I could select either for or against. It was the most unusual special exam we've had. I decided to give it some serious thought.

Private points have no direct effect on class points. If you vote for, all your classmates will get 10,000 points, which is a straightforward bonus. However, by doing so, you lose 5 class points, and while it's only 5, points are points.

In this case, we need to consider how we think in terms of human nature.

It's not a question of whether it is better to gain 10,000 private points or to preserve 5 class points, but the other way around. It is a question of which choice will save you from regret.

I decided to vote 'for' and see what the result would be, because I didn't think it was a good idea to have the vote be unanimous the first time.

Soon after, the vote was complete, and Chabashira-sensei looked up from



her tablet.

“Okay, now that everyone has voted, I’d like to display the results as soon as possible.”

With that said, the result was displayed on the monitor.

**[Results of the first round of voting:]**

*3 in favour, 36 opposed.*

I knew that there would be more opposition, but it was by a greater margin than I had imagined.

“Oh, what? You’ll get more for 10,000 private points than you’ll get for 5 class points, right? Did I do the math wrong? Why is it so much the other way around?”

Ike, who seemed to have voted in favour of the proposal, looked around at his classmates and asked curiously.

“It’s true that the 10,000 private points are more valuable than the 5 class points. However, class points are essential to achieve Class A. If the difference is only 1,000 points, why bother to reduce your precious class points?”

Here is a theoretical explanation of why Horikita, who seems to have voted against it.

“In the unlikely event that a difference of five class points makes the difference between winning and losing, you wouldn’t be able to stop regretting it.”

Like me, many students are worried about the “just in case” risk. It is also important to remember that three other classes will be taking on the same challenge. If the three classes are unanimous in their choice of class points, this class will be the only one to take a step backwards. Of course, it would be a different story if we could make use of the 10,000 private points we would have gained.

“Each of you has your own opinion, but let’s hear it. There are 36 votes against, which is a huge margin, but it’s not unanimous, so we’ll have to do this again. In the actual exam, there will be a fixed 10-minute interval before the next vote. During this interval, you will be allowed to talk freely, as you are now, and sometimes leave your seats and exchange views, but for now we will skip this. Let the voting begin again.”

The aim of this test is to make the vote unanimous.  
If the vote is not unanimous, it is invalid, and a 10-minute interval is enforced.

Even if we could reach a consensus quickly, we would lose a lot of time.  
Due to the way this special exam was structured, it was safe to assume that there will probably be a time limit.

If the disagreement continues, there would be a possibility that the time runs out...

So, for the second round, the only thing to do is to vote against it, without even thinking about it.

If you pitch against it, you can bring it to unanimity.

That's why I decided to vote "yes" for the second time.

I thought that this would give my classmates a better understanding of this special exam.

**[Result of the second round of voting:]**

*2 in favour, 37 opposed.*

"Oh, hey, hey, hey, who's still voting yes after what you just said?"

"I'm sorry, it's me, Sudō-kun. I tried to avoid being unanimous. It seems that there is someone else who had the same idea as me, but..."

She didn't look at me, but I think she was referring to me.

"This is the result of the second vote. The vote was almost completely against, but there were still two votes in favour. In this case, there will be a further interval of 10 minutes before voting resumes. The test is to reach a final unanimous vote of 39 in favour or 39 against. Of course, whatever is chosen in this way will actually be adopted. In this case, if the vote is 39 in favour, you will all receive 10,000 private points, but you will lose 5 class points. On the other hand, if 39 votes are cast against the proposal, the proposal becomes invalid and has no effect whatsoever."

This means that the challenge will end without anyone gaining or losing any points.

"It's not unanimous, but to save time we'll move on to the next example."

**[Example:]**

*1 million private points to one person in the class. (In the event of a unanimous vote in favour, the pupil who will be awarded points will be voted on.)*

*You can vote for or against.*

“You may think it’s an example, but in the real exam, we forbid private conversations before the first vote. In other words, you have to genuinely face the question and vote first.”

So it’s not until before the second vote that we discuss what we thought about the question.

**[Results of the first round of voting:]**

*39 in favour, 0 opposed.*

The obvious result is displayed: even if only one of the 39 students gets private points, there is almost no reason to choose the latter. Even if you are disappointed that you don’t get them, it will be difficult to achieve unanimity in opposition.

“If the question is to select a particular individual, the first step is the same as in the first example: to get a unanimous vote in favour or against. If the vote is unanimously against, the question ends, but if the vote is unanimous in favour, the question does not end, but goes one step further. After an interval, you will be asked to discuss who you would nominate. The tablet will show the names of all your classmates except yourself.”

The screen on the tablet was forced to switch and, sure enough, all names other than my own were laid out.

However, it is not in alphabetical order, but in an irregular order, with a mixture of boys and girls.

“To ensure anonymity, the position of each student’s name will be changed each time a vote is taken. This is also the case for options such as yes or no, which are also randomly changed. This is to prevent people from spying on the students next to them and guessing which one they voted for from the position of where their finger tapped the screen.”

She continued to explain the rules further, telling us that it will be impossible to know what other people have voted for.

“Once the discussion is underway, each student can vote at their own pace, simply by tapping on the student they wish to nominate. At the end of the 10 minutes, the student who has received the majority of the votes will be considered as the ‘specific student’. Suppose Ike is chosen by a majority of votes.”

“Oh, it’s me? Yes!”

“The right to vote is temporarily removed from Ike, the person in question, and the vote is cast by the other 38 people.”

A majority of students is naturally close to unanimous. I suppose that’s how recommendations work.

A new round of voting on questions that go one step further began, and we cast our votes.

**[Example:]**

*Ike Kanji is awarded 1 million private points.*

*You can vote for or against.*

**[Results of the 2nd round of voting:]**

*0 in favour, 38 opposed.*

“What? Wait, why hasn’t anyone voted in favour of this!”

“No ones gonna give you a million private points.” Sudō spoke for all of us in the class when he said what we must all be thinking.

“In the event of a unanimous vote against awarding the points to Ike, it will be passed that “no points will be awarded to Ike”, but that only removes Ike from the list of options and leaves the one million points up in the air. So, from the remaining 38 students, we will select another student to continue the question. However, if they are unable to reach a unanimous decision on who to award the points to before time runs out, the test will fail. Furthermore, please note that the one million points will not be awarded to anyone.”

“What? Does that mean my chances of getting them are now zero?”

“That’s the way it is. You wouldn’t have been removed from the list if there

had been even one vote in favour, though. We also invite candidates to stand. If they do so during the interval, they will be accepted as the ‘specific student’ on a first come, first served basis. However, only one candidate will be allowed per question.”

“So what happens if we don’t get a majority of nomination votes for a particular student in 10 minutes, or if there are no candidates? I’m sure those cases could be considered.”

“In that case, they will be randomly selected from within the class.”

They don’t wait for time or an question , they seem to force someone to start the voting.

“When it comes to choosing an individual, I think you might be wasting your time.”

That’s right. It’s like having more options for the number of people in your class. However, I don’t think it will be easy to decide on a randomly selected student.

“Let’s all keep our heads up. This special exam may turn out to be harder than we thought...”

Not all issues can be solved by talking about them.

There is a good chance that we will be forced to make choices that will never be able to be compromised on.

No, otherwise it would have no meaning as a special examination.

“I’ll give you one more example at the end. This time, we’ll have you do it in a real-life format to its completion.”

**[Example:]**

*It has been decided to build an additional facility in the Keyaki Mall. Which of the following would you prefer?*

- *Restaurants*
- *General shops*
- *Recreational facilities*
- *Medical facilities*

In contrast to the previous examples, this time the poll consists of four options rather than for or against.

I thought it was just a yes or no vote, but apparently that’s not the case. It

seems that the choices made here will actually be implemented, but if this were not an example, would it really mean that the facility will be built?

“When a question is passed in favour, etc., its content is actually approved. However, there is a special way of doing this for questions that affect the whole school. In such a case, the unanimous choice is simply the one chosen by the class. If this class is unanimous on the restaurant option, but the other three classes are unanimous on the entertainment option, then the additional entertainment option with three votes will be chosen.”

The meaning of what Chabashira-sensei was saying was probably clear to all. There are two types of questions: those that take immediate effect and those that are presented as a class vote. Either way, it will have to be carefully discussed and unanimously agreed upon.

Private conversations are not allowed before the first vote, so choose your options intuitively

- **[Results of the first round of voting:]**
- *20 for restaurants.*
- *4 for general shops.*
- *15 for recreational facilities.*
- *0 for medical facilities.*

“As it was not unanimous, we will have a 10-minute interval.”

This is where the interval comes in for the first time.

A ten-minute countdown began on the monitor behind the podium. This will continue until the time runs out and the next voting time is enforced.

Students are free to leave their seats and formulate their arguments as they wish, whether they speak out loud or whisper to someone in particular. I observed and waited to see what happens. Ten minutes passed without anyone giving any particular instructions, just chatting away as they pleased.

“Just before the end of the interval, you will be asked to return to your seat and prepare to vote. You will be given a maximum of 60 seconds to vote. If everyone votes quickly, we will move on to announcing the results without waiting

for the time limit.”

Unlike the compulsory 10-minute interval, it seems that the voting time can be shortened with some ingenuity.

“Students who do not complete their vote within 60 seconds will be penalised with an overtime penalty. Any student who allows 90 seconds overtime in total to elapse before completing the five questions will be expelled.”

This is the school’s way of making sure that students vote. If there is a student who refuses to vote, they will be forced to leave the school.

Even if you delayed every time you voted, you would lose valuable time if you didn’t finish your vote within 58 or 59 seconds, so it is unlikely that any student would bother to do so.

The second round of voting took place, and the results were displayed.

- **[Results of the second round of voting:]**
- *23 for restaurants*
- *2 for grocery shops*
- *14 votes for entertainment facilities*
- *0 votes for medical facilities*

As there was no talk of a consensus of opinion, the result was the same as the first one.

Unless it’s an obvious decision, it’s not easy to bring it to unanimity on the first vote.

And it is not so difficult to get 39 votes for a particular option once we have reached a consensus.

But that’s only if the questions are all as we expect.

Depending on the content, there will be some things that will require considerable discussion.

“This concludes the example, but you get the gist. In order to pass this special test, you must unanimously complete five questions within five hours. If you fail to complete all of the questions in the five hours, you will be penalised very heavily. The penalty loss is 300 class points.”

“Three hundred?!”

So it’s a special exam that is an absolute necessity to clear.

“But if you can finish it in time, you get 50 class points.”

The rewards and penalties seem unbalanced, but they are reasonable when you consider the difficulty of the test.

“There’s no need to panic. We don’t have to fight with anyone this time, we just have to be united in our views. We can re-run the vote as many times as time permits, with an interval in between.”

“You can now see roughly the outline of this special exam. You will see a summary of the rules. Those of you who feel the need to save it may take a screenshot to use as reference.”



## [Overview of the Unanimous Voting exam]

### [Rules explanation]

- *All classmates have to vote on a set of options in response to a question posed by the school.  
(There are a total of five questions with a maximum of four options.)*
- *Unless one of the choices is unanimous, the same question will be repeated.*
- *If you run out of time in the middle of a question, it will not be approved at all, regardless of the progress of the question.*
- *Unanimously approved proposals are actually adopted, regardless of whether the class passes or fails the special examination.*
- *Earn 50 class points for completing all questions.*
- *If you do not complete all questions within 5 hours you will lose 300 class points.*

### [Special examination process]

- *You will be presented with a challenge and you will cast your first vote (within 60 seconds).*
- *If there is unanimous agreement, move on to the next question (1). If it is not unanimous, go to (3).*
- *10-minute interval, during which time students are free to move about and discuss within the classroom.*
- *60 seconds voting time (you can't discuss, only vote.)  
(Students who do not complete their vote within 60 seconds will receive an overtime penalty.)  
(If the accumulated penalty exceeds 90 seconds, the student will be expelled.)*
- *If the results are unanimous, proceed to the next question and go to (1).  
If unanimous agreement is not reached, return to (3).*

Repeat the process, and when you have completed the five questions, the special test will be completed. If you fail, you will be penalised. Losing 300 class points here could mean losing your ticket to Class A. This is not an exaggeration.

If the other three classes all clear the exam and we don't, that would open up a 350-point gap to the others.

We can talk about it as much as we like, but the main obstacle is that it is a completely anonymous vote in which it is impossible to know who voted for what.

You can vote in favour and still claim to have voted against.

“We teachers do not know what kind of questions will be asked of you. Some of you may be optimistic, but I would advise you not to be complacent. In addition, it is strictly forbidden to make any agreements with other students that bind them to vote for a particular option in this exam. It is also forbidden to exchange money with other students to bind them to a particular choice. This applies equally to your own class as it does to other classes.”

So you're not allowed to force people to bind their choices?

They may be able to unite and consolidate their votes to a certain extent, but they can't create guarantees.

If there is a contract that says you can only vote for option 1, then there could be one person who has signed such a contract, and that could make the test dysfunctional.

That alone would make it possible to carry out vicious attacks against other classes.

“Thorough monitoring of the rules will be carried out by the school. If it is found that a third party outside the class has been involved and is able to continue to make unilateral choices, there will be no mercy and expulsion for anyone involved. Please be prepared for this. I also assure you that if anyone is approached about any wrongdoing, they should report it immediately to the school and we will do our best to resolve it.”

If time runs out on the special exam, which is a prerequisite for clearing the exam, the school will undoubtedly carry out an investigation.

The mere mention of it would probably incur a heavy penalty, so even people like Ryūen would be unlikely to make any overt moves.

Until the start of the special examinations, it is advisable to refrain from getting involved with students from other classes.

“In addition, during this special examination, the effectiveness of protection points will be temporarily disabled. The reason for this is that it is impossible to have a fair exam if only one student is protected. If the holder of a protection point is expelled in any way, the protection point cannot be used to reverse the expulsion. However, the expulsion can be avoided if the individual or the class as a whole pays 20 million private points.”

There is currently no sum of private points within this class that can do that. This means that students who are expelled are certain to be expelled.

Does this mean that protection points, which can nullify expulsion once, are sometimes restricted? If it were a special test against another class, the temporary invalidation of the protection points could lead to complaints. In this case, however, it is an in-class issue. In that sense, it is not surprising that this special rule applies. It would be no wonder if he complained, but Kōenji didn't seem bothered by this.

“During the special examination, all communication devices such as mobile phones will be collected. This is because of the possibility of interference from external sources. In the unlikely event that you are found to be carrying a concealed device... well you can already assume what would happen.”

Now that we knew that expulsion, among other various rules were involved, we started to form an idea of how this exam might go.

# 1

When it was time for lunch, Yōsuke immediately left his seat and headed for the podium.

“Can we do this before lunch? I think I’d like to hear everyone’s opinion. What do you think?”

Kushida raised her hand to answer.

“Um, this special exam means that there are going to be separate options and there’s going to be trouble, right?”

“Of course it will. Because there’s no need to go to the trouble of having a special form of examination if it can be settled without any trouble.”

“Then I think it’s better to have a clear leader in case there’s a contingency where the choices don’t add up. I think if we follow the options that that leader eventually decides on, we can pass the special exam without any problems.”

“Yes, I agree. I agree with you, Kushida. But it’s going to be a big responsibility for the leader.”

The more options there are and the more divided opinions there are, the more criticism there will be from students who support the option that was not chosen. It will take a leader who is capable of organising the entire class.

“If you don’t mind, could you ask... Horikita-san?”

“Me?”

“Yes. You’ve been a leader many times before, and most importantly, I thought you could bring everyone together so that there would be no unfairness. Of course, it’s a big responsibility, as Hirata-kun said, and if Horikita-san says it’s okay, then it’s...”

“Yes. It’s possible that other classes will have similar strategies, and you’ll be able to use them if you have a difference of opinion. If you don’t feel comfortable following my instructions when the time comes, you can let me know now.”

Not many students were willing to stand up for themselves or say anything negative about the leader’s responsibility. Kushida’s proposal was easily passed, and it was agreed that Horikita will be the leader of the group in case of emergency.

For the rest of the day there was a lot of discussion, but no major decisions were made. Sometime later, lunchtime arrived.

“Let’s go to lunch. Yukimū and Miyacchi you guys are coming, right?”

The two guys stood up in agreement with Haruka as she turned around and asked for confirmation.

Members of Ayanokōji Group. A small group of five, including myself.

Just as the five of us were beginning to gather, a different classmate came running up to us.

As soon as I made eye contact, the student shouted.

“Kiyotaka! Lunch, let’s go.”

Without a pause, but with a nervous look in her eyes, she called out to me.

No one was paying attention to the fact that Kei was coming towards me, nor was anyone intending to listen to the conversation. But all 37 of the other students, with the exception of Kōenji, looked at us at once.

“Sorry guys, I’m going to eat with Kei today.”

I pulled out my chair and stood up before the others could comprehend what was going on.

“I’d like to go to a café. Can we?”

“Hey... Eh...? Wait, wait, wait. Why are you interrupting us for all of a sudden, Karuizawa-san?”

“It’s not really a rule to not interrupt, is it? Didn’t you hear Kiyotaka’s refusal just now? Plus, he promised me.”

“I heard what he said but... What do you mean? You were promised something? Wait... Kei?”

After a short delay, Haruka began to understand that we called each other by our first names. Even then, she might not have understood most of it.

“Sorry, but I’m his girlfriend and I’m his priority, you know?”

“Ha?”

“G-girl...friend?”

Haruka and Airi muttered at the same time, although their reactions were quite different.

“So from now on, Kiyotaka may not be able to attend your group’s gatherings as much.”

“Come on, let’s go,” Kei said, tugging on my arm as we left the classroom.

The fact that her face was beginning to turn red showed that she was feeling quite embarrassed. I didn’t think she would reveal it to everyone in this way either...

Haruka, Airi, and the rest of the students were too stunned to follow us.

## 2

With Kei's bold action, our relationship, which few people had known about until now, became known to the whole class. It will probably spread across the whole school by the end of the day.

I'm not sure how many students would be interested in the relationship between me and Kei, but I doubted it would be many.

The pairing of Ike and Shinohara, who had become a couple during the summer holiday, didn't cause as much of a stir in terms of publicity as I'd expected. Rather, it was a pairing that had been expected.

Some of the boys were pretentious and some of their friends were frankly jealous, but in the end, it made no difference to the many people who congratulated them, and they developed a slow but steady relationship as a couple.

The sight of them going home together, as well as going on dates together, was becoming increasingly frequent.

What at first seemed like a new sight will soon become commonplace.

I'm sure it will be the same for me and Kei, but we'll probably cause more of a stir for a longer time than the Ike-Shinohara pair. I'm not sure how many of the students could have predicted our relationship.

Anyway, the first day after school arrived and the whole class knew about the relationship.

I'd been aware of this all afternoon, but a certain girl hadn't looked at me once since lunch.

"Hey Kiyopon, would you like to walk home with me?"

One such girl, Airi's good friend and confidant, Haruka, came up to me and called out.

I was expecting Kei to suggest that we go home together after school, but when I'd looked at her, I saw that she was still surrounded by girls asking her questions.

"Are you sure?"

I'd thought that Haruka would do something to help and care for Airi.

Airi was silently preparing to leave.

"I know, but there's nothing I can say to that girl now. Well? Unless you're saying that there are reasons why Kiyopon can't go home alone with me." When

she said this, Haruka's expression hardened for a moment.

"Okay."

Now that our relationship has become public knowledge, there are inevitably fewer opportunities to get together with the Ayanokōji Group.

Therefore I'd better listen to them as much as I can. Then the two of us took our bags and headed for the front door via the rear exit. On the way, Haruka walked along without saying a word. I occasionally stole glances at her face, which looked both angry and sad.

When I'd put on my shoes and left the school, she finally turned to look at me.

"I'm going to ask you straight out because there's no point asking in a roundabout way, but... is it true that you started going out with Karuizawa-san? I still can't believe it, even now."

"Just as you saw, it's true."

When I told her this, her lips pursed and she nodded quickly.

"Right? But it was such a shock. It's not that I care who you go out with, it's just that I didn't think it was going to be Karuizawa-san."

The reputation of Karuizawa Kei was not very high in the eyes of the rest of the student body. Most of them think that she is a selfish girl who went out with the popular Yōsuke early and dumped him for her own convenience.

"So this is what you were talking about in the pool before. It's a bit of a psychological shock. You know, it's not just a bit, okay? She was trying to hold it together in the classroom, but she was crying all throughout lunchtime."

"I see."

"Well, no. And are you serious about the fact that you started dating over spring break?"

"I'm sorry for not telling you, I really am. It's just that there are a lot of circumstances."

"Circumstances, huh? Well, there are a lot of rumours about Karuizawa-san, so I can understand that..."

Considering the fact that she had started dating Yōsuke immediately after enrolling at the school, and that she herself had probably been fabricating her past, this kind of perception arising was unavoidable.

"This is real, isn't it? I mean, it's not like, a prank, or anything."

"Don't do that."

"Ha. ...I see. That's right. I'm so confused too ...No, no, no, no, no, I never

would've guessed Karuizawa-san, but I had an idea that Kiyopon was dating someone, or that you liked someone who wasn't Airi..."

She held her head in her hands, lamenting that all her predictions had been wrong.

"I talked to Yukimū and Miyacchi for a bit and they felt the same as me. I haven't heard directly from them, but I think Airi's shock was bigger than ours."

I was sure it was. I could easily imagine that.

"I mean, how did it happen? It didn't seem like you had many personal connections at all."

It's no wonder she doesn't know when I started to like Kei, or when she started to like me.

"I was in the same group as Kei in the Cruise Ship special exam last year. From there we started to talk a bit more, and when Yōsuke and Kei decided to split up, our relationship started to take off."

In February of this year, the fact that the relationship between Kei and Yōsuke had ended reached the ears of some students.

"So you're saying you've had contact with her for a rather long time? You didn't seem to talk to her on a regular basis."

"We were mostly talking on our phones."

"I'm going to have to dig deeper; who confessed first?"

As Airi's guardian and spokesperson, she would like to learn more about it.

"I did."

"So, if it was at least from Karuizawa, I thought there would still be a chance, but I didn't expect it to be from Kiyopon... I'm beat."

She slapped her forehead and held up her hands in surrender.

"There's so much information, it's hard to sort through it all. I'm sorry, but can we stop by the convenience store?"

Just as we were approaching the convenience store, Haruka suggested this to me.

"Yeah, I'll wait outside."

Apologizing lightly, Haruka disappeared into the convenience store in a hurry. I took out my phone, which had vibrated in my pocket several times during this journey.

[*"I'll be waiting for you at Keyaki Mall afterwards. It was hard for me to dig up all the answers!"*]

Such a message of invitation from my girlfriend was left for me.



[*“Alright. I’ll call you when I leave.”*]

After a brief minute or so, Haruka returned with a croquette in her hand.



“This afternoon, Airi and I were talking so much that we couldn’t eat lunch at all.”

“Sorry to trouble you.”

“I don’t mean to be a nuisance or anything, but...”

“I’m not sure if it’s a good idea to ask you out at a time like this, but there’s actually something I’d like to ask Haruka and, if possible, Airi to help me with.”

“Cooperation?”

“It’s not public information yet, but we’ve decided on one of the events for the cultural festival.”

“Oh, really?”

“This is a secret that only I, Horikita, and the organisers know about, so as not to let any information leak out. We’re going to have a maid café as part of the festival.”

“Ma-... maid café? What the heck ...I’m not shocked, but a little surprised. I never imagined Horikita-san would approve of a maid café.

“In her case, she’s pretty flat about everything she does. I think she allowed it because she thought she could compete purely with a maid café without any prejudice.”

“I see. And what made you ask me for help?”

“Actually, the way I found out about this project, I had to take care of a number of things.”

When I said that, Haruka nodded her head as if she understood.

“Even if the situation was like that, Horikita-san, who wants to leave it to Kiyopon, is also quintessential.”

“So, I’m wondering if I could ask you and then Airi to be waitresses for the café.”

Not surprised, Haruka listens with an indescribable look on her face.

Well, I suppose you could have guessed from the way I was talking.

“If it hadn’t been for the incident with Karuizawa, I might have agreed to do it here, despite my reservations. I don’t like to dress up like a cosplayer in front of a lot of people, but I don’t think I would have been able to say no if an important member of my group of friends had asked me to. But... it is bad timing.”

On the day that I found out that my best friend had lost her heart, it would have been a bit of a surprise for me to ask her to do this.

“It’s just that I can’t blame Kiyopon, that’s also a problem. I said something similar, but you’re entitled to go out with whoever you want, and I’m sure there are

circumstances I don't know about. Airi is free to fall in love with Kiyopon, just like you are free to reject her..."

It's like you're convinced in a logical sense, but your emotions won't accept it.

"I can't make any promises. But when I'm a bit more relaxed, I'll talk to Airi."

"Are you sure?"

"Sooner or later, she has to accept reality. And, I don't know what Kiyopon, thinks, but if it's against Karuizawa-san, she might not give up. Even if it's just a one-percent chance, there's a possibility she might hold hope, right?"

"Well, yes. I think there's a great deal of potential for her to be affectionate."

"When that time comes, it means that Airi will get another chance. She's a gem who hasn't stood out at all at the moment, and... Kiyopon's feelings might change too."

It's true that if Airi were to put on a costume like that and give it her all, she could be as good as Matsushita, Satō, and Mii-chan. No, if you include her physical characteristics, she might even be able to beat them. Furthermore, although not related to the guests of honour, the school staff will be surprised by Airi's appearance. If this happens, rumours will quickly circulate around the school and may even reach the ears of guests.

"No, that's not true. I'm sure Airi will change her mind after this incident."

When the person you love has a girlfriend, it's natural to begin looking for your next love interest. I thought I'd said the obvious, but she now looked the angriest she'd looked all day.

"Listen, don't you think you're taking Airi's feelings too lightly? I've been watching her for a long time, and I know exactly how she feels. Her feelings towards Kiyopon aren't so light that they'll be shaken because of something like this.

She strongly denied that it is unthinkable.

"I'm sure you'll be going on lots of dates with Karuizawa-san, but make sure you show up to our group gatherings. I don't want us to drift apart because of this."

"Right. I get it. For me too, this group is part of my life at this school."

I think it's a big downside to be missing out in a situation like this.

"Ugh, I feel a bit better. I'm going back to school."

She said this as she finished her croquettes and put her trash away in her

bag.

Although she didn't specify, it was clear that she was going to see Airi.

"I'll see you tomorrow."

"Yeah, see you tomorrow."

The girl ran back to the school, and I followed Haruka's back to the halfway point. I then changed my direction, not towards the dormitory, but towards Keyaki Mall.

### 3

After school, I was still in a state of turmoil. I walked with Kei back to the dormitory from Keyaki Mall, chatting with her. Then, in the lobby of the dormitory, Horikita was sitting on a sofa, waiting for someone.

It's easy to see who that person is. I pushed the call button of the elevator, that had stopped on the first floor, and when Kei and I got on board, Horikita also got in.

“Ayanokōji-kun, can I have a word with you?”

The elevator stops on the fourth floor, where my room is.

“Well, I'll see you later, Kiyotaka.”

Although Kei is prone to jealousy and envy, she has a good understanding of the situation.

She knew that Horikita was not such a target of the opposite sex in the first place, and when she heard about the special exam, she could judge before, and she thought it better not to interfere.

“Ah. I'll be in touch later.”

A year ago, I would never have believed that we would be spending time together like this.

I got off and Horikita followed me down. I looked back to see Kei smiling and waving at me from the lift as it began to close. Shortly afterwards, it closed and went up to the next floor.

“How long have you been seeing her?”

“I wonder.”

“Rumour has it that it's spring break, but I think the relationship started developing even earlier than that.”

She looked at me with a hint of anger in her eyes and said something like that.

“I wonder.” Whether there is a rationale behind Horikita's words or not, I'm not interested in or willing to touch on that point. “That's not the point, you said you wanted to talk to me?”

“Yes. There's something I need you to tell me about the special exam. Okay?”

“Yeah, no problem.”

“Huh?”

“What’s with that reaction?”

“I was prepared for you to refuse. You were in charge of the maid café the other day and you didn’t like it, did you?”

Apparently, she’s surprised at how readily I’ve accepted her consultation.

“Not here. We should go to your room.”

Standing in the corridor, you never know who might overhear. Room 401. I unlocked my room and enter inside.

“It’s not like you’re asking me to help you, right?”

“I don’t know about that... In the meantime, if you’ll listen to me, I’ll let you proceed.”

Perhaps thinking that she would be rejected if she provoked me too much, Horikita let it slide and started talking.

“If you want to make sure that you clear this special exam, I was thinking about making it semi-compulsory before the exam. But even if we prepare for it, it is impossible to unite our class unless we know what the question is, isn’t it?”

“I’m sure we’ll inevitably have to use different options depending on the situation.”

Even if there were only two options, it would be nothing short of reckless to decide to vote only for or only against a proposal before it is put to a vote.

“You’ve thought of the means in your own way, haven’t you, Horikita? How can we get through this special exam?”

“I think that the easiest way to solidly pass the special exam is for someone to have the final say. No matter how many options there are, no matter how the vote splits, you have to promise that you will follow the pre-determined leader’s judgment and will.”

This was suggested to us by Kushida during the day.

The strategy is to not take into account whether an individual is unhappy with the option or not.

Surely it would be so much easier if that arrangement could be reached.

“I hope that really brings everyone together.”

“Yes. There will always be students who don’t agree with some of the questions... If this had been a dictatorial class like the one led by Ryūen-kun, it might have been easier for us.”

In terms of coercive power, unlike us who request it, Ryūen will be able to exert it with impunity. But the real question is whether it will work.

“The fact that all voting is anonymous means that students who are unhappy

with Ryūen can vote against it. There is no guarantee that a mere command will be enough to clear it.”

“If a student is unhappy with his methods, he may rebel. But there’s nothing to be gained by doing so. After all, if the vote is split and time runs out, the whole class will be damaged. In the end they’ll just leave it alone and come together.”

“I know what you mean, but if you’re going to say that, you’re contradicting yourself in the first place. No one wants to fail the special exam. That’s why the votes will always come together. If that basic premise always holds, then there’s no need for a strategy in the first place, is there?”

“That’s...”

“No student wants to run out of time and be the detriment of the class. But don’t expect them to complete the five questions if they are left to their own devices. If that were possible, it would defeat the purpose of the school calling it a special exam.”

“You’re right.”

“What you can do now is to prepare your mind to be flexible. For example, what would you do if you were faced with an issue where 38 people were in favour and one was against?”

“Of course we will try to bring the one person who is against it to the side in favour.”

“Right. Then what if that one person opposing you never gave in?”

“That’s...”

“It’s not always the 38 people who agree with you who win. In the process of persuading the opposition, some of the 38 students who were in favour may even change their opinions.”

“Even if just one person’s ideas are detrimental to the class at large?”

“It all depends on the content, I guess.”

I wouldn’t be surprised if there is a question in store for us that we could never overcome.

“I feel a bit uneasy, don’t you?”

“What is it?”

“Because without hesitation you gave me advice. I don’t think it has anything to do with... the fact that you started dating Karuizawa-san, but what do you intend to do?”

“It’s not much advice. I’m sure in some small corner of your mind you’ve already started to think about that possibility.”



“Yes... Then I’ll tell you the main reason why I approached you. I have a proposal for a special exam tomorrow. I could ask someone else, but I want to ask someone who understands me.”

“Do you want people to always vote separately on the first round of voting, or what?”

“Can you please not pre-empt my thoughts?”

When I saw the hint of irritation in her eyes, I took some distance from Horikita.

“It was something I was going to suggest, if no one else had proposed it. I didn’t think we were on the same page.”

“...Really?”

I could see Horikita’s anger dissipating, apparently convinced a bit by my now adequate excuse.

It is true that the proposal should have at least done that. It is better to avoid the risk of making an unexpected choice as a result of bias caused by the momentum of the situation.

“Even if it’s a question that you agree or disagree with 99% of the time, or if you’re confused about an option that has advantages and disadvantages for both sides, coincidence can be a bit scary.”

“Ah. If a vote is passed due to a lopsided vote as a result of a proper vote, it can’t be undone. But the strategy of always using the interval at least once is not always a good one. You have to bear that in mind. There is always the risk that what would have been unanimous in the spur of the moment may become inconclusive when the votes are split. You have to take that into account.”

“Right. Of course.”

To argue is to plunge one’s hand into the deepest darkness. This can consume a huge amount of time if it results in an unexpected darkness being dragged out.

“Due to the rules of this special test, there is no way to determine with certainty who voted which way, no matter how much we discuss it. Even if you get a statement, it may not be 100% true.”

“Does that mean you can lie and lie and lie?”

“In some cases, yes. Because right now, it’s hard to say that the class is still united as one.”

Having said that, I’m sure a few people will have popped into Horikita’s head.

“You mean the existence of Kushida-san and Kōenji-kun.”

“As for the former, I’m sure she’ll lie about everything, and as for the latter, he might even dare to vote for someone different from his classmates if his vicious nature shows through. That’s about it.”

“Hey, why did you tell me all the details? It’s weird. It’s not every day that you give me a warning like this.”

Horikita, of course, senses the changes in me.

“I decided that the current Horikita would be flexible enough to listen to me and understand what I was saying.”

“Am I right in saying that that’s a compliment...?”

“Yes.”

“Yes... I’m feeling a bit restless...”

In the background, I heard a phone vibrate briefly in front of me.

“I’m sorry about that.”

When she stopped talking, Horikita took out her mobile phone and stared at the screen.

“Please give me one minute. I need to message them back otherwise they may get a wrong idea.”

I have no intention of stopping her, of course, but who is she talking about?

I was a little curious, but I decided to wait quietly as Horikita took about two minutes to compose a long message. Eventually she finished her message and put her phone away in her pocket.

“Anyway, I’ve got my message across. Good luck with the special exam tomorrow.”

Not intending to stay long, Horikita quickly left the room.

# 4

It was just before 6:00pm in the evening. The sun will soon set and night will fall. Today was supposed to be an ordinary day, although the next special exam was revealed.

It's been a difficult day with a lot of information to sort through. It would be easier if we could just move on towards the end of the day, but that's not going to happen. The reason is that the special 'unanimous voting exam' will begin tomorrow.

"Hey."

I went back to my room and waited, and the first person to show up was Yōsuke.

"Come on in."

When I thought about it, this was the first time I had invited Yōsuke into my room like this.

"Yoo-hoo!"

Not long after, Kei came to join us in my room.

"It's kind of new or unusual to get together like this, isn't it?"

"Maybe so."

I haven't told them why I asked them to gather together. Yōsuke might have guessed, though.

"Tomorrow's special exam, I thought I'd prepare some measures."

"Measures? You're simply trying to make the test unanimous, aren't you?"

"It certainly doesn't sound like a very difficult exam from the outline, does it? The special exams that have been held in the past have had much more difficult rules."

"I'm not sure what to make of it," he said.

"But maybe this special exam, like the difficult ones in the past, will not be straightforward. If you think about it according to the rules, it's an exam where you can get more class points simply by being unanimous. Unifying the will of the class itself is not that difficult."

"I think so too."

"I mean, I guess the fact that it's easy means that there's a good chance that we'll be presented with a question that will divide opinions."

It's just as Yōsuke thinks. Although the individual students in the class have

different ideas, they are willing to be flexible to a certain extent to align their votes if it will benefit the class.

If you're a first-year student, it might be a different story, but for us second-year students, the bonds of friendship have already deepened considerably. In addition, there is no penalty for not being able to reach unanimous agreement on the first try, and there is plenty of time for discussion.

It is because it's a test that individual opinions can be so covered up, though, that it can appear to be such a blessing.

"But, you know, what kind of questions are difficult to get unanimous agreement on?"

"I can't read through it completely, but... I think..."

What kind of question would trouble his classmates? It wasn't something that Yōsuke could immediately think of. I suggested a simple question.

"From now until you graduate, you will only be able to eat either rice or bread. Make your choice."

"Oh, what's that option~"

"If you ask me about rice and bread, it sounds a bit laughable, but this is a difficult choice to make."

"I would definitely eat bread. I wouldn't be able to eat no bread until I graduated."

"I'd probably go for rice. I only need bread once a week or so."

"I'm more of a rice man myself. And, well, even the three of us have different opinions, don't we? It's not so easy when the whole class has to vote. If there were 30 of us in the Rice camp, would you follow us?"

"No, I wouldn't. Because it's a ban until you graduate. I'll keep voting for bread."

Some students will resist, as Kei did, because if they do not follow the majority and bend, they will suffer later.

"On a more realistic comparison, all future special examinations will be based on 'academic' or 'physical' ability alone. What would be the outcome of such a question?"

Hearing this, Yōsuke and Kei looked at each other.

"If you're an athletic student like Sudō, you're definitely going to choose physical ability, and if you're like Keisei who's not very good at sports, you're going to have to bring your academic ability to a unanimous decision no matter what."

Of course, Sudō, who is currently putting a lot of effort into his studies, could compromise, but it would be better for his own reputation if he were evaluated on his physical abilities, and if it were a student who could not study at all, he would not be able to compromise like Sudō.

“If a question is passed unanimously, it’s enforced, right? So does that mean that in some cases you have to be prepared to lose 300 class points in penalty for not choosing an option?”

“I don’t know... There will obviously be some difficult choices, but losing 300 class points could mean giving up your ticket to Class A. I think the first priority would be to clear it.”

“I’m starting to think it might be some kind of difficult special exam...”

“Is that why you invited us here?”

“Ah. The very next special examination will require a great deal of unity among classmates. It’s okay to have one or two full disagreements, but if it’s a long time, I’m sure it’s going to be a mess. In the event that this happens, the two main figures in the class, Yōsuke and Kei, will need to be on top of things to get the vote to go one way or the other.

“Yes, you’re right. But then, shouldn’t Horikita-san also be included in this conversation? Because Horikita-san is also playing the role of a leader of the class in this exam.”

Yōsuke’s point is a natural one. The best way to control the class is for Horikita to lead the two of them, not me. Even if he wanted to, at this stage, he couldn’t remove his support.

“This time, you will support Horikita from the shadows. Just keep what goes on here confidential.”

“Why? Well, as for me, I don’t like following Horikita-san’s instructions.”

“Both you and Yōsuke have the ability to read the atmosphere better than the average student. But I want them to be more flexible than they are now. If they can sense what Horikita is thinking and what she wants to do and match it, the class will be much stronger.”

“Why don’t you just do it, Kiyotaka? That’s a better solution.”

“It’s not always possible for me to make a move. You have to be prepared for the unexpected.”

“What’s the contingency?”

“It could be a sudden illness or an unexpected withdrawal from school, right?”

“It’s... Well... Expulsion is one thing, but surely it couldn’t be a sudden illness?”

I can’t be there for them all the time.

If they can’t prepare for such a situation, the class won’t make any progression.

“Anyway, I understand. All we have to do is follow Horikita-san well and make sure the special exam goes smoothly, right?”

“Also, I’m going to set some instructions and cues that only Kei and Yōsuke will know.”

The interval allows for free discussion and movement, so there is no problem in giving an earful. However, it can be necessary in certain situations to give instructions without being seen communicating. Even in situations where private conversation is not allowed, it is possible to exchange signs by coughing or tapping on the desk.

After they’d learned a few patterns, I looked at Yōsuke.

“I’ll give you one last piece of advice, Yōsuke. It’s not necessary if the five questions are going to be completed smoothly, but if the time remaining is less than two hours and you still don’t see the special exam clearing in time, you might have to resort to forceful measures.”

I decided to tell Yōsuke to prepare himself now so that he wouldn’t go out of control when that time came.

# 5

It was just after 10pm when the hectic day before the special examinations seemed to be coming to an end.

I was in bed looking at my phone when I got a call. Although I don't have the contact saved, I recognized the 11-digit phone number.

"Hello?"

"I'm sorry it's so late at night, can I have a moment now?"

"It's all right. It's been a long time since I've heard from you, Chairman Sakayanagi."

Yes, the owner of this phone number is the director of the Advanced Nurturing High School.

"I'm sure I've caused you a lot of anxiety too, but everything's okay now."

"I'm glad to hear you're doing well."

"It must have been tough for you too. But I'm amazed that you've been able to stay in this school without any problems in that very unfavourable battle."

"It just so happens. If he had been serious, I wouldn't still be here right now."

It is not necessary to mention his name to know that he is Tsukishiro, who had been filling in as Acting Director for Chairman Sakayanagi.

"When it was all said and done, I had a few questions about his behaviour too... But let's not talk about that today. I just wanted to let you know that I'm going to be following up with you in the future."

That's how Chairman Sakayanagi continues his story.

"You have heard about the unusual festival, to which government officials and their families have been invited, haven't you? Once I had approached them, there was nothing I could do to stop it."

If you've already notified the people involved, it's understandably difficult to withdraw.

"It's nothing for the chairman of the board to apologise for. I'm sure the students are looking forward to it."

It's a bit like a special exam, but it's in the realm of student fun.

Whether it will end up being just a cultural festival for me is another story.

"About that... Actually, there is something that hasn't been announced yet, but I'm going to tell you about it first."

“What is it?”

“As well as the cultural festival, the sports festival in October is a precursor to it. First of all, it was decided on short notice to welcome certain guests here.”

“Guests of honour at a sports festival?”

It’s something I never thought I’d hear.

“If you go back to the beginning, sports festivals are for the parents of the students to come and watch. In that sense, the stance of welcoming the guests of honour itself is not dissimilar...”

“I see.”

It is true that when we watch TV, we often see families with cameras and lunchboxes prepared for sports events.

“This is an unprecedented event, and we are concerned about the security implications of allowing guests to come and go as they please at our school’s festivals.”

It was a test, a preparation for the arrival of a large number of guests in earnest.

“The selection of people is entirely up to the higher-ups, and the teachers in charge can’t rule out the possibility that... your father may be involved. So, in view of the danger to you, I would like to have a few observers by your side.”

“That’s very kind of you, but I’m just one of the students at this school. I don’t want any special treatment.”

“Then how are you going to cope when you encounter the people that Sensei sent?”

“I know it’s a difficult issue.”

You can’t use violence to get through this, of course. It’s easy for me to do so if I’m in a secluded area, but if I’m in the presence of friends and acquaintances and I’m instructed to show up with a school official following me, there’s no way to refuse.

You are imposters, you are his assassins, aren’t you? I can’t ask that question.

“I already understand that you are such a person. But if you are expelled from this school in any way... I am sure I will regret it. I want to avoid the regret of not doing what I could to prevent it.”

“Even if I were to follow Chairman Sakayanagi’s instructions, it would be unnatural for a student to have a monitoring officer.”

“So I’m going to have to ask you to sit out the sports festival.”



“Be absent..?”

That’s not what I had expected in my head.

“We understand that when it comes to exams that can only be held on a certain day, such as sports and cultural festivals, there will of course be inevitable sick leaves.”

“Yes. Although the class will be disadvantaged, there are no compulsory measures such as expulsion, right?”

We are all responsible for our own health, but there are still inevitable problems.

If it was a smaller special exam, we could wait until all the students were in each year group and take emergency measures, but if it was an all-school sports festival, we couldn’t do that.

“I’m going to ask you to stay in your dormitory on sick leave on the assumption that you’ve had a medical check. Then I can place my trusted observer outside the dormitory with confidence.”

If you are sick and have been ordered to stay in the dormitory, your classmates will agree that you have no choice.

Even if there is a watchman wandering around the dormitory, the other students will only see one guard.

“Surely, then, you might be able to escape the hands of that man.”

“Of course there is another risk. As you said, the students in the classes you’re enrolled with are at a disadvantage because they’re going to be challenged with a lack of students.”

The fact that he’s prepared to lie about taking a sick day shows the generous support of Chairman Sakayanagi. It’s also nice to know that he’s not trying to show favoritism and wants to keep the special treatment to a minimum. I’m grateful for the offer, but the moment I heard about it I knew I had to say no.

But at the same time, I had a new idea.

“Can you give me some time to think about it?”

“Of course, I can’t force you to do anything, so I’ll leave the final decision to you. But...”

“I know, I know. I’m seriously considering the option of accepting sick leave now, too, so...”

“Yes. I’ll ask you to answer a week before the sports festival. We have some preparations to make too.”

It would take at least that long to arrange the personnel.

After the call, I thought about the possibility of the class having a sports festival without me.

Of course, it is quite possible that other classes or grades will have students absent on the day of the event. In fact, it is not easy to get all the students to sit every exam.

“No, I should concentrate on the special exam in front of me first, right?”

This special exam - I think it might be more difficult than any other special exam I’ve ever had. All the exams I’ve taken so far have been ones that I could have taken any form of preparation for. However, there is no such thing as a “sure-fire” strategy in this particular test.

We are expected to believe in our classmates and to work together as one.

P.E. and cultural festivals. There are new things to worry about that weren’t there last year, but it all starts with getting through the special exam tomorrow.

# 6

“Come in, Kushida-senpai.”

A few hours ago. After school, Kushida visited the first-year dormitory, and Takuya Yagami’s room.

The sun was shining faintly through the gaps in the closed curtains. The tea was freshly brewed on the table, but Kushida didn’t reach for it.

“There’s nothing like poison or drugs in it, you know?”

“I don’t care about that, can you just get on with it?”

With a scowl on her face and no attempt to hide her frustration, Kushida pulled out her mobile phone.

“Excuse me, senpai. Then let me ask you without hesitation.”

Yagami pressed the play button and heard Chabashira’s voice in the middle of the explanation, giving an overview of the special unanimous voting exam announced for the second-year students.

After listening in silence to the entire lecture, including the examples, Yagami returned the phone to Kushida.

“Kushida-senpai wants to crush Horikita Suzune and Ayanokōji Kiyotaka. That’s what it was about, wasn’t it?”

Kushida kept silent, as if she didn’t need to answer now.

“I was briefed by our senpai beforehand, but it is still a very simple special exam. From a number of options, you have to repeatedly vote and adjust your votes to reach unanimity. There are five questions in total, and you have five hours to complete them. What did you think when you heard this?”

“Easy, right?”

“Yes, it is. It is considered to be very easy for an exam that is billed as a special exam. But only the punishment for running out of time is severe. This must be because the school assumes every class will clear. The closer the time is to expiry, the closer to unanimity everyone will inevitably be. Because whether you like the choice or not, everyone wants to avoid heavy penalties.”

Yagami reached for the cup of tea that continues to steam in front of Kushida and took it in his hands.

“Well, here’s the main thing. We are already in the middle of our second year. But while I’d like to expel those two, I haven’t had the best opportunity to do it so far.”

“As far as I’m concerned, you’re a little bit responsible for that, but that doesn’t matter right now.” Yagami responded with a smirk.

She knew that there was nothing to be gained by lashing out at Yagami here, so she held back.

“Have you been able to tell your senpais about Horikita?”

“Oh, you mean the one about her being a... leader? In a manner of speaking. Well, I’m sure she’d have done it on her own without me telling her.”

“It is not good to leave things vague and ambiguous. It’s important for you to know that Horikita-senpai has been entrusted with this role.”

“So what? You think you can get Horikita expelled at the next special exam?”

When she asked him about it, he laughed and sipped from his cup.

“That’s right. I’ve listened to the recording just to make sure I didn’t miss anything or misinterpret anything, but this is clear. There is a good chance that the next special exam... there is a good possibility.”

“How could you possibly know that? The only condition for expulsion is to let the accumulated penalty time accumulate in the individual’s voting time. Do you think Horikita would make such a mistake? It’s not just Horikita, no one else would make that mistake.”

“Of course, it is unlikely that any fool would be expelled for a cumulative penalty. But my interpretation is that there are other ways to get expelled.”

“Huh?”

“Expel Horikita-senpai or, depending on the situation, Ayanokōji-senpai. It is possible that you can crush the one you want to crush. In that case, you should not hesitate to guide the conversation so that you can target both.”

Yagami mentioned an example of a question that he expected to be given in this special examination.

“Are you sure?”

“Of course, I don’t think it will be the same word for word. But. I think there is a good chance that there will be a question with the same content as what I have just mentioned.”

Yagami hadn’t been told about this special exam by Tsukishiro, but after listening to the teacher’s explanation, he had an idea of what the questions would be.

“There is only one path Kushida-senpai would take when presented with a question like the one I just mentioned.”

He then explains how she can corner Horikita and Ayanokōji in that question.

“What do you think? Doesn’t this make you see the letter of expulsion? Of course, the whole class will have to cry, but that’s a trifle to you, isn’t it?”

“You think I can do it...?”

“I see that Kushida-senpai has the ability to do that, am I wrong?”

“You’re doing a lot of shopping already.”

“I had to test my senpais when I first met them to see if they were people I could use, you know?”

“What does that mean?”

“Don’t you understand? Do you remember what I said when we first met?”

“I was in a hurry at the time. So what?”

“So what? Normally, you would wonder. We’re strangers, we’ve never even met each other before. And yet you were able to get through the situation by improvising. That’s how I knew you were capable enough.”

“But what if I’d said who you were right there? Maybe I simply forgot.”

“I don’t think so. As long as we don’t know where we met, maybe we were in the same secondary school. If that’s the case, there’s a possibility that you know about my past. If I were to say, “I knew you because of that incident,” it would be a disaster.”

In order to rule out such a possibility, Kushida immediately went to work on the story.

“If it’s not the same secondary school, for example, but a cram school. Or if you found out later that it was a younger student who lived in your neighbourhood, then the risk of being someone who knows your past is greatly reduced. You can just laugh it off as a misunderstanding. The first priority is to make sure that we are from the same secondary school, isn’t it? And it’s easier to divert the conversation if the subject of the past is brought up at all.”

After drinking about a quarter of the tea, he put the cup on the table.

“Who the hell are you? How do you know about my past when we didn’t even go to the same secondary school...?”

“I know you’re wary, but think of me as a guest in a special position. However, my goal is to play with Ayanokōji-senpai.”

“What? To play with him?”

“Yeah, well, I don’t think he knows anything about me. Right now, it’s my hobby to try different things without Ayanokōji-senpai noticing.”

“What if I got upset when we first met and didn’t give you the answer you thought I should’ve?”

At that time, Kushida was wondering how Yagami would answer.

“That’s what I thought was so interesting. I’m sure Ayanokōji-senpai noticed the discomfort and looked at me with suspicion. I probably would have been able to greet him at an earlier stage.”

“Are you telling me you went to the same secondary school as Ayanokōji, by any chance?”

“Well, what do you think? It’s a trivial matter for Kushida-senpai. Shall we turn our attention to the special examination for now?”

“I know. If we get the question you’re after... then I’ll try and set it up.”

“You’re going *try* to set up...? That’s pathetic.”

“Pathetic? What do you mean weak?”

Yagami stood up, stepped closer and grabbed Kushida by the shoulders, who reflexively tried to flee.

“Hey, what are you doing?!”

She tried to get away from him, but the power of Yagami was stronger than she had imagined, and she could not move.

“Please, listen carefully. You are in a much tighter spot than you think. Not only do you have Ayanokōji-senpai and Horikita-senpai surrounding you, but you also have people who you consider to be a cause for concern, such as myself and Amasawa-san, who continue to threaten your daily safety and livelihood. Isn’t that right?”

“That’s ...yes, but...”

As Yagami stared her straight in the eye, Kushida glared back at him without fear.

“As a matter of course, it is not easy to kick out your fellow classmates in this school. It takes a lot of effort to expel a student in his or her personal life. If there is an opportunity to expel a classmate through a special exam like this, it is unmistakably the chance of a lifetime.”

“I know that. But if you go too far, you’ll put me in danger.”

“So you have to be prepared for that. Expel or be expelled.”

Kushida felt as if she was under a strong pressure, even though she was the one who wanted the expulsions done.

“Of course, it’s up to you to decide. If I were to say here, “If you don’t want your past of class disruptions to be exposed, you must expel either Horikita-senpai

or Ayanokōji-senpai,” that wouldn’t be very charming would it?”

“That’s what I call a threat.”

“I’m sorry, senpai. I really don’t mean to scare you. It’s just that I think it’s true that Kushida-senpai isn’t prepared enough. No matter what sacrifices you have to make, you have to get rid of them. If you don’t do something like that, you won’t be able to drive them out of school. Forever.”

Removing his hands from her shoulders, Yagami returns to his seat and sat down.

“Let me ask you again. Senpai wants those two to be expelled. Isn’t that right?”

When Yagami looked her in the eye again, Kushida felt a mixture of anger and frustration.

That is something that does not need to be reaffirmed.

It’s what she’d been wishing for every day for the last year and a half.

“I want to expel Horikita, I want to expel Ayanokōji. I’m definitely going to get them expelled...!”

“I can feel it, and finally I can confirm that your conviction is genuine.”

Kushida is determined. She must expel Horikita and Ayanokōji as soon as possible. Then there’s also Yagami who talks about whatever he pleases. Sometime in the future, he’ll have to be expelled too.

## Chapter 3: Dark Clouds

**T**HE ALARM CLOCK which I've kept for ten years, rang in my ear. I silently and quickly reached for it, and without a second thought, I roughly pressed the snooze button. It tumbled off the mini-table with one last squeal. This clock has taken way more damage than this so I don't care.

"It's already six o'clock..."

In the end, I only slept for about two hours and it was already morning. I took off my pajamas, which I didn't know when I had changed into, and headed to the sink in my underwear with heavy steps. As I did so, I picked up the alarm clock and found that the battery cover attached with cellophane tape had come off and a battery had fallen to the floor.

"I guess I was a little too rough. I'll be more careful tomorrow, so forgive me." I then stepped in front of the mirror. "Oh my..."

I couldn't possibly show my face in front of the students in my current state. I've been relatively sleep deprived for the past few days, and the dark circles under my eyes look even more visible today.

After washing my face carefully, I put together a list of cosmetics that I rarely use. I don't want my students to know that I'm in a bad or... unstable state. As I picked up a bottle of lotion, my eyes suddenly met with my own in the mirror. Without thinking, I touch my cheek.

The elasticity and tactile sensation coming from my fingertips will never be the same as when I was in school.

"I've grown old, haven't I?"

It's only been a little more than ten years, but it's still ten years. That's how long it's been since I've seen him, and I can't help but be reminded of...

"Is such a thing trivial...?"

It's not that I've started to understand reality just now. I've known it all along. I resume my halted movements, open the lid, and silently begin applying makeup.

One day it will come.

I knew this from the moment I decided to become a teacher.

I should have known, but I wasn't really ready for it.

"Calm down. This isn't my fight. The situation is different from that time. I'm sure my current class will be able to get through this without a hitch. Yes, they should. It's useless to be nervous."



I felt my heart beating faster and tried to convince myself that this was just like the other exams.

Such shallow thinking did not work, and my heart beat faster and faster. At this rate, I won't be able to hold myself together until the end of the special exam. I can't imagine what the future holds.

“Prepare yourself...”

I muttered to myself as I pressed both palms against the mirror and glared at my reflection.

# 1

A teacher's morning is surprisingly busy. At this school, I live in a dormitory, and I work on the premises, which means I'm always close to the school. However, there is a lot to do. I have to prepare for class, check my emails, and sometimes check the pool's water quality. However, the start time of the workday is the same as the start of homeroom, so it's practically like service overtime. After the morning preparations are over, there is a morning meeting with the other teachers.

Especially on days when special exams are held, the rush is doubled or tripled. There is absolutely no room for error on the part of the school, as it will affect the lives of the students, and then some.

"In this special exam, our teachers' utmost concern should be to not intervene in the exam. We want to protect the students in our own class, but we can't help them unintentionally, please avoid such a situation."

Ikari-sensei, who had gathered the homeroom teachers of the four classes and was auditing this special exam, warned us with a stern face.

"Um, I know it's a little late, but do you have a minute?"

"What is it, Hoshinomiya-sensei?"

"As I recall, the last time this exam was held... 11 years ago, a measure was taken to shuffle the teachers so that they would not be assigned to the same class, right? So why is it that this time the homeroom teacher is still looking after their own class? If you are concerned about fairness, I think you should change it."

As far as issuing a warning, I could sense the school's intention to stop the homeroom teacher's intervention. But surely it would be better to leave the other classes in charge. Not many teachers would go to the trouble of risking their lives to help a rival class.

"Isn't it because you believe that fairness will be maintained?"

Sakayanagi-sensei, who was listening to the conversation, analyzed it calmly.

"Is that so?"

"I can't tell you for any other reason than because that's the decision."

"So the top brass decided it..."

In all the special exams, there is nothing that we, a single teacher, can decide. It's decided by Chairman Sakayanagi and those who are involved in the management and operation of this school.

All we can do is follow the rules and try to make it work. However, it didn't seem to make any sense, and Chie didn't even try to hide her dissatisfaction. Ikari-sensei, who could not bear to see this, opened his mouth in a low voice.

"This is my own personal imagination, but this special exam has the potential to look inside the minds of students. To see existences they've kept hidden. It is a massive chunk of information. I think they thought that by leaking it to the teachers of other classes, it would in turn affect the next special exam."

"Doesn't that mean that they don't believe in us teachers after all?"

"It can't be helped, can it? This special exam, the three homeroom teachers seem to have experienced the same thing in the past and... Isn't that also the reason why they each took the class they were in charge of in the in-class voting held last year?"

"That's what I thought."

Chie seemed to be convinced once again, as if to say that she had known it from the beginning.

"Hoshinomiya-sensei, can we proceed...?"

"Sure, whatever. I'm somewhat convinced, so please proceed."

Ikari-sensei resumed his explanation as if he had given up, though Chie was clearly in a bad mood.

"If the supervisor deems it to be advice, you will be warned. If it is repeated, there will be a pay cut. Also, I am not worried about you all, but I would like to make sure that the students make the choice on their own. Remember that if you are judged to have intervened in a malicious manner, such as intentionally leading, you may be demoted at worst."

The unanimous special exam is all about choices. If a teacher acts in a way that shoulders and leads to a particular choice, it's only natural that the nature of the special exam itself will be questioned. Of course, neither the teachers of the other classes nor I have any such intentions. We just proceeded as usual, solemnly and quietly, without getting too emotionally involved with the students. That is something that will not change even if this is a special exam filled with bitter memories.

"That's all. Now, please take care of the special exam."

After that, I tried to keep things as usual and got through the morning class.

No, I was the only one who thought it was business as usual, but in reality, it most definitely wasn't. I had no sense of time, and before I knew it, it was lunch.

On the desk in the staff room was a half-eaten meal. About a third of the way down my throat, my chopsticks stopped moving. Not wanting to be seen like this, I put the rest of my lunch in a bag and put it away.

As I left the staff room, staring at the floor, I heard the sound of footsteps coming from behind me.

“It’s finally here, Sae-chan.”

“Words of wisdom or something?”

“You’ve been like that since this morning, I noticed. You couldn’t sleep last night because you were thinking about the special exam, right?”

I tune out the obvious and cheap provocation.

No, it would be more correct to say that I couldn’t answer back.

“This class has nothing to do with me. It doesn’t matter if the students clear it easily or not.”

“Hmm? You don’t seem to truly feel that way. Whatever, just know that Sae-chan doesn’t have the qualifications to aim for Class A. Never forget that.”



As I walked away, Chie's voice was filled with resentment and she didn't bother to hide it.

I was unable to raise my head until I turned the corner.

## 2

*September 17th.*

After lunch break. Less than three weeks after the summer break, the next special exam arrived.

When I came back to the classroom about five minutes before the exam started, there was already one adult waiting in the classroom. He was quietly watching the students from the back of the classroom. What surprised me a little was that I was instructed to sit not in my seat, but in a seat that was designated only for this exam. I wondered if they were trying to be more strict with the rules. Interestingly enough, I was seated at the very back of the class, near the window, where I had sat in my first year. The rest of the students were randomly assigned to seats regardless of their placement last year or this year. I just happened to be in similar seats it seems.

Satō sat down to my right. The students began to arrive one after another.

The test we are going to take is the “Unanimous Voting Special Test”. It’s a simple test, nothing more, nothing less, in which you have to choose from multiple options, five questions given by the school and repeat them until you reach unanimous agreement. There are not many things worth mentioning about this special exam, but there are also few countermeasures that can be taken in advance. Regardless of the content of the question, there is no communication during the first round of voting, so there is a promise to spread out the votes to avoid unexpected unanimity. Be aware of the time limit for voting. Decide in advance who you will follow in the event of a dispute over which option to choose. This is the only thing that any class can do.

This is why there is almost no heavy atmosphere in the class.

The fact that this exam is easily achievable for all participants, ultimately “all you have to do is choose an option and press the vote button,” is another reason why it is so loosely regarded.

There is some tension, of course, because it is a special exam. The tablet had a film firmly attached to it to prevent prying eyes. Even if you peeked in from the seat next to you, you wouldn’t be able to steal a look at the screen. Since you can’t leave your seat while voting, it’s impossible to narrow down where others are voting by sight.

Even if they could see the results of a third party’s vote by some means or accident, whether they would believe it is another story. In the first place, it is

impossible to make a fuss about who voted for whom, since snooping is forbidden.

We had to face this special test head on.

Also, the tablets on the desk seemed to be turned off, and it was forbidden to even turn on the main power without permission.

“Hey, hey, hey... if we clear it in an hour or two, let’s go to the Keyaki Mall.”

“Yeah, I’d love to, but I’m pretty sure I have to study in the dorm. So can we go in the evening?”

Ike and Shinohara, who have become a close couple, discuss what to do after school.

Is it a special exam that can be easily cleared? It’s questionable how many students understand that it can turn into a difficult question depending on the conditions. The problem is that the voting is anonymous. It is impossible to know who voted for which option, not only during the exam, but forever.

Total anonymity. It’s all about how big of an impact this factor will have on this special exam.

Anyway, the time limit for the special exam is five hours, from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., a very long time. If you think about it simply, you are allowed to spend one hour per question. It would not be surprising if the special exam was completed in one or two hours as Ike said. And if you complete it within the time limit, you can easily get 50 class points. On the other hand, if you fail to complete the exam within five hours, you will lose 300 class points, so making all five questions unanimous is an absolute must.

Looking back on the content of the exam, I can say that the small rewards and heavy penalties are understandable. I sat down at my seat in the corner of the classroom, where half of the students were seated. On the side of the podium, the facilitator of this special exam, Chabashira-sensei, and the teacher in charge of monitoring, are stationed at the back of the classroom.

“As I told you beforehand, all communication devices will be collected.”

Restrictions on what luggage can be brought in, monitoring from the front and back to prevent peeking at the tablets. They’re being more thorough than they need to be. That’s how much they want to prevent people from knowing who voted for which side.

It may sound harsh, but it’s the right thing to do. In order to reflect the genuine feelings of the students in the multiple choices, the anonymity must be 100%. If there is a chance to spy on them, the probability that they will succumb to peer pressure increases. There will naturally be betas and alphas. This could work to the advantage of students who are looking to get ahead. However, this is not a



good thing for the school, because they want everyone to be unanimous, regardless of whether it is peer pressure or not.

Anyway, there is no room for cheating. No matter what the question is, it must be unanimous.

“Look, Airi. You need to go say it properly, okay?”

Hmm? When I returned my gaze from looking out the window to the inside of the classroom, I saw Airi being pushed around by Haruka.

“Ah, Kiyotaka-kun! If you’re interested in coming with us, you have some time after school, right?” She appealed with her eyes. “I wanted to talk to you about the cultural festival.”

“I see. I thought we should talk in person, too, and I don’t mind.”

“Oh, thank you! I’ll see you later, then.”

After running away, Airi took a seat in the far seat and turned her back.

“I managed to calm that girl down. It doesn’t mean her heart is healed, but she’s trying to move forward.” She didn’t even try to mention it in front of me, trying her best to make eye contact. “But it remains to be seen whether or not she’ll really take it on. It’s up to Kiyopon, do your best.”

“I’ll try to negotiate as hard as I can.”

“Yeah. I’ll see you after school.”

They’re really good at taking care of each other, or rather, they’ve been together a lot lately, those two.

Two minutes before the start, the homeroom teacher, Chabashira-sensei, begins to explain.

“Well... It’s about time. We will now move on to the special exam, but since today is a long day, we will have up to four-bathroom breaks. Basically, we can only take a break before we get unanimous consent to take on the next question. This means that we can’t take a break in the middle of the day when we haven’t reached unanimous agreement. Also, each break is a maximum of 10 minutes, but the test time continues to be counted. It will be important to skip breaks if you deem them unnecessary.”

All of us had already gone to the bathroom as announced, so there would be no problems for a while.

There didn’t seem to be any students in the class who had stomach-aches or other unexpected health problems.

Now it was time for the special exam to begin.

I thought so, but Chabashira-sensei just stood there and stared at the students absentmindedly.

The students didn’t care at first but then started to look at each other noticing

something was off. The teacher standing at the back of the classroom also seemed to have noticed something strange.

“Chabashira-sensei. It’s time for you to go.”

“Oh, yes. I’m sorry. We will now begin the unanimous special examination. From here on out, we will proceed according to the rules, so if you leave your seats outside of the interval, or if you chat during forbidden times, you will be warned without mercy. Be mindful of this.”

The countdown starts at twenty-six seconds, probably due to a slight delay in the start signal, but I’m sure it won’t affect the students.

When the count reaches zero, the text switches to show the first question.

### [QUESTION ONE:]

*Choose which class you want to face in the final exam in the third semester. Even if there is a change in class rank, this choice will take precedence. The numbers in parentheses indicate the additional class points you can earn by winning the match.*

### [Choices:]

*Class A (100)*

*Class B (50)*

*Class D (0)*

“This is the last trimester of the second year, and the choices are used to determine the opponents for the special exam at the end of that school year. As mentioned above, if you unanimously choose Class A, your opponent will be the Class A and additional class points at the time of this choice, even if the current Class A falls to Class B by the end of the school year. Also, if the combination of the desired options was a disagreement between all classes, the school will decide randomly.”

In simple terms, the choice of who would you rather fight; Sakayanagi, Ryūen, or Ichinose. The opponent chosen here will not be changed.

“It’s important to figure out which class we can fight and win. Of course, we won’t necessarily be able to fight the class we want, but...”

If Horikita and the others nominate Sakayanagi’s class, and Ichinose also nominates Sakayanagi’s class at the same time, does that mean that Sakayanagi’s class is left to choose between Horikita’s class and Ichinose’s class? And if Sakayanagi’s class chose Ryūen’s class and not either of them, then it would be left to Ryūen’s class to confirm their choice. If Ryūen’s class avoided

Sakayanagi's class, then the result would be a random combination.

Normally, you would want to choose a lower class with lower strength. However, as you can see from the choices, the treatment of the higher classes seems to be a little different. If you are able to defeat a higher class, you will be rewarded with extra class points. If you fight a lower class, you will not get any additional rewards.

Normally, we would want to avoid fighting Class A, but if these advantages exist, there will be enough room for consideration.

"Then we'll move on to the first round of voting. The time limit is sixty seconds."

If these sixty seconds are exceeded, it will go into penalty time. Of course, Horikita had informed us beforehand so that we wouldn't have to deal with that kind of trouble the first time around, the classmates voted for their favorite options as they saw fit.

I had agreed with Horikita that I would always vote for the first choice, so without hesitation, I chose Class A, the first choice. Horikita probably chose class B, the second choice.

At this point, it's never going to be unanimous, but the other 37 votes are purely to see which class they want to face.

"Now that everyone has voted, I will now announce the results of the voting."

**[Results of the first round of voting:]**

*Class A: 5 votes*

*Class B: 21 votes*

*Class D: 13 votes*

The votes were concentrated on Class B, to which Ichinose belongs, instead of Class D, the lowest class.

"Since the vote was not unanimous, we will now set an interval."

From this point on, the students were allowed to leave their seats freely for ten minutes to contact the students or have a conversation. It doesn't matter if you raise your voice a little, or if you only give an earful to certain students.

"So that we don't waste time from the first question, let me make a suggestion first."

Raising her hand, Horikita, who was sitting in front of the Chabashira-sensei, stood up and then turned around. Since she was to be the leader of this special exam as well, she would take the initiative to show her actions.

“As the votes are scattered, each of us must have something to think about. You can ask as many questions as you want, and don’t hesitate to express your opinions to the whole class.” With that, Horikita took a breath and began to state her preferred option. “My ideal opponent to fight at the end of the school year would be Class B. In other words, I figured it would be Ichinose-san. There are three reasons for this: one, unlike Sakayanagi-san, and Ryūen-kun, Ichinose-san is likely to be a fair fight, a clash of pure potential. Even if it’s an irregular special exam, there’s little worry that we’ll be outsmarted. Secondly, they are currently in class B. We’ll get class points in addition to our rewards, which will give us an edge over the other classes. The third and final point is that the Class B title is a sham. We are already side by side with Ryūen-kun’s Class D. At one time, she was far ahead in class points, but her class is now on a downward slope. I think that makes her an ideal opponent.”

She spoke rather quickly, perhaps because she was concerned about time, but her reasoning was clear, and it seemed to have resonated with many of the students.

“If any students have any objections, I would like them to voice their opinions here and now. If, on the other hand, you think that Class B is okay, then you can vote for Class B as soon as possible and we can talk about it.”

I would like to get a unanimous vote on this issue for the second time.

I can feel Horikita’s intention. As if in response, Yōsuke stands up as well.

“I also agree with what you just said, Horikita-san. The additional reward for defeating Sakayanagi-san and the rest of Class A is huge, but there’s no doubt that they are stronger enemies than anyone else. Of course, the strong bonds and solid fighting style of Ichinose-san and the others won’t be easy to overcome, but I think they are the best opponents.”

With the two of them pushing for B class, the direction of the classmates began to take shape. Then, as if to bring the flow of events to a head, one more person, still seated, offers an opinion to match.

“I think I’ll go with Ichinose-san too. I don’t think it’s fair that we don’t get any additional rewards for fighting Ryūen-kun’s class, and it wouldn’t be funny if we lost to Sakayanagi-san’s class.”

Before any opposition could be raised, Yōsuke and Kei quickly solidified their opinions by voting for Class B. It could be said that they went with the follow-up as planned, but it was probably safe to assume that the two of them also wanted to fight with Class B. The fact that Class B received the most votes in the first round of voting was a clear indication of this.

The interval, which lasted nearly six extra minutes, eventually passed without any dissenting opinions. While checking the time, Chabashira-sensei resumed the proceedings that had been halted.



“Then we will move on to the second vote as the time has expired. As soon as the tablet screen changes, you have 60 seconds to cast your vote. I explained to you beforehand, if you go past 60 seconds, the penalty time will accumulate. Be careful.”

That caution was unnecessary, and in less than ten seconds, everyone had voted the second time. The results were immediately reflected and displayed on the monitor.

**[Results of the second round of voting:]**

*Class A: 0 votes*

*Class B: 39 votes*

*Class D: 0 votes*

Without Kōenji jokingly putting in a vote for another class, we succeeded in getting the first unanimous vote with a smooth start.

“By unanimous consent, the first question shall be finalized with the choice of Class B. I will inform you of the class you will face in the final exam as soon as it is officially decided, but that will be after tomorrow.”

In just ten minutes or so, we had completed one of the five questions. We were also able to vote for the Class B that Horikita and the others wanted to face.

For me personally, if I had to choose a partner to fight, I would have definitely chosen Ichinose’s class.

Horikita had already said all the reasons for this, so there was nothing to add. All that was left was to hope that Sakayanagi and Ryūen’s classes would match up, but since Ichinose’s class was sometimes easy to target, there might be three classes competing for her. Let’s hope it won’t be too much trouble and Ichinose’s class will choose our class in return.

“I don’t think we need to take a break, but just to make sure, I’ll ask. You don’t mind if we move on to the next question, do you?”

Of course, no one from the student body objected, so the second question began immediately.

“Now then, let’s move on to the second question.”

**[QUESTION TWO:]**

*Choose a destination you would like to see for the school trip scheduled for late November.*

**[Choices:]**

*Hokkaido*

*Kyoto*

*Okinawa*

“What is this?” I heard a voice leak out from one of the students.

Since private conversations were not allowed in the school, the voices were quickly drowned out by the sharp stares of Chabashira-sensei.

However, it is undeniable that many students were thinking, “What the hell is this? Even so, we can’t even talk about it until we have voted first.

The only way to vote is to genuinely think about which option to choose for yourself.

“This vote is the same as the previous one, and this one is not final. The results may change depending on the situation of the remaining three classes, so be sure to understand that.”

**[Results of the first round of voting:]**

*17 votes for Hokkaido*

*3 votes for Kyoto*

*19 votes for Okinawa*

With the exception of Kyoto, the voting results were shown to be much closer than before.

“Since the vote was not unanimous, we will now have an interval.”

“Hey, hey, can we call this a special test? I mean, it’s a piece of cake.”

When the interval came, Hondō said with a laugh as if he was out of sync. It’s true that the first and second questions don’t need to be asked in such an ostentatious manner. They could be summarized in the course of homeroom.

It’s only been two questions. After this, two-fifths of the special exam would be over. The content is too easy. Many of the students were probably starting to relax more than they were nervous.

However, it is interesting to note that there are some students who become more anxious as the situation increases. Typical of these are the cautious and thoughtful students like Horikita and Yōsuke. While everyone is laughing and discussing which way to go, they are looking at the question seriously.

I guess maybe they have a valid reason not to be worried. It was hard to believe that such a question that was going to be taken seriously. However, the easier the first part is, the more pressure there will be on the second half.



With this premonition in mind, I quietly watched the flow of the interval.

“I’m sure we all have our own thoughts. But let’s focus on this question first.” Wary of getting distracted, Yōsuke pulls the entire class back together. “The first time, it was more or less a split between Hokkaido and Okinawa, so what are we going to do now?”

It is definitely an important vote to decide the school trip destination.

“Horikita-san, it looks like we’re divided in our opinions, do you have any advice for us?”

Kushida was worried about Horikita, who didn’t speak up right away unlike before. However, Horikita didn’t reply immediately, and for a moment, the room went silent.

“Horikita-san?” Kushida called out her name again with a bit of concern, and Horikita hurriedly answered.

“I’m sorry. I’ve been thinking about it for a bit. It’s not a complicated choice, but I thought it might be surprisingly hard to make it unanimous. The school trip is an important event for us students, and of course I can’t summarize its destination in a single word.”

I promised to follow the leader if things went wrong, but that still didn’t mean that Horikita alone could decide the destination of the school trip. It’s a tough choice, considering it’s a matter of preference, not merit or demerit.

“Anyway, I guess we’ll just have to start by asking you to give us your opinion on your preferred travel destination.”

As if he had been waiting for that, Sudō raised his hand.

“Okay, I’ll start. I want to go to Okinawa. Okinawa is the most popular school trip because of the ocean, right? It’s got the most votes, so I guess it’s settled, right?”

“Wait a minute. I’ll admit that Okinawa is one of the standard places, but if you say that, then so is the North Coast Highway. It’s not even a close call in terms of votes. Don’t you want to go skiing or something?” Maezono, who seemed to have voted for Hokkaido, said in opposition to Sudō.

“I’d like to go to Okinawa. I want to go snorkeling!”

“I’ve been to Okinawa a few times, so Hokkaido is my choice...”

The two travel destinations with close vote counts start to disagree head on. Since they both chose the destination they thought was best for them, it’s not surprising that they are critical of the other options.

“In the first place, there’s only snow in Hokkaido, right? It’s definitely boring.”

“Well, if you put it that way, Okinawa is nothing but ocean, isn’t it?”

They argued for a few minutes, with no end in sight, until Yōsuke intervened.

“Hokkaido and Okinawa are both equally popular destinations for school trips, so I guess it’s not unreasonable to get into trouble, but you might want to be a little more considerate of the others.”

Yōsuke appealed to her to stop speaking out of turn. The first part of the conversation had been about how wonderful their chosen destination was, but now it was turning into a discussion of how to humiliate the other person’s choice.

“Hirata-kun picked Hokkaido, right?”

“Hey Hirata, you chose Okinawa, didn’t you?”

“W-Well, I mean...” Sandwiched between both groups, Yōsuke gives a troubled look. “That’s a bit... secret... isn’t it?”

In this situation, it’s hard to answer which one he put in. In a way, this is the moment when the anonymous name comes alive.

“The only place you can swim in November is Okinawa, right? Don’t you want to go to the beach?”

“I don’t want to go to the ocean anymore. I’ve had enough after the island. Hokkaido for sure!”

The discussion was interrupted once, but it soon became heated again.

The exchange between Sudō and Maezono could probably be seen as a microcosm of the entire class’ opinions.

“Oh my... what should we do, Horikita-san?” With a troubled look on her face, Kushida asks Horikita for help.

“We’re in a tough spot I suppose.”

The difficulty of unanimity. Maybe they’ve been given a problem that will bring it to the surface sooner rather than later. There was no easy way to wrap up the conversation, and the ten-minute interval was coming to an end.

Incidentally, I’m thinking of voting for Kyoto this second time. Kyoto has a deep history. I had a strong desire to see that scene.

“So, now that all the voting for the second round is complete, the results will be displayed.”

**[Results of the second round of voting:]**

*18 votes for Hokkaido*

*4 votes for Kyoto*

*17 votes for Okinawa*

“Ah, Hokkaido did a reversal! We did it!”

“Damn, who switched from Okinawa to Hokkaido?”

It was almost a 50-50 split, although Hokkaido was slightly ahead with more votes than before. However, both the Hokkaido and Okinawa groups start arguing over the votes that were moved.

No matter how many times the voting is repeated, it will never be settled. The only sad thing is that it's not being talked about at all. It's just about the votes now...

Perhaps the votes of Horikita, who first chose option 2, Kyoto, did not move. Of course, it's possible that Horikita voted for Hokkaido or Okinawa and someone else voted for Kyoto, so we can't be sure, but there is a way to force the vote to go to the one with the most votes, but that is likely to leave a lasting grudge. If Hokkaido had won twice in a row, Okinawa would have won the first round of voting.

"It can't be helped. I guess we'll have to settle for a winner. There are three people who want Hokkaido, and three people who want Okinawa. We'll choose a representative for each and have them play rock-paper-scissors. We'll choose the spearhead, the middleman, and the general, and play a winner-take-all game. However, Kyoto, with its low number of votes, will be left with only one representative. It's a tough fight, but we'll try to keep it as fair as possible."

It would certainly be unfair for the minority group of Kyoto to be able to fight on equal terms with the other two.

If we want to put it together without coercion and time, we should do it this way. It's inevitable that there will be some dissatisfaction, but if the rules are set at the beginning, there's no choice but to follow them. While there was some wrangling over who would be the representative of the rock-paper-scissors team, the contestants were soon chosen.

The Hokkaido team, spearheaded by Maezono, middleweight Ishikura, and general Shinohara. This is a women's team.

Okinawa team, spearhead, Onodera, middle, Hondō, general, Sudō, mixed gender team.

"Also, whoever voted for Kyoto, can you join us for rock-paper-scissors?"

Horikita hopes to have one representative. Then one man raises his hand in full.

"If no one else is willing to participate, I'll be the captain. I'll definitely bring everyone to Kyoto."

It was Keisei who expressed his strong will and threw himself into the fierce battle. He was the first student from the Kyoto selection to speak out.

Kyoto is also my preferred school trip destination. I'm counting on you to take care of me, Keisei. It's going to be a tough fight, but I hope you can pull it off...

In order to make it to the third round of voting, the rock-paper-scissors game was quickly started. The Okinawa team easily won the match. The Kyoto team's dream was shattered in an instant, and they left the battlefield with a broken heart.

It was a fleeting moment, less than ten seconds after Keisei had come forward.

I witnessed Horikita put her hand on her forehead and sigh, and I was convinced that she was one of those who wanted to go to Kyoto.

The game continued as if the Kyoto hopefuls had never existed in the first place. Onodera, who had defeated both of them in the first game, won two games in a row, defeating Ishikura in the middle game to take the lead. However, there was an unexpected turn of events when Shinohara, who appeared as the general, defeated Onodera, who in turn faced Hondō.

The two sides glared at each other as they were locked in a battle between the two generals.

“Definitely Okinawa! Beaches and snorkelling”

“Definitely Hokkaido! Hot springs and Skiing!”

Each of them clenched their fists while chanting out random words that relate with each destination. When both of their raised fists were brought down, their hands were each at par. It's a match. I'd like to say they're laugh it off, but they stop moving and take a break.

They're just deciding where to go on a school trip, but the tension is unbelievable.

“First, par! Then, rock, paper, scissors.

The second clash. Sudō made a powerful par.

Shinohara, on the other hand, threw a brilliant par for the second time in a row.

“I got it! It's Hokkaido!”

The Hokkaido group shouted in unison.

“What are you doing, Sudō!”

“Damn you...!”

I don't want to get in the way, but the only vote in this class should be Hokkaido. Now if some votes were gathered for Okinawa or Kyoto, there would be trouble. Horikita understood that this was not the kind of atmosphere in which to say such a thing, and she looked somewhat dismayed. The third round of voting was held, and everyone operated their tablets at once.

**[Results of the third round of voting:]**

*39 votes for Hokkaido*

*0 votes for Kyoto*

*0 votes for Okinawa*

“The third vote was unanimous, so the second question is clear.”

While about half of the voters remain dissatisfied with the results, the third round of voting was successful in achieving unanimity through a fair fight according to the established rules. Although I couldn't get my heart's desire of Kyoto, I'm very much looking forward to Hokkaido, and depending on what happens in the other classes, Kyoto and Okinawa are still possible.

Anyway, no matter where we end up, it's a subject that makes me look forward to the school trip.

“Now, let me move on to the third question.” Chabashira-sensei's demeanor hadn't changed since the beginning, but there was a slight change in the tone of her voice when she uttered the next question.

**[QUESTION THREE:]**

*- Instead of the private points that are paid out according to class points each month being reduced to zero, three random students in the class will be given protection points.*

*- Alternatively, the number of private points awarded could be halved, and a specific student could be awarded a protection point.*

*- If neither of these options is desired, the bottom five students in the next written exam will receive zero private points.*

*No matter which option is chosen, the period of private point forfeiture will continue for six months.*

Unlike the previous two questions, this one encompassed major advantages and disadvantages within the class. In option one, the payback is greater because of the larger number of private points you lose, but you also cannot overlook the fact that they are given to random students.

Protection points are a very powerful boon, but depending on your point of view, there are some students who will end up not needing them for three years. If they are given to such students, they may end up being a waste of private points.

Option two is also not cheap, as the amount of private points transferred is halved. Moreover, only one student will be granted protection. However, being

able to choose any student is an important factor.

Option three is to minimize the loss of private points as much as possible. This would be the option you would choose if you find the protection points too expensive or if you don't need them in the first place. However, you should not forget that even though you have five players you still have to bear the disadvantages.

In addition to calculating the profit and loss, it is also necessary to consider the class situation. Some students may have a lot to say, but there is no other way but to vote first.

“Before we vote, let's talk about the case where there is unanimity on option two, the option to grant to a particular student. If the vote is unanimous on this choice, we will move on to the next option where we will continue to determine one person without clearing question three. You remember the example, don't you?”

The interval will be used to select one student and collect votes for or against granting it to that student. If the vote is unanimous in favour, the student will receive a protection point; if the vote is unanimous against, the student will no longer have a chance in that question. Then, the remaining 38 students will discuss and select one candidate. We will have to repeat the question in such a subdivision, taking the approval and disapproval again.

“Based on those results, we will announce the results of the first round of voting.”

**[Results of the first round of voting:]**

*12 votes to grant three random people*

*5 votes to select and grant one person*

*22 votes to not grant anyone*

The results of the first round of voting seemed to indicate that the majority of people were willing to meditate on some of the inconveniences and give up their protection points. That may be so, since the five students who will lose their private points are already determined to be the bottom five in the written exam. For those students who don't fall into that category, it's risk-free. On the other hand, some of them might think that it's more beneficial to gain protection points if they know that they won't get private points for six months anyway.

“Hey, wait a minute! I don't understand something about this!”

“Me neither! If we don't get protection points, we'll only lose five people!”

Ike and Satō were the first to speak up, as they were students who seemed to fall into the bracket for lowest grades.

“Well, it can’t be helped, can it? It’s a bit like... not getting your private points transferred for six months. In addition, random is a low probability, and specific is unlikely to be given to me so please sacrifice yourself, Kanji.”

Sudō can only confidently suggest that since he’s already out of the bottom five in the class for academics.

“That’s not fair! Even I need a lot of private points right now!”

“You’re not going to tell me you need money to go on dates with Shinohara, are you?”

“I mean... well, what does it matter to you?!” He didn’t seem to be bothered by the fact that his use of the money was exposed, and it seemed to be a matter of life and death.

“It’s settled, it’s settled. It’s unanimous that there will be no grant.”

“I can’t have that!”

“Then you should study. That’ll solve it, right?”

“H-hey... I just can’t agree with what Ken says! He’s asking too much.”

Of course it’s important to study and break out of the lower ranks, but no matter how many points you get, you can’t change the fact that five people will be sacrificed.

“I understand what you’re saying, but it’s too early to be pessimistic. We just need to minimize the number of private points we lose and we can all make up for the burden. The remaining 34 students should be able to make up for the bottom five’s private points that will be lost each month. This way, only certain students won’t feel dissatisfied, right?”

In simple terms, if one student earns 50,000 points per month, then 250,000 points for five students will be lost. The remaining 34 students get 1.7 million points, which, if divided by 39 and rounded down to the nearest whole number, comes to 43589 points. The loss of points is unavoidable, but each person would only lose about 6500 points. Even if that lasted for six months, the stress on each student would be minimal.

“Well, that’s fine then...”

“I don’t really want to share... but I suppose I could help Kanji if he really needs it.” Sudō seemed to be dissatisfied, but he was willing to help Ike in any way he could.

As many of the students wished to not be granted, they naturally began to agree on the direction to stick with option three. However, in the midst of all this, Yōsuke raised his voice.

“Horikita-san, do you think it’s best to choose no grant?”

“That’s a tough one. It’s a pretty troubling option, to be honest. Protection points can be a very powerful tool to prevent expulsion. But the same can be said

for private points. I wonder if Hirata-kun thinks differently?”

“It’s only one opinion, but I think I should get protection points for this question . For all three of us, of course.”

“If you don’t get any private points for six months, it’s going to hurt a lot. Not only will it put a lot of stress on your daily life, but it could also affect your special exam if the situation warrants it.”

The possibility that private points could make the difference between winning and losing cannot be denied.

“If something unforeseen happens, we can protect three people. The timing of when you can get protection points is quite limited, plus this is a valuable commodity that can’t be taken lightly.”

I couldn’t help but understand why Yōsuke is somewhat passionate about this. The value of the protection points that can prevent expulsion is actually up to 20 million private points. It’s not often that you get the chance to get them for three people. Especially for Yōsuke, who cares about his friends, it’s a value that can’t be replaced by money.

The destination of the school trip was a different story, one that was not easily agreed upon. It’s hard to influence the outcome of the class in any destination, but this protection point choice is a problem for the whole class. If we get it, it may save someone else’s life.

“Sorry, but let me have my say.” Keisei stood up and expressed his opinion. “For the next six months, we’re going to increase our class points, right?”

“Of course. There’s never a good time to stagnate in your quest for a higher class.”

“Fifty for this special exam, and a hundred points if we place high in the cultural festival. Assuming the sports festival increases similar points, by the end of the semester, you might have more than 200 points, or even 300 points depending on the situation. Can I assume that?”

“I suppose we will.”

If we increased the class points by 300 points by the end of the year, our class points would recover to the point where he could peek at 1000. If that happens, the total amount of private points given out in six months will be about fifty percent more than now, about twenty million points.

If you think about it, the maximum value of one protection point is equivalent to six months of class income. It’s a beautiful figure that seems to have been calculated. However, if you choose 3 protection points here, you can get about 7 million private points per protection point.

It’s a very fine line, isn’t it?

And the most unlikely one, giving one instead of three looks like a good



combination of advantages and disadvantages, but it is actually the least costly and hardest to choose. However, it is the only one that has the advantage of being able to be given to a specific student, which is probably an important factor. However, if you decide to give it to any one student, you will naturally have to follow up with a unanimous vote.

If this choice is bypassed and passed carelessly, there will be a possibility of a dispute over who to grant it to.

“So the idea of prioritizing private points is an offensive strategy, while the idea of prioritizing protection points is a defensive strategy, right?” Kushida asks as she tries to sort out the situation, and the three people who are currently sitting in their seats nod almost simultaneously.

“But if we end up not using the protection points, then we risk that it was an expensive purchase, right? Of course, I’m fine with that...”

It would be inevitable to talk about it, too, to keep that fact known.

“Yeah. After all, if you never use it, it’s equal to nothing. Of course, there will be a sense of security and peace of mind that comes with owning a protection point, but...”

“It may or may not be worthless. Even if it ends up being unnecessary in its original use, it can be used as a strategy to intentionally consume protection points to launch a surprise attack or to use it as a self-destruct mechanism. You might even be able to use them for offensive purposes, not simply for protection.”

I can understand why Keisei pushes that there are many ways to use protection points. It’s a great advantage to be able to avoid expulsion from the school. However, we won’t know what the special exams will be until we have the full picture.

There is no guarantee that we will have the opportunity to use it effectively in the future. But this question, or rather the special exam, is deeper than I thought. Even though the content of the question is the same for all the classes, the depth of the question changes depending on the rank of the class and the situation. If the class points are equal to zero, then it is unanimous to choose to get three protection points without any trouble. It was a good opportunity for the other classes to follow suit. On the other hand, for Class A, which is in sole possession of first place, it would be a more expensive purchase than the other classes.

On the flip side, the first and third options can be seen as somewhat inconvenient choices for Class A.

“Then Yukimura-kun, you are saying that we should grant protection points to three students? Isn’t there a risk with it being random?”

In order to make a final confirmation and narrow down the options, Horikita tries to get a word in edgewise.

“You misunderstand. The option I’m recommending is the second. The one that grants a protection point to one student.”

Horikita shows surprise at the development of wanting option two, which was thought to be the least likely.

“Does that mean, for lack of a better word, that I should grant it to you?”

“I’d honestly be happy if you did. But that’s not realistic. I think you’d want me to grant choose someone worthy of it, because that’s basically what all of us would do.”

If we asked for a show of hands, even a simple one, it wouldn’t be surprising if the entire class raised their hands.

“It’s hard to pick out a specific person. But no matter how much of a bargain it is, I don’t know how well giving protection points to three random people will work.”

“You seem to have a clear idea of who you should give them to. Who do you want to give them to?”

“If you want to make a strategic decision, Horikita-san, I’m thinking of no one but you.”

“Me?”

“Correct. Right now, you’re the leader of this class, and I have no complaints about your abilities in OAA. Obviously, you’d be targeted by Sakayanagi and Ryūen at the very least. It’s not surprising to think that those two would try to expel you without mercy. It’s best if we protect our leader first, then worry about the rest of us later.”

Normally, there would be some animosity, but naturally the classmates listened.

Because he had a solid reason, not a random one.

“That’s not the only reason. Normally, when you hold a protection point, there is a risk of loosening up. There is also the risk that you will not take it seriously, thinking that you are safe. I’m sure you’re not that kind of person. I feel quite strongly about that.”

It’s not just a matter of giving it to someone who has the ability to do it, but someone who can do more for the class after being given it. That’s what Horikita is, according to Keisei.

“I understand what you’re saying, but... it’s an expensive purchase.”

This option will result in losing half of our private points for six months.

“They feel like they’re losing money because they think they’re just losing private points. This is an upfront investment. Horikita will turn it into more class points than you pay for with this option. It’s easier to think that way, isn’t it?”

“Even so... it could crash, you know?”

“I don’t believe we can beat Class A without taking a risk. I’ve been fighting at this school for a year and a half myself.”

“Hmph. That’s valid, isn’t it? I agree with your current proposal, Glasses-kun.”

Kōenji, who we had thought would never be involved in this special exam, verbally showed his approval.

“For the amount of protection points we give up, we can have the Horikita girl work harder than anyone else.”

“You have a protection point, but you don’t seem to be working hard.”

“Hard work is something ordinary people do, you know. I’d rather sit back and let you people handle it.”

It’s great that Kōenji took a passive approach to this exam. I assumed he was going to be the biggest hurdle. Personally, I was thinking of option one or three, but I agree with Keisei’s presentation.

More importantly, if I’m going to voice my disagreement, I need to have a good reason. It’s hard to say that it’s for the good of the class if it’s simply because it has to do with private points.

In the atmosphere created by Keisei, the next voting period arrives.

**[Results of the second round of voting:]**

*0 votes to grant three random people*

*39 votes to select and grant one person*

*0 votes to not grant anyone*

It turns out that Keisei’s idea was adopted after successfully sewing through the gap. However, it’s a little troublesome to choose a candidate right away, since there’s a rule that there should be an interval between the choices.

This time, there were no students who objected to giving Horikita a protection point, so the students were free to speak and kill time during the interval. It was decided that Horikita would run as a candidate and become a specific person, without the need to hold a vote on who to recommend. The vote was unanimous with 39 votes in favour of Horikita without any disturbance.

It was a challenge that I thought would be difficult, but the fact that it was passed more smoothly than I expected was significant.

“This concludes question three. From now on, for the next six months, all private point transfers will be half price equally for everyone, but a protection point for Horikita will be granted at this time.”

Of course, she couldn't make use of it in this special test, but this succeeded in giving Horikita, the leader of the group, valuable protection. It was not a cheap purchase, but it was not too expensive either.

**[QUESTION FOUR:]**

*One of the following rules will be applied to the class in the written exam at the end of the second semester.*

**[Choices:]**

*Increased Difficulty*

*Increased Penalty*

*Decreased Reward*

These are nasty choices. None of them are a advantage to the class. If it had been a time when private conversation was allowed, there would have been a lot of grumbling.

**[Results of the first round of voting:]**

*6 votes for increased difficulty*

*18 votes for increased penalty*

*15 votes for decreased rewards*

All of these are basically options you don't want to choose, and the votes are split. After that, there was a heated debate between the students who were confident and those who were not, and it seemed that the question would be prolonged, but in the second round of voting, the choice of "Increase Penalty" led to a unanimous result.

Horikita's strong persuasion that it would not be difficult to avoid penalties if we worked diligently also seemed to have worked.

### 3

With a time limit of five hours, we reached the final question in about an hour without a hitch. I'm sure many of the students thought that they would be able to complete the last question with ease. Once the last question was completed, the special exam would be cleared and 50 class points would be awarded.

However, if there was one concern, it would be the homeroom teacher's condition.

"Now... then, this... is your last question."

As each question progressed, it was obvious that Chabashira-sensei's complexion was changing for the worse. It was clear to the students that she had finally reached its peak and they were looking pale.

"Sensei, are you okay?"

Even though it was before the question was announced, private conversation was not allowed. However, Yōsuke couldn't overlook it and raised his voice.

"Excuse me?"

"No, it's just that you're obviously not feeling well."

"Is that so? I'm not sure what you mean Hirata."

She didn't seem to be faking it. In other words, she's not even aware that she's not looking right herself. Or maybe I should say that I'm not conscious of it. Anyway, once he was told that this was not the case, Yōsuke had no choice but to back off.

The teacher in the back of the room didn't move either, so the final question would probably begin.

But one thing is for sure, the next question should have a lot to do with Chabashira-sensei's current physical condition.

"I'm about to display the final question. Prepare to vote." Chabashira-sensei held her breath as she touched her tablet.

And so, the final question was displayed in front of us.

#### [QUESTION FIVE:]

*Gain 100 class points in exchange for one classmate being expelled.*

*(If the vote is unanimous in favour, identify the student who will be expelled and vote for him/her.)*

**[Choices:]**

*For*

*Against*

The last question has only two options, the fewest so far. At first glance, one might think that the fewer the number of options, the easier it would be to come to a consensus. In reality, however, the number of choices does not have much influence. If there are a lot of strangers in the room, or if it's not possible to have a discussion, having a large number of choices can be a disadvantage, but in our class, we can have a lot of discussions. The important thing is always the content of the question.

Expulsion or Class Points.

Here we had one of the worst questions I could have imagined.

The students, who are not allowed to speak, must have been upset when they read the question in their minds.

If they voted in favour of the question, one of their classmates would be expelled. Under normal circumstances, the entire class should have voted “no” without hesitation. Although 100 class points is not a small number, most of us would prefer not to have one of our classmates expelled in return.

If this were a majority vote, it would probably end with a majority against in one vote.

However, the past four questions have proven that it does not work that way. That's the simple but difficult part of unanimity.

“The... 60-second count will now begin. Students are asked to... begin voting.” Chabashira-sensei called out in a shaky voice.

No extra time is given, and the 60-second voting period begins. If the vote is unanimous in favour of the proposal, it'll inevitably lead us down a dangerous path. Again, of course, almost none of the students would want that to happen. 100 class points, because it's not so much a need that must be earned.

If this had been in the third semester of my senior year, with only one or two more special exams to go, I would not be in the same state of mind as I am now. In a close race for one point, the value of those 100 points would skyrocket. At that time, it could have been a battle between two ultimate choices.

However, the situation is different now. This is not a time when almost everyone would hesitate to vote “against”.

Still, it is true that there are a number of concerns, including Kōenji.

That's why I took my hands off my tablet and took my time to think.

According to the agreement with Horikita, my role in the first round of voting is to vote for option one, no matter what the issue may be. But if 38 people, including

Horikita, are voting against it now, it is better to vote against it without an interval and combine them into 39 votes.

This is an issue that should be finished quickly, without giving any unnecessary space. There is no guarantee that students will not be swayed by the 100 points if you interrupt the discussion even once. I decided that this was the only question where I didn't need an interval.

After close to sixty seconds, I see a notification that all the votes have been cast.

“All... have voted and will be informed of the results.”

Despite the obvious anomaly, Chabashira-sensei kept her posture and continued to proceed.

**[Results of the first round of voting:]**

*2 in favour*

*37 against*

Not unanimous, huh? I took my finger off the button and quietly looked at the results.

Chabashira-sensei, who should be reading out the results, remained motionless, staring at the monitor as the students did. The results are surprising, and the votes can't be described as “split.”

“Chabashira-sensei. Please proceed.”

The teacher cautions Chabashira-sensei from behind, who is dribbling out time, albeit for a few seconds.

“Ah... I apologize. T-the results are... 2 votes in favour, 37 against. Since the vote was not unanimous, we'll go into an interval.”

Two votes in favour?

“Hey, who the hell voted in favour of that? Are you kidding me?” Sudō's strong gaze was unilaterally directed at Kōenji.

Although Kōenji had made some comments about protection points, he hadn't really stood out much, but the content of this question was probably the only thing that made him stand out.

Of course, that was Sudō's idea, but I'm sure many of the students agreed with him.

“Which way did you vote, Kōenji?”

“Do I have to answer that?”

“If you can't answer, it means you voted in favour, right?”

“Don't be so judgmental, Red Hair-kun. In the first place, according to Horikita girl, you should be allowed to make any choice in the first round of

voting. I don't think you have any right to complain about which one you put in, do you?"

Sudō becomes blatantly unhappy after receiving a good argument.

"Even if one vote was Kōenji, that means there's another guy who voted in favour, right?"

Ike focused on the part of the vote that remained even if Kōenji was excluded.

"That's definitely a problem, too. Who the hell is that?" Sudō barked in annoyance, as if he had no idea who the other person was.

"Don't panic. One of the people who voted in favour is Ayanokōji-kun."

"What? Oh, Ayanokōji voted in favour? How can you say that, Suzune...?"

"I've been keeping it a secret up to this point, but before this special exam started, me and him had made a pact regarding voting. Whatever the content of the question, I've arranged it so that the first vote will not be unanimous."

As we reached the last question, Horikita mentioned the contents of our prior meeting. Surely there is no advantage to keeping it hidden when we get to this stage. It's obviously more wasteful to spend time and effort trying to figure out who the one vote is.

"To avoid unanimity on an unexpected choice, yes?"

Yōsuke added a few words to make it easier to understand for the students who didn't fully understand.

"I guess so..."

"What's that about? But if that's the case, you should have told me about it earlier."

"Not so fast. The first round of voting, when you're not allowed to talk, is an important opportunity to get a proper idea of what your classmates want to choose. If they knew that I was planning to prevent the vote from being unanimous from the start, some students might just vote randomly. I wanted to avoid that. It was his role to vote for the first option. I would vote for the second option. That's why only one person actually voted in favour." Looking around the classroom, Horikita speaks to that someone. "It's a bit of a radical question, but it's up to the individual to decide which way to vote. I don't think it's wrong in itself to vote in favour in order to grab class points. But I think we should all vote against it as a class. If you have any objections, I would appreciate it if you could raise them here."

Normally, the student who had voted in favour of the proposal would have come forward at this point.

But no matter how long we waited, no one answered Horikita's question.

"How long are you going to keep your mouth shut, Kōenji?"

"Fufu. As I said before, I don't want you to assume that I'm in favour of



this.

“What the hell. I know you’re just messing around anyway.”

Since it’s Kōenji we’re dealing with, he might have been amused by Sudō’s anger, only provoking him for entertainment. If the vote is unanimous in favour, the vote to expel one person from the class will begin.

In other words, someone wants to get 100 class points for expelling one of their classmates. That would attract attention and criticism in a bad way. I really don’t want anyone to think that someone is thinking that way.

“I’ve had enough-”

“Calm down, Sudō-kun. It’s only the first round of voting, there’s no need to be particularly upset.”

“Okay, but still! I don’t like that someone actually voted in favour for this option.”

“It’s your choice to interpret it that way. But we have no proof that it was Kōenji-kun. I also interpreted it to mean that whoever voted in favour of it was sorry for not coming forward. If they vote no on the second ballot, it will be unanimous. That should be enough.”

The issue was cleared. Horikita seemed to have decided that there was no need to take extra time. As I was thinking to myself, not pursuing it would be one of the best choices we could make right now.

“There’s no need for further discussion on this issue. Come on, let’s finish it in the next vote.”

Looking at the calm Horikita, Sudō tapped both cheeks once as if to discipline himself. And with a bit of unrelated chit-chat, it was time for us to vote for the second time.

“We will now begin the 60-second voting period.”

The 4K UHD screen switches to show the in favour and against buttons. It seemed that the voting was completed in approximately twenty seconds.

“Voting is now complete and the results of the second vote will be displayed.”

**[Results of the second round of voting:]**

*2 in favour*

*37 against*

Up until now, the special exam didn’t create any strong tension. However, the moment the results of this second round were announced, the room went silent. Once again, the result was two votes in favour.

This meant that the vote had not shifted even after the explanation given

earlier.

This fact was conveyed from an inorganic monitor.

“Wait a minute, what does this mean?”

The person Horikita looked at as she said this was, of all people, me.

Why did you vote in favour for the second time? That was the question.

The students, including Sudō, who understood the explanation, also looked at me.

“I voted *against* both the first vote and just now, in the second vote.”

“What? Ayanokōji was supposed to vote for option one, right?”

“Yeah. But because of the content of the question, I took the liberty of deciding that it would be better to vote for the *against* option. I didn’t tell you that because I didn’t want to cause any unnecessary conflict.”

If there were two people in favour of the first vote, the upset would increase. Now they can no longer play it off as a joke. Even Horikita, who had carried herself calmly throughout this entire process, was a little distraught.

“So... there are at least two people who think it’s in favour of the current question, is that it?” Horikita puts a hand to her lips and thinks. She would probably like to stop and think about it, but the interval is precious. “If you’re going to continue to vote in favour of this, could you please tell me exactly why you’re in favour of it? As you can see, all but two of the results show that thirty-seven people are against the idea. If you want everyone to vote in favour, I’d like to see a reasonable presentation.”

The basis for swaying the vote is discussion. If more people decide that there are greater advantages to voting in favour, the vote will naturally shift. On the other hand, if there is no discussion, it is not easy to sway votes. However, the answer to this question was silence from everyone.

“Hey, hey, Horikita-san. It’s okay... right? No one is going to drop out of the class, right?” Kushida was worried, but she couldn’t stand the silence and asked Horikita that question.

“As I said before, my policy is to not let anyone drop out of school.”

Horikita reiterates her determination, but after that, the silence continues. It’s easy to utter the first and last compulsion, but...

“I don’t know who’s against this. But I want you to listen carefully.”

Yōsuke stands up and speaks gently but forcefully. “You shouldn’t choose to cut off your classmates in order to gain class points. I don’t think the points gained from such a choice are worth anything, even if they were 500 or 1000 class points. The most important thing is that there are other ways to achieve class points.”

A well-deserved appeal from the man who would suffer the most from such

a sacrifice. Thirty-seven out of the thirty-nine of us understood that to some extent, as Yōsuke had said.

They should be willing to let go of 100 class points if the price to pay is a valued classmate. But whether or not that is their true intention is another matter. Even before the first vote, the outcome of the vote was heavily influenced by silent peer pressure.

There must be some students in the class who think that they will never be expelled. In such a situation, it would not be surprising if some of them really thought that they would not mind sacrificing their classmates.

“Very well, it’s getting interesting in this special exam. This is quite enjoyable.” Kōenji started laughing with amusement and continued. “I thought you were going to vote against me in the second round.” Kōenji stated without seeming to take offense.

“So it *was* you, Kōenji!”

“Kōenji-kun, is that true? I’d like to stop you from becoming the boy who cried wolf here because that would cause a nasty mess.” Horikita reaffirmed, prioritizing clarifying whether he was really against it or not first.

“Don’t worry, I made sure to vote *in favour* the first time and the second time.”

“Can you tell me why?”

“The answer is simple. You’ll get 100 more class points, right? That means you’ll inevitably get more private points every month, so there’s no reason to vote *against*.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me. You think class points are more important than your friends?”

“You have a funny way of saying things. You didn’t seem like that kind of person when you first came here.”

“Shut up!”

“I’m voting *in favour*, so of course I’ll take that into consideration.”

“What the hell do you think your friends are...?”

“Friends? I’ve never thought of any of you as my friends.”

“So you’re saying you’re not going to change your vote to the other side at the next vote?”

“Of course not. I’ll probably continue to vote *in favour* if things ‘stay the same’. I’m sure Horikita girl doesn’t want to just run out of time, right?”

“Ha. Don’t think things will go as you wish, Kōenji. If that’s what you’re planning to do, we’re not going to let you get away with it either, Suzune. Let’s all vote *in favour* and get Kōenji expelled!”

It may have been a spur-of-the-moment answer, but it's also true that this question has a nasty aspect in terms of the "for" choice. We can unite to get rid of the bad guys who say that their classmates should be expelled. People subconsciously choose what they want to believe and then justify the reasons they chose. "I don't want to expel anyone, but I have to because they're holding back the class." The brain starts to work to justify that the person should be expelled. It also swallows convenient logic, conspiracies, and misinformation.

"I wish everyone would vote *in favour*. But don't think you can get me expelled for it. Isn't that right? Horikita girl."

If Kōenji came forward as one of the people who voted *in favour* of the question, it would be natural for people around him to make a fuss about being expelled. There was no way this man didn't understand that.

However, Kōenji was in a different situation than the rest of the students.

"He's right. We can't expel Kōenji-kun."

"What do you mean?"

"I made a promise to Kōenji-kun before the island exam started, remember? I promised Kōenji-kun that if he took first place in the Uninhabited Island exam, I would protect him until he graduated."

I'm sure the students remember that exchange.

"I didn't expect him to get first place either. But thanks to you getting first place in that exam, our class is now all the way in contention for Class B. That achievement is immeasurable."

"Yeah, that's true... but not if you're trying to bring the class down!"

"I'm not sure I'd call it "bringing the class down." I'm just freely choosing the choices that are entrusted to me. You can't assume that voting *in favour* is bad, can you?"

If the question was, "You may remove one student if you wish," you could argue that voting "for" is just evil. However, in this case, instead of expelling students, they would receive class points. Although it is difficult to put a concrete figure on the value of one student, no one has the right to deny Kōenji's calculation of the benefits of voting yes.

As long as there is a good argument and a promise, there is no way Horikita can cast a single vote for Kōenji's expulsion.

"Fine then. Let's go back on our word! If Kōenji doesn't think of his classmates as friends, no one will be bothered if he gets expelled!"

"I can't. I'm not going to break my promise to him."

"I guess you're right. No one will trust a class leader who doesn't keep his promises. I trust you more than anyone else right now in that sense, Horikita girl."

This is yet another example of Kōenji's troublesome side. Now that this has

happened, Horikita must first persuade Kōenji at all costs. But there is still plenty of opportunity to do so. Even if Kōenji believes that Horikita will not betray him, that does not mean that Kōenji is 100% protected. The possibility that Horikita will cut Kōenji loose must be in the back of his mind.

In other words, Kōenji will change his attitude if the seeds of such a move appear. If that happens, Horikita, who is beginning to become aware of her role as a leader, immediately cuts Kōenji, who has responded with results, will affect her status later on.

That choice will be a major hindrance in the future.

“If you’re not going to cut Kōenji, then what are you going to do, Suzune?”

“Give me some time to think about it.”

That would have been fine if the only one in favour was Kōenji. We can’t overlook the part that there is one more person in favour who hasn’t come forward.

“I wonder the person who voted in favour, excluding Kōenji-kun, can come forward and tell us.”

If we don’t know that, we can’t move forward. But the only response we got was a long, deep silence.

If you come forward here, there is a fear that you will be threatened and even argued unnecessary as well as Kōenji. Rather, they may receive more frowning upon than Kōenji.

The answer other than silence does not come.

Eventually, time ran out, and the third round of voting would come, whether we wanted it or not. Fortunately, there was no limit to the number of times we could vote. As long as time permits, there will be a chance to make the vote unanimous every ten minutes.

### **[Results of the third round of voting:]**

*2 in favour*

*37 against*

As in the past two rounds, two people voted in favour, Kōenji and someone we can’t see. For now, many of the students still put more weight on Kōenji’s side, but I wonder if they will eventually look in other directions.

It won’t be long before we are faced with the reality that there are students who have not come forward and continue to vote in favour of the project with their eagerness and vigilance. We are about to face the danger of anonymity, a danger that we had hoped to avoid the most. But the first priority is to deal with Kōenji.

Unless the votes in favour of the project are reversed, there will be no solution.

“We can’t ignore the other person who is voting *in favour*. I think there are certain beliefs that only the person who is so adamantly in favour of the project has. If that’s the case, then I’ll speak to Kōenji-kun and anyone else I can’t see at the same time.” Not wasting any time in passing, Horikita began to gather her thoughts. “Thirty-seven of us will continue to vote against this. And two of us will continue to vote in favour of it. The worst thing that will happen is that we will run out of time. Even then, we may lose class points, but we won’t lose our friends. We can get through this special exam without anyone dropping out. The people voting in favour feel that the class points are a major advantage though, right? Even so, it isn’t the end of the world. We can find other ways to achieve those class points.”

Horikita explains the risk of ending the exam in disagreement, citing specific gains and losses. Of course, the unseen one doesn’t answer anything, but what about Kōenji?

“Well, if we’re going to run out of time, go ahead and vote *in favour*.” Kōenji tells Horikita to vote in favour, as if it were a matter of course.

“It’s true that if the vote is *in favour* unanimously, we can move forward. But what awaits next is an even bigger hurdle: which of your classmates will be expelled. You don’t think it’ll be easy to get a unanimous vote either, do you?”

“It’s your job to put it all together, Horikita girl. Besides, having students drop out isn’t such a bad thing, is it?”

“That’s not true. We shouldn’t have expelled anyone.”

Before Horikita could argue with him, Yōsuke told Kōenji.

“I don’t get it. You guys seem to be afraid of expelling students, but wouldn’t it be easier mentally to see this as a positive? You can discard unwanted students at will. You can even get class points on top of that. If you change your mind a little, you’ll see that *in favour* is really a great choice for the class. The other person besides myself who’s voting in favour also knows that.”

It’s a pointy way of thinking, but it’s a good enough reason to cast your vote in favour.

“I don’t think that’s true, Kōenji-kun. Losing someone from this class is not a positive thing at all.” As if in response to Yōsuke, Kushida also said that classmates should be prioritized. Other students, who had not spoken much until now, began to voice their objections at once.

However, Kōenji did not soften his attitude, but only smiled and chuckled. Kōenji, who wanted to get the most out of the vote, did not respond to the discussion, and the fourth voting time arrived.

**[Results of the fourth round of voting:]**

*2 in favour*

*37 against*

After tens of minutes of appeals with no effect, the third interval begins with a signal from Chabashira-sensei.

“What am I supposed to do? Damn, is there any way we could just punch him, knock him out and vote on our own?”

“No, of course not. Let’s think about this objectively for once. If we do that, Kōenji-kun’s thoughts might change.”

As Horikita wanted to avoid just following a parallel path, she was forced to try a different approach.

“What do you mean by objective?”

“I mean, which of the three classes, excluding us, will choose *in favour*.”

“Definitely Ryūen’s class, they’re going to cut out the right guy, aren’t they?” Sudō says without hesitation, crossing his arms at the back of her head.

Many of his classmates seemed to agree with him, letting out mouthfuls of “sure.” From the way he thinks and acts, there is certainly a good chance that he will.

“Yes, it’s certainly the most probable class, isn’t it?”

“On the contrary, Ichinose-san’s class will definitely not. I wonder if Sakayanagi-san’s class will...”

Ryūen’s class probably has the highest chance to vote in favour. Ichinose’s class will surely turn in the opposite direction. And Sakayanagi’s class, which has the potential to be either. Coincidentally, the three classes all have different colors, an interesting result shared by the classmates.

In this case, there is almost no discussion about Ichinose’s class, which is known to be good natured. The focus of the conversation will be on Ryūen’s class.

“I don’t like the idea of being outclassed by Ryūen’s class. We have a lot of momentum right now, and we’re going to be one step ahead of them here, which means Class B, right?”

“That said, the difference won’t be huge. Even without the current lead, the difference is 100 class points, and one special exam is enough to regain the lead.”

“I know what you mean. But I still have one thing to say.” Akito had been quietly participating in the special exam but decided it was time to break his silence. “It’s unlikely. But it’s also possible that missing these 100 class points might make us regret our choice, right?”

“Miyacchi, does that mean we have to get someone to drop out?” Spoke up

Haruka from her seat.

“Don’t get me wrong. I’m clearly against it.”

She stared at Akito looking more annoyed than angry.

“I’m of the opinion that the best way to get to Class A is without missing anyone from this class. That’s why I think we need to understand the weight of a hundred points, and not take it lightly.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“It means that we all need to express our opposition after imagining a future in which this special exam is the turning point when graduation approaches.”

It was wrong to vote against it without preparation, that was Akito’s opinion.

“Well when you put it that way...”

You have to vote against it without a second thought. The students find themselves in the shadow of such peer pressure and fail to look at the bigger picture.

“Kōenji. I’m well aware of your success in the island exam. Even without your promise to Horikita, I think it’s strange that you’re choosing the vote to expel someone.” In addition to Horikita and Sudō, Akito turns his thoughts to Kōenji as well. “But still, it’s not something you can just annoy the class with as long as you want. Class points aren’t the only thing that make up a relationship. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“Hmm...” Closing his eyes, Kōenji nodded deeply. Then, whether he was thinking about something or not, he opened his eyes and gave Akito a single glance.

“Of course... I have no idea what you’re talking about. Think about how this school works. Everything is based on points earned. It has nothing to do with friendship or affinity. It’s class points that determine the higher classes, and private points that are your personal assets. It’s an inextricably linked evaluation system. I don’t see anything wrong with agreeing to make that a top priority.”

“You’re a bit of an idiot, aren’t you? You’re the one who hasn’t contributed to the class in almost two years! Just because you won first place on an uninhabited island doesn’t mean you can act like that all the time!”

“I think you should look in the mirror, Red Hair-kun. I think it’s clearer than ever which of us is the better tribute to the class.”

In reality, both of them were slow to contribute at the start. No, Sudō’s portion is worse if you factor in the fluctuations to class points due to his behaviour.

“Well, it’s not the class points that are important to me.”

Kōenji’s attitude in favour of the project had seemed untenable up to this point. However, Horikita did not miss this statement by Kōenji.



“Class points are not important. Then for you, these 100 class points are not for moving up to Class A, but for private points. That’s why you keep throwing your support behind it, isn’t it?”

“Exactly. I want to be in favour of it for private point’s sake, because in the two previous questions, I chose to halve the amount of private point’s transfer for six months. I drank in the tears that it was necessary for you to protect me, but it’s not going to happen this time.”

“I want class points to compensate for the private points that will be lost.” That turns out to be Kōenji’s reason for being in favour of it. For some students, they might resent the fact that he is trying to get them expelled for private points. However, Horikita saw this as an opportunity.

“Okay, Kōenji-kun, let’s make a deal. It’s not a bad deal for you.”

“Huh? That sounds interesting, I’d like to hear that presentation.”

Kōenji welcomed the proposal without surprise, rather as if he had been waiting for it.

“If you vote *against* from now on, and then unanimous consent by opposition is granted, I will pay 10,000 private points on behalf of the school every month from now until you graduate. This would be the equivalent of 100 more class points for you, right? That would certainly make it meaningless for Kōenji-kun to vote *in favour* of it.”

“As expected of a Horikita girl, it didn’t take you long to come to that conclusion.

“You were *in favour* of this proposal from the start, weren’t you?”

“That’s what my vote is worth, you know. It’s not impossible to raise the price, but I need the Horikita girl to be a reliable ally. Let’s make a deal on those terms, shall we?”

“We don’t need to put this in writing, do we? We have Chabashira-sensei here.”

“Of course, I don’t expect you to go back on your word. The deal is done.”

Kōenji’s vote of approval seemed to be unmovable. He finally made a move and promised to vote against it. The fact that he dared to continue to vote in favour of the proposal and let Horikita bring it to him was a masterstroke.

This is how the fifth vote went. The fact that Kōenji made it clear that he was going to vote against the proposal must have had an effect on the one person who was invisible. It would not be easy for just one person to continue to express opposition, even if he or she is an anonymous person. In other words, even without persuasion, the vote has the potential to turn against it. However...

**[Results of the fifth round of voting:]**

*1 in favour*

*38 against*

Kōenji switched his vote from ‘for’ to ‘against,’ but there was still one vote to expel a student.

The real battle seems to start here.

An anonymous, absolute in favour vote.

In order to overcome this, we still need to find out who is voting in favour. But that is more difficult than anything else. The tablets are basically impossible to spy on, but if you want to see where you touch with your fingertips, you can. However, the school has anticipated this and the order of the choices is randomized from the beginning. It is impossible to check each other’s finger movements because the choices are switched each time the vote is taken. There is no other way but to make do with the repeated intervals.

“Well, well, it looks like things aren’t going to be easy.”

“As I said, unless you are unanimous in your opposition, the deal you just made is null and void.”

“I know, I know. If the vote is unanimous in favour, or if the time runs out, I’ll just give up.

As long as it’s anonymous, there’s no way to prove that Kōenji isn’t voting yes except by unanimous consent. He doesn’t seem to think that he can get private points for any other option. If they vote for whatever they want here, the good news will disappear.

It would be inconvenient for Kōenji to make an enemy of Horikita. We had about three hours left. Despite her struggles, Horikita is making progress toward a breakthrough with a solid strategy. However, it is also true that we can’t continue to be sidelined forever.

We need to get this to a unanimous vote before the remaining time runs out. Until then, I’m just going to sit back and watch this war unfold, but can I give her some support? In between intervals, I coughed a couple of times. In the midst of all the chatter, no one pays any attention to an unconscious coughing fit.

On the contrary, it is a cough that can be heard if you are aware of it.

“You know what, Horikita-san?”

“Did you say something, Karuizawa-san?”

“This is just a hunch of mine, but maybe you have an idea of who’s voting *in favour*?”

“Huh? Why do you think that?”

Horikita's face showed surprise at the unexpected point made by Kei.

"I just kind of thought so."

The Horikita of the past would have taken it as a mere thoughtful remark. But now that the fact that Kei and I were dating was out in the open, that would begin to change.

"Yes... you're right. You're right Karuizawa-san. I think I might know someone who keeps voting *in favour*..."

"What the hell, then, get on with it. Who is this guy?" said Sudō as he jumped out of his seat.

"I can't tell you that. This special test is a poll of anonymous names. If you say a name just because you think of it, you'll never be able to take it back if you're wrong."

"But--"

"I know. That's why I think I need to be prepared. We'll have time to vote a few more times. If the number of votes *in favour* still doesn't reach zero... then I'll have no choice but to speak the name."

"I want you to wait, Horikita-san. I don't agree with you. As Horikita-san just said, there is no way to know for sure who is voting for whom this time. I don't think it's acceptable to name names just because you have an idea. Of course, I'm not talking nonsense just because I don't want anyone to drop out of school, you understand that, right?"

"I agree with Hirata-kun. I don't think it's right to say something without absolute certainty."

Kushida also leaked out anxiously, saying that she agreed with Yōsuke. The students were filled with anxiety after the two's opinions.

If Horikita misunderstands me in some way and says my name, I will be criticized. If they were told to vote in favour when they were voting against, it would be an untenable situation. If thirty-eight people vote in favour in a hurry to run out the clock, it will be inevitable that the named person will be discussed as a target for expulsion.

"I know, I know, that's why I haven't mentioned the name so far. But we can never just run out the clock. Isn't that right?"

"I know how you feel. I'm not the same person I used to be, and I'm willing to make a choice if I have to. But it has to be one hundred percent."

"Correct."

I try to make a slight change to the situation, which is starting to get heavy.

"Horikita, besides the one you have in mind, is there any student you can think of who keeps voting *in favour* of this?"

"No, I don't. I don't know, I just can't wrap my head around the fact that

there are people who are so adamantly *in favour* of this other than Kōenji-kun.”

Of course, it would be hard for anyone who agrees to openly come out. As Sudō stated before, if you voted in favour, you yourself would be put at risk of expulsion.

“Even if I can’t say the name, I may know who it is. I’d like the person to raise their hand now, so we can avoid conflict.” She asked again, as if to remind them. However, there was no response.

“Yōsuke. I know you don’t want to suspect anyone, but you have a wide range of friendships with both men and women, is there someone who might vote *in favour* or something?”

“There isn’t. I’m not lying, I really can’t think of anyone.”

“I see. What about you, Kushida?”

Even though I was talking to her out of the blue, she didn’t show any strange reaction.

In fact, Horikita turned her head slightly and showed a somewhat disturbed expression due to the fact I had asked her.

“Umm... I’m sorry Ayanokōji-kun. I’m with Hirata-kun, there’s no girl that comes to mind.”

“Kushida is the one who understands the class the best. I thought she might know a bit about the students who are unhappy with the class. Everyone knows that you care about the class more than anyone else, and that you’re very accommodating. So if you get any idea, let us know, okay?”

Sure enough, expectant eyes from the class turned to Kushida.

“Umm, hmm... I don’t know if there’s anything that comes to mind. But I’ll let you know if I realize something.”

“Sure thing. I have a feeling that the presence of people like Yōsuke and Kushida is essential for this last special exam.”

Without the combined efforts of all of them, it would be difficult to break through this challenge by opposition.

But such cooperation was futile, and the results of the sixth vote were also posted shortly after...

**[Results of the sixth round of voting:]**

*1 in favour*

*38 against*

There was no change. We continued the same discussion.

**[Results of the seventh round of voting:]**

*1 in favour*

*38 against*

**[Results of the eighth round of voting:]**

*1 in favour*

*38 against*

The results continue to be the same, and the conversation becomes more and more silent. The eighth interval begins next. A little more than an hour had passed since the start of this question.

With a loud bang, Chabashira-sensei stumbled and almost fell over. She pressed her arms against the podium as if she was going to fall down, and managed to prevent herself from collapsing.

“Ah...!”

The discussion was cut and Chabashira-sensei, who had been standing on the podium the whole time, was breathing hard.

“S-sensei!”

“It’s alright...” She said, and adjusted her posture as if she was trying to demonstrate she was alright. Chabashira-sensei stared at the students with vacant eyes, wondering what they were thinking. Eventually, she exhales heavily with some kind of determination.

“Teachers are not allowed to guide the students to a particular choice. Naturally, as for me, I would not do such an act. However, may I tell you an old story? Of course, it would take up a lot of your precious time. If you still don’t mind, that is.”

“Chabashira-sensei. The teacher’s statement itself is not forbidden, but you won’t get off scot-free either if you violate the rules. If I decide that you are guiding the class to protect them, you will face consequences...”

“Yes. If you see any intentions towards choice induction, I am prepared to be punished.”

By answering that she understood, the monitor could only be silenced.

As a matter of course, an unexpected suggestion from Chabashira-sensei who had never intervened in the special exam. It could be taken as a ray of light in this environment that had been at a standstill.

“Right now, we are suffering from this situation. To the extent that it doesn’t affect our options, please let us hear what you have to say, sensei.”

If there was some way to break the ice, Horikita said, that would be welcome. Of course, if Chabashira-sensei really wanted to talk about it, it wouldn’t

have mattered what Horikita said.

But under the watchful eye of the monitor, direct interference must be avoided.

“I also attended the Advanced Nurturing High School. And I’ve taken this special exam when I was a student.”

Horikita and the rest of her classmates were surprised at the story being told for the first time.

“Sensei, did you say you also take this unanimous special exam...?”

“Yes, there were five questions, some with slightly different contents, but the last one you’re facing right now is the same word for word. You can either drop out a classmate and gain class points, or you can protect your friends and not gain class points.”

The students turn to look at Chabashira-sensei’s statement that she has experienced the exact same special exam.

“One thing is for sure. That is to give it your all with no regrets. To choose yes, no, or to run out of time. Whichever choice you decide to find a path that will not leave you regretting the outcome. There is still time.”

For the first time, everyone listened as Chabashira-sensei spoke to the students with real emotion. She was not guiding them to choose any of the options, nor was she offering any solutions. It was the kind of advice a teacher can give when they are on the edge. The teacher who was listening in the background didn’t tell her that she was breaking the rules, and he listened until the end.

I don’t know if this will change the outcome.

However, I made sure that I provided the students with the words to face this special exam again.

It’s not a good idea to waste the remaining time in the interval, even with unexpected back-up from Chabashira-sensei, in order to increase the odds by even one percent, Horikita needs to stay on track.

“It’s getting close to the time when you’ll have to make up your mind, but before you do, let me talk to you one more time. I’m not your enemy. I’m on your side.”

The name of the advocate must have crossed her mind many times.

Their face, their voice, their eyes, their breath.

Horikita continues to try her best to persuade them, never letting the class know who the specific person is.

She must be asking herself over and over again. “Shouldn’t I just tell them the name?” But she still doesn’t say anything because she sincerely wants to bring that person over to her side.

It was like a cry of grief.  
In response to this, the ninth vote was cast. The result...

**[Results of the ninth round of voting:]**

*1 in favour*

*38 against*

As expected, the vote in favour remained in deadlock. Only one person. There is one student who is hanging on to the 100 class points.

No... there is someone who is clinging to the right to expel someone. This is the real truth that only I, or perhaps only two people including Horikita, are aware of. It's safe to say that a certain person's thorough vote of approval continues to linger. However, there is no way to objectively confirm that person's opposition in this situation.

Horikita said that if time ran out, she would be forced to speak the name.

But in reality, no matter how many times the vote is repeated, Horikita will never say the name. Horikita will never ask, "Why are you opposed to this?" Because she knows that such a question is not really meaningful.

Rather, Horikita will lose everything in the future once she mentions the name. Even though there was still some time left, the time limit set for the next two hours was approaching.

That was the deadline for her to make a big decision.

## Chapter 4: Honami Ichinose's Decision

**B**EFORE THE START of this special exam, there was one class that every teacher thought would pass through with ease. On the other hand, it was also foreseen that if the class cleared the exam without a struggle, there was a concern that they would lose the battle for Class A. That class was Ichinose's Class B.

### [QUESTION FIVE:]

*Gain 100 class points in exchange for one classmate being expelled.  
(If the vote is unanimously in favour, identify the student who will be expelled and vote for him/her.*

### [Choices:]

*For*

*Against*

Ichinose and her friends, who had reached the last question early, finished the first vote and were waiting for the result. There was no sign of anxiety or agitation. Except for one person.

Kanzaki prayed as he looked at the 39 people who had already voted, excluding himself. He strongly hoped that the results of the vote would turn out to be a bit of a split vote.

“Well then, I'll announce the results.”

Hoshinomiya operated her tablet while showing a somewhat disappointed look. The results that were displayed while everyone was watching were...

### [Results of the first round of voting:]

*1 in favour*

*39 against*

After realizing the worst possible result, he could have imagined, Kanzaki closed his eyes. Of course, the Class B students are not surprised by the overwhelming majority of votes against. They had no doubt that the vote would be unanimous. This was symbolized by the fact that they did not feel anything unusual about the in favour vote.

“Who's the guy who voted in favour? You pressed the wrong button.”



Without any sense of crisis, it was Shibata sitting in the front who turned around and said so.

That's right, he didn't consider the possibility that this one vote was a in favour vote with clear intention.

Not only Shibata, but everyone in the class had the same perception. Knowing this, an uncontrollable feeling of anger welled up inside Kanzaki. Up until now, Kanzaki had done his best to quietly support his classmates' intentions. However, under no circumstances can he continue to fight just to protect his friends. It was precisely because Kanzaki was in the position of a general advisor that he felt this concern more strongly than anyone else.

"I don't think there's anything to discuss for the time being, and we'll just wait until the next vote-"

"Wait a minute. Sure, we could always pass a unanimous vote by dissent, I guess. But can we really say with certainty that it's the right thing to do, to keep choosing to protect our classmates?" Kanzaki interrupted Shibata's words and stood up, tapping the desk calmly but powerfully.

A lack of crisis awareness. A mindset that assumes that there is no such thing as a student who prioritizes class points over classmates.

This was shown to him, and Kanzaki could not continue to endure quietly.

"I can only believe that everyone is suffering from normality bias if they don't think it's abnormal that 39 opposing votes were gathered without any hesitation or doubt."

Normality bias refers to the characteristic of not paying attention to unfavourable events, information, etc., and not recognizing a crisis.

"If our class is going to win this thing, we're going to have to choose a new decision. We're already on the edge of a cliff. And yet, I think you're hawking the idea that we can't ever fall off that cliff. If you don't chase class points more greedily, moving up to Class A will be a pipe dream."



Kanzaki simply wants his classmates to understand. He's trying to make an argument, even though he's far from suited for persuading others.

The eyes of his classmates watching him are colder than ever.

“What the hell, Kanzaki. Does that mean this vote was cast by you?”

It's not just Shibata who's unconvinced that the vote in favour wasn't a mistake. The whole class is looking at him in such a way.

“That's right. It's certainly important to protect your classmates. But our class has been slowly dropping scores from the time we entered until now. If the lower classes prioritize class points over a classmate, then we'll fall down to Class D in this special exam.”

The only person who listened to Kanzaki's plea head-on was his homeroom teacher, Hoshinomiya.

However, from her position as a teacher, she couldn't say anything sympathetic towards it.

“That's true, but there's no one in this class who can be expelled.”

There is no room for debate, and Shirinami instantly shows her rebuttal to Kanzaki.

“I know that... I know that.”

“You say we're dropping to Class D, but man, I don't think others are going to expel anyone for just a hundred class points. Maybe Ryūen is an exception, but this exam requires unanimous approval from the entire class anonymously. I don't think the rest of the classes are going to choose to drop a student out of school.”

If you foresee that all classes will be unanimous in their opposition, the gap will not widen.

“It certainly won't be easy for any class to choose the option of cutting out their friends. But it's the process that I'm focusing on. Isn't it natural for some students, if not half, to think that they should prioritize their class over their friends, even just a little?”

“You mean you want to have a discussion? Even though it's pretty much a given that we're going to be unanimous in our opposition?”

“It's not set in stone. It's a discussion with a view to unanimity by approval.”

“No, no, that's not right. You're trying to work your way up because you have friends and no one is missing. There is absolutely no way that any one person can be missing.”

Class points and classmates.

If it were a simple choice of which of the two was more important, Kanzaki would have no room for doubt. However, the situation has changed drastically since he entered the school. Starting in Class B, the class points were in line with

each other.

In the first semester of his first year, they took a large lead over the bottom two classes. If they had maintained that status, he would not have complained about preaching the preciousness of fellow students.

“By all means, is there no one... who has an opinion other than the opposite?”

On the verge of giving up, Kanzaki looked around at his classmates, believing in one last possibility. However, none of them showed any sign of agreeing with him. Even if some of them agreed with him in their hearts, there were no students who could say it out loud. Everyone believes, or rather hopes, that the second vote will be unanimous in its opposition.

“I’m sorry, but I’m... not going to let you be unanimous in your opposition to this choice.”

Feeling the pressure, Kanzaki muttered against it.

“Does that mean you’re going to vote in favour on... the next vote?”

Ichinose, who had been silent up to this point, asked Kanzaki what he really meant.

“Yes.”

“But Kanzaki-kun, we’re not going to change our minds, okay? We definitely don’t want to be in a class where we blame our friends for sacrificing themselves to gain class points.”

“That’s right, Kanzaki. I’m not sure what to think about this question, but you’re probably wondering if it’s a challenge or a trap. If you start thinking like that, you’ll suffer the same kind of pain in future battles, right?”

“But if you gain class points even if you abandon your friends, you can get closer to Class A. Even more so if such a chance comes around twice or thrice. On the other hand, if only our class chooses to protect our friends, we’ll be overtaken by other classes.”

“I don’t think it’s easy to sacrifice several of your friends, man. Besides, I don’t see how a class like that can keep winning. The class that protects their friends and believes in their friends will win in the end. Don’t you think?”

Almost in unison, all his classmates nodded.

“Let’s face it, Shibata. The situation is very different from last year. We’re in a tight spot right now. As a result of choosing not to expel anyone, we lost a lot of private points. On the other hand, the three classes that are missing their classmates are doing well.”

“It won’t last forever.”

“What makes you say that it won’t last forever?”

“Then I’ll ask you the opposite, what’s your evidence that it will last

forever?”

“We were in second place, and now we’re on the verge of falling to fourth place.”

“You’re the one who should look at the current situation, Kanzaki. Right now, we’re in Class B. Whether the lead is 1 point or 100 points, it’s a fact that we’re in Class B, right? And even if we drop a little, we’ll come back eventually.”

Up until now, Kanzaki had been pushed by the expectations of those around him from start to finish, but he had tried his best to hold on. He was desperately trying to resist, to make them question this unusual idea.

“Kanzaki-kun. I understand that you want to have a lot of choices in order to win. But there are some choices that you should never make. I believe that’s what I’m choosing for this question. It’s not because you don’t have enough class points to get people to drop out. It is wrong to put class points and friends on a balance sheet.”

Ichinose’s statement solidified the resolve of her classmates. No, they originally put their friends first with a firm will, but now they were even more convinced.

Kanzaki was deeply disappointed. This class is often envied by the rest of the school grade.

They are kind, cheerful, and equal. They are the ideal group of friends who can balance both studies and sports. This is the advantage that Ichinose, the leader of the group, has created, but she also has a major disadvantage. Her presence has mass-produced followers and created an environment where people don’t pay attention to the dirty things.

Even if she is told that if she drops out of school, the rest of the class will be confirmed for Class A, they will rather choose Ichinose. An obsession that makes you say, “I’d rather be in drop classes than cut off my friends.”

It was the sole biggest drawback, Kanzaki reminded himself again.

“Well... I guess you’re right. Maybe I’m wrong.”

In order to overcome this shortcoming, he knew the risks involved and tried the rough treatment. He knew he was not the right person for the job, but since there was no one else available, he had to do it.

“But what if I continue to vote in favour until the end? Even one vote has a lot of power in this special exam. I can even ignore the will of the 39 of you and keep voting in favour.”

“There’s no way you can do that! If we fail because we run out of time, we’ll be minus three hundred, and that means we won’t be able to beat the other classes.”

No one would choose to run out of time. It’s common sense.

“It’s the same thing. If we don’t cut ourselves loose here and grab 100 class points, I don’t think this class will ever graduate from Class A. In other words, whether it’s 100 or 300 class points, the size of the points you lose is a small and insignificant matter...”

It wasn’t about the points. It’s about sending a message.

“Okay, that’s enough. Now it’s time to vote, so let’s stop the discussion.”

Hoshinomiya interrupted Kanzaki and started the timer to 60 seconds. The tablet showed a switched voting screen, with buttons for approval and disapproval.

Quietly, Kanzaki looked at the buttons. The class stopped moving, and silence fell.

It was as if the 39 students had finished voting in less than five seconds.

No, in fact, they have finished voting.

Kanzaki made up his mind and pressed the button, and Hoshinomiya moved at the same time.

“Yes. Well then, since everyone has finished voting, I’ll announce the results.”

**[Results of the second round of voting:]**

*1 in favour*

*39 against*

Despite desperate attempts at persuasion, the results were the same as the first vote. Of course, the vote in favour of the question was cast by Kanzaki.

“You’ve got to be kidding me...”

“Kanzaki-kun, you mean you’re seriously going to continue to vote in favour of this?”

The classmates, including Ichinose, were more dumbfounded than angry and blurted out their thoughts. However, that easygoing atmosphere begins to change little by little due to Kanzaki’s firm will.

“I’ve... made up my mind. I *won’t* let this be unanimous.”

At that statement, the class goes silent even though the interval has just begun.

“If I keep voting in favour, after a few hours, you’ll have no choice but to unpack your stopped thoughts and think. We’ll have no choice but to debate whether or not it’s really the right thing to vote against.”

Kanzaki tells them that he is prepared to use the remaining three and a half hours of exam time to the fullest.

“There are only a few ways we can defuse this situation. We would have to change our opinion and make it unanimous in favour.”

“What are you talking about, Kanzaki-kun? That’s not-”

“That would be unrealistic. It’s not like you guys have any idea of sacrificing any of your classmates in this class, except me. But that doesn’t mean I’m going to sway the vote in favour of it.” Interrupting Ichinose’s words, Kanzaki didn’t stop resisting and continued speaking. “Then there’s only one real way. You can choose to agree with me and then expel me.”

Kanzaki wanted to change this class even at the cost of self-sacrifice.

That’s how he has chosen to express his feelings.

“If you don’t have the courage to take a step forward in this special exam, then you won’t be able to move up to Class A. If that’s the case, I’ll spend the remaining half of my school life in vain. At that point, I’m willing to drop out and find another path to follow.”

It seemed like a strange idea, but it was also the only way Kanzaki could do it. There was no way this class, which leaned towards the weak, could act to select someone to drop out. On the other hand, there was no way he was going to use any luck against the heavy penalty of expulsion.

The vote was repeated three times, with a new interval between each time.

A total of five rounds of voting resulted in 1 vote in favour and 39 votes against. Not a single vote moved, and the same screen and the same results were repeated.

“Ugh, okay, we’ll have another interval.”

Perhaps bored with the stalemate, Hoshinomiya didn’t hide her annoyance, but showed it in her attitude.

The observer at the back of the classroom did not take issue with the teacher’s attitude.

Their role is to maintain fairness.

Whether the students are fooling around or the teacher is not motivated, it is a free action that is allowed within the rules. But furthermore, from there, it went on for another 30 minutes or more. In other words, even after three additional rounds of voting, the results were still the same.

Only the results of the fixed and unchanging voting are reflected back to the class.

“It’s been over an hour now, right? There’s just one question left...”

“It can’t be helped. We’ll just have to wait until Kanzaki-kun votes against it.”

The hope of the 39 who are voting against is that Kanzaki will lose his patience and vote against as well. At first, they tried to be friendly to him, or scolded him with a stern tone, but Kanzaki just kept repeating the vote in silence.

“Hey, guys, I’m bored with the silence, so can I talk to you? Oh, if you’re

not interested, just ignore me.”

Hoshinomiya, who has been keeping an eye on the last question so far, opens her mouth.

“Actually, when I was a student, I had the same experience as everyone else. You know why? Because I’ve also taken this unanimous special exam. And the content of the fifth question was exactly the same as now.”

“That’s unusual for sensei to talk about her school days. This is the first time.”

Ichinose’s class and Hoshinomiya had a good relationship, and it was known early on that she was from this school. Not many students had tried to ask her about her school days in the process, but it was safe to say that there had never been a serious opportunity to talk about it.

“The class situation was totally different, but I remember we were stuck on this question for a long time as well.” She gives a somewhat cold laugh as he reminisces about that time. “It’s the ultimate choice, whether to take class points or your friends. So, we struggled and struggled. The boys would even grab each other by the chest.”

“Well, that’s a little aggressive, isn’t it?” Shiranami chuckled as she looked at the girls.

They couldn’t imagine such a situation in their own class, being so angry with one another and grabbing each other by the chest.

“Well, it was in a different time too. In my case, it was the third semester of my senior year; it was the time to go all out for one point. If you talk even a little bit about expelling a certain person, your friends will defend that person as a matter of course. But sometimes you have to cut someone loose to win, don’t you? If you were in a situation where you only needed 100 more class points to get to Class A, would you have been able to make the same decision?”

Hoshinomiya understood very well what Kanzaki wanted to ask, and she put it directly into words.

“We can’t expel someone. We’ll do our best to recover in the next special exam. That’s what they said anyways. But, what if there’s no next time? What if this special exam is the last exam for graduation? At this moment in time, we all made it to Class A, the class we’ve always wanted to reach. But the gap with Class B was only a few dozen points. If we prioritize protecting our friends here, we’ll end up in Class B. So, what were we to do? Of course, the Class B that’s chasing after us doesn’t have a choice, do they? They’ll cut someone and get 100 class points, right?”

No matter how many good-natured people there are in the class, they have to consider it. Protecting their friends would almost guarantee a drop to Class B.



“Do you want to make it unanimous in opposition as well? Bet on the dream story that Class B will give up on Class A and choose the option of no dropouts?”

Kanzaki’s classmates, who have been saying nothing but rebuttals, finally have nothing to say.

“Well, that’s a nasty question, isn’t it? It’s not like you’re actually in that situation right now. But one thing is for sure. That is, if you have the desire to move up to Class A, there will come a time when you have to choose in favour of it by playing rock-paper-scissors or whatever. Running out of time is not an option.”

“What choice did you make at that time, sensei?”

“Me? I made the choice to... cut out the unnecessary people, of course. Because even if you say you are a friend or a confidant, in the end it is you who is important. In essence, I think it’s fine as long as I can save myself.”

We all want to graduate together from Class A. That’s what everyone is thinking. However, many of us also understand in our hearts that this is idealism. Friends or self-preservation? When asked to answer this question, the students were unable to speak.

“I can’t say much more because I’m being watched closely behind me. I will respect you all, whichever choice you make. But definitely don’t just make vague and ambiguous decisions. If you’re only friends on the surface, don’t worry about it, just prioritize your class points. You’ve only known each other for a year and a half, right? I’m sure you’ll heal from the loss of your friends in time. But if you don’t make it to Class A, it’s going to haunt you for the rest of your lives. If that’s not the case, and your friends are really more important than anything else, you need to put them first.”

Hoshinomiya finished her conversation, avoiding the glares of the observer. As a teacher, she merely told her students that there are advantages and disadvantages to both choices. The next vote will come at the same time as we finished listening to this story. Everyone had a strange feeling about the button, both for and against.

The results of the vote, which took some time, were 1 vote in favour and 39 against. As in the past, there was no shift of even one vote.

Hoshinomiya in particular was not surprised, but rather seemed to have been shown the shape of this class’ will.

“Hey, Kanzaki-kun. Can’t we, like, just stop this now?” In the interval right after the voting, Himeno called out in a dumbfounded manner. “I understand what you want to say, Kanzaki-kun, after listening to what Hoshinomiya-sensei said as well. But I don’t think that will lead us to vote in favour of it here and now. I’m sure that won’t change even if the time runs out.”

He would choose to run out of time to protect his friends. That's the perception that Himeno and most of the class must have.

On the other hand, Ichinose expresses her own thoughts.

"Yes, I understand what Kanzaki-kun and Hoshinomiya-sensei are saying. I can understand them. But what you two were talking about is what to do when you are put in such a situation. I understand why people are upset, and I don't think that's a bad thing. But... even if I were in that situation, I don't see the point of reaching Class A if your friends aren't there. So, what should I do for that? In order to avoid such a situation, I think it's important to make sure that we achieve Class A in a situation where we don't have to make such an absurd choice."

"That's idealistic... An overwhelming Class A where no one has to drop out. How many class points do we have to rake in to make that happen...?"

"It may not be good enough right now. But I want to achieve such a class."

Ichinose's classmates listened intently to her dreamy narrative and repeatedly nodded their heads in agreement.

Kanzaki's resistance would be meaningless now.

Even if he continued to vote in favour here, he would only run out of time, as Himeno said.

"Let's do our best together, Kanzaki-kun."

"I... I see how it is."

The one opposing force is preyed upon and taken in by those who know no fear.

"In my own way, I tried to change this class for the better, even if it was through aggressive means. But apparently, I don't have the qualifications or the ability to do so. I don't know if I'll end up in Class B or D, but I'm pretty sure I'll never make it to Class A. This was enough for me to be convinced of that."

The look on his face as he accepted to pitch against us was devoid of any vitality, but he doubts many of the students noticed that. After that, it was time to vote, as if there had never been any trouble in the first place.

The answer given by 40 people was...

### **[Results of the tenth round of voting:]**

*0 in favour*

*40 against*

Kanzaki gave up on class points and chose to protect his classmates.

"With that, we are now unanimous on the last question, so the special exam is over."

"I'm fine with this, Kanzaki-kun. We'll also get fifty points for finishing."

“The time required was about three hours. You’re not allowed to leave the but you’re free to go.”

“By the way, it looks like Class A has already finished their special exam.”

“Really? That’s expected of Sakayanagi’s class.”

“That means Ryūen-kun and Horikita-san’s classes are still in deliberation, right?”

“Yes, everyone~. The other classes are in the middle of their special exams, so please don’t disturb them. The teacher will guide you now, so please get out of your seats quietly.”

As the students around him jumped in joy after finishing the special exam, Kanzaki quietly got up from his seat and walked out of the room.

## Chapter 5: Kakeru Ryūen's Choice

CLASS D, ANOTHER class of 40 students, was beginning to feel the heavy atmosphere. Of course, this was only because of the intense content of the last question that we had arrived at.

### [QUESTION FIVE:]

*Gain 100 class points in exchange for one classmate being expelled.  
(If the vote is unanimously in favour, identify the student who will be expelled and vote for him/her.*

### [Choices:]

*For*

*Against*

### [Results of the first round of voting:]

*14 in favour*

*26 against*

This is the moment when the voting results were disclosed. Like Horikita's and Ichinose's class, there were against votes. However, compared to those classes, the number of classmates who were in favour of expelling a classmate were considerably larger.

In other words, more than a third of the students felt on first impression that class points should be prioritized even if it means expelling a student.

“So, what are you going to do, Ryūen-san?”

Ishizaki, the first person who asked for instructions after receiving the results asked the class leader, Ryūen...

The flow of events leading up to this question all started with this procedure. Since it is unlikely that the issue will be unanimous after the first vote, they listen to the leader's policy in the first interval and aim for unanimity in the second and subsequent votes.

The sequence of events is similar to that of other classes, but the accuracy is extremely high. The confrontation class in question 1, the protection point relationship in question 3, and the test imposed on my own class in question 4 all resulted in unanimous votes on the choices that Ryūen instructed in just one

interval.

The only question he let them do as they pleased was question 2, the decision on the school trip. He let his classmates debate as they wished for about half an hour, and in the end, they were unanimous in choosing the destination with the highest number of votes.

It is obvious to everyone that this last question is different in content, but the method is essentially the same.

All issues that seem to require instructions are decided by a single word from Ryūen.

The students are keenly aware of just which side Ryūen voted for. If he votes in favour, it means that someone will be expelled. An irresistible decision. This is the characteristic of a class that is governed by a dictatorship. Looking at the results and smiling, Ryūen stood up from his chair.

“It’s been a boring time up to this point, but I guess the school didn’t intend for it to be just a game. Otherwise it wouldn’t be so interesting, would it?” He mumbled to himself for all my classmates to hear, and made my way to the podium.

Sakagami, the teacher of Class D, sensed Ryūen approaching and distanced himself.

He knew well that this was where Ryūen would start his stand-up act, as usual. He sat down on the podium as if it was his reserved seat. He took a posture that allowed him to look out over all his classmates and spoke his first words.

“All those who voted in favour, raise your hands.”

There was no consideration whatsoever in Ryūen’s order, and an intense tension ran through everyone, regardless of whether they agreed or not. In the past, he had never even asked which option we had voted for.

After a few seconds of hesitation, hands started to be raised. Some of them were Nishino and Kaneda, who raised their hands while staring out the window, looking unmotivated.

“So, five people. Well, I guess that’s about right. That’s pretty good for a first time.”

The fact that there were nine students who didn’t follow orders and didn’t state that they voted in favour.

It was students like Ishizaki, Komiya, and the others who were first surprised to see this.

“Hey, there’s nothing to be gained by hiding opinions, is there? It’s not like we’re going to get mad at you for voting in favour once.” Komiya appealed to his silent classmates, hoping that things wouldn’t get too messy now. “It’s not like you were being told what to do. It was your personal choice to vote for or against,

right?” Komiya explains that they can’t be blamed for that, and just to be sure, he checks with Ryūen to make sure he’s right.

However, when Ryūen didn’t respond immediately, it caused a moment of tension in Komiya. If there was a misinterpretation, it could lead to a scolding censure.

“Hurry up and raise your hands before I start getting annoyed!”

Hurrying to change the atmosphere of the place, Ishizaki hurriedly followed up.

Then one student raised his hand apologetically after a delay. This brought the total number of students to six, but the remaining eight students still did not raise their hands.

“It’s okay, Ishizaki. Anyone who doesn’t want to raise their hand doesn’t have to. For now.”

“Eh, is it okay?”

“Komiya said it right, that it’s up to each individual to agree or disagree. So first of all, each of you should think about what you’re going to do on your own. We have a little over eight minutes left, and that’s plenty of time to do so.”

Checking the time without panicking, Ryūen didn’t even try to change his posture or break out of his grin. He only told them vaguely to think about it, and then did nothing.

And for more than two minutes, he remained silent without doing anything.

“Look, don’t waste this time. Think about which way you’re going to vote.”

From here, silence again.

Ten seconds, thirty seconds, a minute passed, but he made no attempt to utter anything. All the questions up to this point had forced him to make a choice in the first interval.

That’s why all the students were wondering why Ryūen didn’t give them any instructions. However, few students were able to express their opinions, but the more time passed, the more their mouths closed.

“Please, give us some instructions...”

At first, Ishizaki and the others seemed to be able to say so, but then they became downcast. Their upper and lower lips were stuck together and would not open as if they were glued together. The more time that passed, the more they almost lost the will to speak. Eventually, those who wanted to speak up would fade away, and they would shift to hoping that someone else would speak up. When even that passes, people start to hope that the voting time will come soon, even though the remaining time is longer.

The first interval, which seemed long and drawn out, came to an end with the majority of the time spent in silence. This was something Sakagami hadn’t

expected, and he had lost track of the fact that he had to proceed a few seconds past the scheduled time.

“Sakagami-sensei. Isn’t it time?”

He huffed at Ryūen’s words once he got off the podium and tried to return to his own seat.

“Yes, it is. We will now have a second round of voting, and you have 60 seconds to cast your votes.”

And as soon as everyone had voted for the second time, the results were immediately shown on the monitor.

**[Results of the second round of voting:]**

*10 in favour*

*30 against*

Of the 14 in favour votes, 4 moved to against votes. For the majority of those who did not want to be expelled, this result was generally not a bad thing. With one or two more stern words from the school, the number of in favour votes will decrease further. The result of the second round of voting was such that a unanimous vote against the project could be seen in the near future.

However, Ryūen does not seem to be satisfied with the result.

“Is this the best answer you guys can come up with?”

“Is it because the number of affirmative votes is decreasing?” Kaneda asks as he adjusts the position of his glasses. But Ryūen immediately denied it. “Does that mean that... Ryūen-san is voting in favour?” He also denied the point, and laughed once with his nose as if he was dumbfounded. “I’m not sure what’s bothering you, Ryūen-san. I don’t know.”

“Did you guys really reflect your intentions in your votes the first and second time? Only this last issue is clearly different and unusual. That’s why I want to know your “true intentions”. Don’t worry about which side I voted for, just make your choice based on your emotions.”

With that, Ryūen left his seat and began to walk slowly through the classroom.

“For the next ten minutes, discuss this thoroughly. Do you want to vote in favour or against?”

With such instructions, the students were forced to debate frantically. Surrounded by the hectic hustle and bustle, they started talking about whatever they wanted. Ryūen listened to them, occasionally whispering into the ears of his classmates.

He didn’t seem to have a particular student in mind.

And the next time he approached Suzuki, he spoke in a whisper in a similar fashion.

“You’re free to agree or disagree. Vote for the one you think is right.”

Having said that, he also gives an earful to Tokitō, who now sits two seats back from Suzuki.

They continued the discussion as long as time allowed. The time for the third round of voting arrived.

**[Results of the third round of voting:]**

*9 in favour*

*31 against*

The result was almost the same as the second time, and was displayed on the monitor. Sitting down at his desk on the podium, Ryūen decides to express his thoughts during the third interval.

“All those who voted in favour, raise your hands.”

After receiving the results, Ryūen again takes a show of hands. Only two people raised their hands, Nishino and Kaneda. The remaining seven people kept their presence a secret and refused to come forward.

Ishizaki was annoyed by the invisible in favour votes, but Ryūen paid no attention to them.

“It looks like you guys voted in favour all three times. Kaneda, what’s the reason?”

“To win, I guess. It’s never good to have a student drop out, but I think it’s more important to get 100 class points.”

“Didn’t you think that raising your hand would make you a target for expulsion?”

“That’s a foolish question, Ryūen-san. If you’re useless, you can cut out people you don’t need, but you won’t kick out people you do need. At least in this class, my value is not 100 class points.”

He had weighed his value on a balance sheet and decided that there was no danger of being voted out.

“Well, you’re right. Even though he’s lacking in looks, Kaneda has a variety of other uses.”

“Thank you very much.”

Kaneda nodded in satisfaction, not paying any attention to the backhanded compliment.

“Nishino, are you the same as Kaneda?”

“Huh? No way. I just agreed to the quickest way to get more class points.



The only reason I raised my hand is because I don't like sneaking around. There's nothing wrong with agreeing with them."

Ishizaki was on edge at the way she spoke, as if she was about to get a glare from Ryūen if she wasn't careful.

"It's time I tell you what you guys care about. Which one I voted for."

"Oh, please tell us!"

They can't start moving on hearing who Ryūen voted for, or in other words, the policy of this class.

Ishizaki hoped aloud as he leaned forward.

"I voted 'in favour' on this question, all three times."

In other words, the current vote, three of the nine votes in favour, turn out to be Ryūen, Nishino and Kaneda.

"So, that means you're going to expel someone from the class... right?"

At Ishizaki's question, Ryūen just smiles and chuckles wryly.

"Don't be so quick to point fingers. I'm just telling you guys how my vote went. I've decided that it's up to you to figure out what you want to do about this issue."

"Oh, *we're* going to decide...?"

"Sure, I voted in favour all three times without a second thought."

If the vote was in favour all three times, it was safe to assume that the policy was to expel students from classmates. But since he didn't admit it, Ishizaki is at a loss for words, not understanding the meaning.

"The reason why I agree is simple: if you expel one person, you get 100 class points. In other words, this is an unbeatable option for getting rid of unwanted hindrances and getting class points. In other words, it's a great option that gives you class points in addition to disposing of someone unnecessary. It's a great option that may save you, but it won't hurt you. However, even after three iterations, the vote was still more against than in favour. In other words, more than half of the class voted "against" to this question. If that's the case, I'm going to respect their wishes and consolidate my vote in opposition."

Ryūen said he decided to give up the class points and to avoid leaving a classmate behind.

"It's settled! You guys don't vote for, you vote against! Ryūen-san's orders!"

Ishizaki looked relieved at the easy-to-understand policy and appealed to his classmates.

"Wait a minute. This isn't like you, is it?" Ibuki, who had been looking bored throughout the special exam so far, voiced her dissatisfaction.

"What do you mean?"

“You’re in favour of it, aren’t you? If that’s the case, why don’t you just push through with your approval like you always do? Are you going to play the good guy now and say you’re protecting your friends?”

She implied that Ryūen should want to pick up the class points.

“What, you were in favour of it too?”

“I voted against. But it’s none of your business what I thought.”

“If this hadn’t been an anonymous name, I might have let you vote unanimously in favour without reservation. It would have been quicker to just expel anyone who disagreed with my opinion. But unfortunately, this time, it was an anonymous vote test. It’s easier to unify the majority of the votes in opposition, since you can’t determine who voted for which side.”

“So, you’re saying you’re not confident that you can get the vote to be unanimous in favour?”

“Kuku, it’s up to you what you think.”

“Yo, don’t say unnecessary things, Ibuki. Ryūen-san said to vote the other way around, so that’s fine, right? I don’t care if it reduces class points, it’s still clearing the way.”

“Whatever. I was just curious because it’s a little out of character for him. Do what you want.”

Now that the policy was set, this interval would also have a high percentage of silence.

### **[Results of the fourth round of voting:]**

*7 in favour*

*33 against*

Even if the vote was not unanimous, the vote was expected to be almost unanimous against the proposal, but surprisingly, many votes in favour remained. There were only two fewer votes.

“Kaneda, Nishino. Which one did you guys vote for?”

“Against, as instructed by Ryūen-san.”

“I’m for it, but I don’t want to upset the harmony, so I voted against it.”

The two who had raised their hands in favour of the question went to the other side.

And considering the fact that Ryūen had voted against it in the current vote, it would be impossible to pass without at least three less votes in favour. Moreover, this time, the vote was not a free one, but a forced one with instructions from Ryūen to vote against. In spite of this, seven votes remained in favour. We can’t rule out the possibility that there are new supporters, or that one of Kaneda or

Nishino are lying.

Ryūen himself voted against, but those around him had no way of confirming that this was even true, and a new sense of anxiety began to spread little by little. In response to the results, Ryūen calmly thinks it over. Instead of just looking at the number of votes, he tried to detect the flow of votes and anonymity.

“Who’s still voting in favour?!”

Ryūen’s orders are to cast the “against” vote. Despite the clear instructions, Ishizaki couldn’t calm down at the fact that there were seven students who didn’t follow them. If Ryūen changed his mind in favour, there would be an expulsion.

“Kuku, don’t be so rude, Ishizaki. It’s getting more interesting, you know. This is a completely anonymous vote, and no one can know who you voted for. I’m sure there are a lot of people out there who are sincerely voting “in favour”.

“But it’s a problem if they don’t follow Ryūen-san’s instructions!”

“I’m not so sure about that. It’s not a bad thing to try to gain class points by cutting classmates. It’s just that there are seven students who are greedy to get to Class A, right?” As if welcoming the situation, Ryūen clapped his hands in delight. “But as long as we tolerate expulsions, the question of ‘who’ to expel comes with it. The seven people who voted in favour of this have a clear idea of who they should cut.”

“I-is it me..?!” Ishizaki began to panic, wondering if he was the one to be cut.

“It’s not impossible to exclude the possibility that there are people who think you’re unnecessary, but isn’t there anyone who has the courage to come forward? Not anyone else, but someone who wants ‘me’ to leave the school.”

Ryūen challenged him to come forward. But the air was once again filled with silence, and of course, no student spoke up.

“Ha, well, there’s no way you’re going to puke easily. Kuku, I’ll take my time with you.”

Thus comes the fifth voting time. This means that we have completed four intervals. Since the beginning of this challenge, they have already spent about 40 minutes on it.

And the results are...

**[Results of the fifth round of voting:]**

*8 in favour*

*32 against*

The result is one more vote in favour, contrary to Ryūen’s aim to reduce it.

“What are you going to do, Ryūen? It’s been almost an hour, right?” Nishino

sounded depressed and annoyed.

“Don’t be so hasty. There’s still plenty of time, right?”

“Yes, but there are a lot of people who are voting against you. Isn’t this a bad thing?”

The number of affirmative votes clearly symbolized that Ryūen’s control was spiralling.

“Yeah, it is. And it’s not like we can dismiss the possibility that you’re in favour of it.”

“What do you...?”

Returning as a counter, Nishino was somewhat surprised, but looked at him and said back forcefully.

“Well, unless I interrogate you, I won’t get any evidence, so don’t worry.”

A difficult test to punish the unsuspecting.

“I have a suggestion, okay?” Yabu Mimi, who had been watching the situation up to this point, made a suggestion.

“Say it.”

“How about we make it a unanimous vote in favour of it, and ask the kids who can be expelled to leave the school?”

“Are you sure you’re in favour of that?”

“No, I’m not. I’ve voted against every time so far. But if the for doesn’t work, I’m starting to think I can change my policy that way. For example, how about expelling Ibuki?”

Saying this, Yabu gives Ibuki a cold look.

“If you mean, Ibuki-san, then I agree with you, I guess.... Oh, of course, I’ve always been against it.”

As if following Yabu’s lead, Fujirika Morofuji also raises her hand in agreement.

“Hey you guys. Since Ryūen-san said he’s solidly against it, we’ll go with it.”

“Wait a minute. I welcome the opinions of these two.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“I’m sure it’s true from the looks of it that they’re so far against it. If we don’t get at least two more votes in favour of it on the next ballot, there will be a contradiction. You wouldn’t be that stupid, would you?”

Both Yabu and Morofujii answered the question with a strong nod. It is possible that the eight anonymous voters who voted in favour of the proposal will vote against it in the next round, but Ryūen understands that this is a different matter.

“And I even named them as being prepared to vote in favour of it. Unlike the

anonymous eight, you know. And from the looks of it, other than Yabu and Morofu, none of the others look like they want to go along with the idea.”

The group of girls who are close to Yabu and the others are at the top of the caste in this class. Ostensibly, it’s the opinion of two of them, but in reality, it could be taken as the opinion of the entire group.

“Can you tell us what you think of what we said, Ryūen-kun?”

“In order to expel someone in particular, the basic premise is that there are no votes to support that person. Is there anyone in this class who wants to protect Ibuki even if it means risking their own expulsion?”

He asks the class. But no hands immediately go up.

“Looks like you’re in a tough spot Ibuki. Do you honestly accept to be expelled?”

If she accepts, or says she can do as he pleases, Ryūen will move to expel Ibuki without hesitation. That kind of atmosphere stretched throughout the classroom.

“I’m sorry, but I’m not going to let you expel me.” Ibuki replies without even looking at Yabu or Morofuji, who had pointed out her name.

“Huh? Wasn’t Ibuki-san taking the stance that she doesn’t mind if I drop out of school?”

“I don’t really care about school, but there are people I want to get revenge on in my own way. Besides, do you really think I’m going to accept this form of expulsion? I’m not going to be conveniently used to line the pockets of people I don’t like.”

“You just don’t care about anything. You’re trying to be clear, but you’re still scared?” Yabu laughs provocatively.

“Ha. You’ve grown up, haven’t you? You used to be the waist of Manabe. Were you so happy to be the leader of the girls once she was gone?”

As for Ibuki’s retort, Ryūen’s smile disappeared and he intimidated her with his eyes.

“Hey, Ibuki. You should know your place now. Yabu has a few friends who oppose her expulsion. But you don’t have any. And you don’t have any kind of attachment to the school, did you?”

“What are you trying to say?”

“It’s not that I don’t like you, but if you want to quit gracefully and contribute to the class, that’s a different story. Regardless of your intentions, we’ll eat your blood and flesh if it comes down to it.”

“My my, Ibuki-san. You’re the only one who thought Ryūen-kun was taking care of you.”

“Do you hate me? Ibuki.”

“Not really. I never intended to be friends with you in the first place. You’d do anything to win. I’m not surprised. But I’m not going to drop out.” She repeated her refusal, but Ryūen’s tone also became a little harsher.

“It doesn’t matter if you intend to or not. I’m going to ask you to bet on whether you’re going to make it unanimous in favour or not. Raise your hand if you’re willing to put your body on the line for Ibuki. But you have one minute to decide.”

In the chilly air, Ishizaki’s body trembled slightly. It wasn’t fear of Ryūen, but it was time to make up his mind.

“Stop, Ishizaki.”

It was Nishino, who had been standing next to Ishizaki for some time, who stopped him.

“Nishino...?”

“We’re fighting to win. Your half-hearted camaraderie will only create confusion.”

“But, but... Even Ibuki is our...”

“Time is up...”

A minute passed, and not a single student showed up to defend Ibuki in the end.

There were cynical glances from the bushes, pitying glances, and students who were relieved that they were not the target. All sorts of thoughts intersected in the silence.

“Ah, yes. If that’s the case...”

Ibuki paused before she uttered her next words. She understood that she, who didn’t have a single decent friend, was at a disadvantage in this question. That’s why she told people early on that she was voting against. But now that it had come to this, she had no choice but to protect herself.

“Then what?”

Ryūen maintained his silence as he waited for the next words.

“I still have unfinished business with this school.”

“Oh?”

“Sorry, but I’m not going to live up to your expectations. Even if the whole class votes in favour, I’ll continue to vote against. If you don’t get unanimous approval for any length of time, you’ll fail this special exam.”

“Huh, what? You’re going to take the class down with you?”

“That’s what I mean.”

Ibuki, who had made up her mind, declared herself against and stayed.

“Well, of course you will. Yabu, your change of opinion to agree with me wasn’t bad, but you’re too quick to name names. If you really want to get rid of

Ibuki, you should bring it to unanimous approval first, and then say that name.”

“Damn it!”

If she knew she was going to be expelled, there was no way she would vote in favour of it.

“You guys should be quiet and vote against.”

Nishino felt a strange sense of discomfort as Ryūen instructed them to do so.

“Why did you have to go through this farce like you just did? Isn’t it a complete waste of time?”

Nishino pointed out that Yabu and Ibuki could have stopped arguing earlier, there was no need for a meaningless show of hands, as it was obvious that unanimity by approval would become difficult once the names of individuals were mentioned.

“It’s just a way to pass the time. We’ve got plenty of time to kill anyway.”

There was no deeper meaning, Ryūen said, but some students in the class realized that the true meaning lay elsewhere. They understood that the reason why he went along with Yabu’s proposal, which would never pass, was to get Ibuki to say that she would never vote for it.

This seemed to be a clever move by Ryūen, and also a painstaking measure born of his impatience that he could not do anything about the situation. The next vote was seven in favour and thirty-three against, and the seventh vote was six in favour and thirty-four against. The seventh vote was six for and thirty-four against. It seemed that the number of in favour votes would gradually decrease, but the eighth vote was seven for and thirty-three against. It was time for the ninth round of voting.

### **[Results of the ninth round of voting:]**

*7 in favour*

*33 against*

The remaining votes are still in favour. This was a figure that seemed to show the leadership of Ryūen at the moment. For the sixth through ninth rounds of voting, Ryūen simply sat at the podium for ten minutes without uttering a single word. He just continued to observe with a creepy smile on his face.

However, that situation changed in the interval before the tenth vote began.

“Yo!” Ryūen, who had been laughing silently until now, suddenly turned to the class and called out sharply. The students, who had been carrying on a conversation that was more like a chat than a discussion, hurriedly straightened their postures.

“You guys can’t even vote against me without me telling you what to do?”

The students shut their mouths in unison at the obvious change.

“I know you think you won’t be scared if you have a certain amount of solid votes in favour, but if it looks like you’re just watching the vote for nothing, you’re wrong.”

He kicked the back of the podium hard with his heel.

“It looks like you’re sitting on your knees in anonymity, but it’s all on your face, you guys. I’ve already got a pretty good idea of what’s going on. If you do anything more foolish, be prepared okay?”

**[Results of the tenth round of voting:]**

*6 in favour*

*34 against*

With Ryūen’s strong words, the vote moved to one for and one against. However, because the vote in favour has already become six votes once in the seventh vote, it becomes the result that it can be said that there was no effect of fright blackmail practically.

The students noticed that the smile had long since disappeared from Ryūen’s face, replaced by a grim expression.

“They’re tenacious guys, aren’t they? I’m starting to get tired of dealing with them.”

We had about four hours left in the time limit, but more than an hour and a half had already passed by the last question.

**[Results of the eleventh round of voting:]**

*7 in favour*

*33 against*

The number of votes in favour of the proposal, which had been reduced at great cost, came back to seven again.

“At this rate, how are you going to get the vote to go against?”

Nishino, no longer trying to hide his frustration, asks Ryūen about his policy.

“I suppose so. Let’s get this over with.”

“So then...”

“Do you think I’ve been sitting here watching you guys for nothing? You do realize that for the sixth through the tenth time, there’s a strange vote, right? I’m talking about the asshole who wanders in and out of the vote for and against. Now



I'm going to tell you who it is."

Tension runs through the classroom.

Normally, it is impossible to see through complete anonymity.

However...

"It's you, right? Yajima."

"W-what? No, no!"

The one who was named was Mariko Yajima. She hurriedly stood up to deny it, but she was clearly upset and her demeanor was restless.

"Don't think I'll believe you if you deny it just because you're an anonymous name, okay? If that's what I think, then you're definitely in the black. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"No, no... I'm...!"

"If I say it's black, it's black. And if I say it's white, it's white. I'll give you one chance to be the first one. From now on, you have no right to enter "in favour" without permission. Do you understand? If I find that you don't abide by that, you're out of school for good."

The threats were uncompromising. Even if she continued to vote against this question and failed the special exam, she would be expelled by some heinous means in the not too distant future. She didn't need much time to imagine that.

"I'm not saying all of them, but I have an idea of who's in favour of it. I'll let you decide in the next vote if you're an idiot like Yajima who needs to be told directly."

And so the 12th vote came.

### **[Results of the twelfth round of voting:]**

*5 in favour*

*35 against*

Since Yajima had decided to vote completely against the question, there was no increase in the number of votes in favour. However, even after the final warning, only two people left the in favour vote, leaving five votes. It became clear to Ryūen's classmates that five votes was an acceptable amount for Ryūen.

"Five..." After muttering this, Ryūen checked the remaining time and left his seat again.

"I have to admit, he's a bonehead. But even so, I'm not satisfied with it. If you're not going to give up, then come forward. The five anonymous people here want me to drop out of school. If that's the case, we'll have to make it a unanimous vote in favour. It would be boring to end this with time running out, right? Then make a move. That's how we can fight as equals."

If one of us doesn't achieve unanimity, we won't be able to pass this special exam. Unless we can identify the students, who want to vote in favour, we'll just be wasting time.

It was thought that there would be no one in favour who would show up in this situation, but...

"Oh good, Ryūen. Then I'll come forward. I'm the one who's voting in favour."

At this point, finally, one of the anonymous people who had voted in favour of the question, stood up, determined.

"Tokitō, you bastard! Do you even know what you're saying?!"

Ishizaki jammed as if he was going to jump at him, but Katsuragi grabbed his arm and stopped him.

"Stop it, Ishizaki. We're in the middle of a special exam. Are you planning on committing violence here? If you make a bad move, Sakagami-sensei will not tolerate it, and will sentence you to stop the exam, isn't that right?"

"Of course. If that happens, of course, this special exam will end with your disqualification."

"Damn it...!"

"Besides, even though Tokitō confessed, there's still no guarantee that it's true."

Even if you're 99% sure of something, there's no way to make it 100% certain as long as it's anonymous, Katsuragi was saying. It's hard to erase the line that he's pretending to be in favour of it while pitching against.

"It's true, though. I've always wondered if I'd ever get a special exam like this. I can't do anything about a regular special exam, but the moment this question came up, I was freaked out. This is the only time I can get rid of Ryūen."

"Why did you come forward now, Tokitō?"

"Because I've seen eye to eye with Ryūen a few times. You could have guessed that I was in favour of it. I could have come forward sooner, but it was painful to see that the number of people in favour of the project wasn't decreasing left and right."

"That's good, Tokitō. It's not the first time you've been defiant. In fact, I'm honestly glad that you were in favour of it."

"How long can you keep getting carried away? You can't afford to be."

"Yeah. No matter how many times the vote is repeated, the in favour vote will never be lost. I mean, if time runs out, our class will lose 300 points, and I guess it's not a stretch to say that we'll drop out of the Class A race."

"That's right. You are the leader of this class, even if you are not worthy of it. If you fail the special exam, it's not my fault. It's on you. In the first place,

you've freely controlled the choices for this special exam. You didn't even listen to the people who said we should fight Ichinose's class, and you forced us to pick Sakayanagi's class as our opponents. Of course, you can take responsibility for losing, can't you?"

"I see. So that's why you, who are rebelling here, have been obediently following the questions up until then."

"It's to show the class that they're wrong. I'm not trying to embarrass the class, I'm just frustrated that you're in charge."

"But here comes a chance to expel someone in particular. So, you decided to bet on it. And? What's your best hope for a good show of defiance?"

"If you want me, or even us, to vote against you, you have to step down as class leader here. If you swear to it in front of everyone, I'm sure you'll get more votes against."

No matter how much he disliked Ryūen, Tokitō knew how difficult it would be to get a unanimous vote in favour of him. That's why he offers a compromise plan.

"Don't be lukewarm about it, Tokitō. Don't you have the confidence to expel me?"

"Don't make me laugh. If the vote is unanimous in favour of the proposal, you're the one who will be expelled, Ryūen."



“May I ask you one question, Tokitō-kun?” While adjusting the position of his glasses, Kaneda raised his hand. “It is true that if the special exams fail, it is logical to nod that part of the responsibility lies with the leader. However, if the vote to expel the student by unanimous approval begins, it will definitely be you who will be expelled, right? In fact, many students continue to vote against as instructed.”

Despite Kaneda’s calm and collected explanation, Tokitō was unmoved.

“There’s no point in voting against it now. Don’t tell me you think all the dissenting votes are giving in to Ryūen? It’s true that there aren’t many people who can openly rebel. But right now, besides my vote, there are four other votes in favour. Even though he repeatedly told me to vote against, there are still four votes left. That’s how many strong core people want you to drop out of school!”

“Compared to Yabu and Morofuji, you seem to have a lot of logic, Tokitō.” After admiring and applauding, Ryūen continued. “Then don’t be shy. Why don’t you and I have a little one-on-one fight? Tokitō.”

“What?”

“I’ll have all thirty-five votes, including the thirty-five I’ve been voting against, cast in favour of it. Then, just like Kaneda said, they’ll start voting on who to expel. Then the rest is easy, you and I will beat each other with our votes.”

If the rest of the students weren’t up for voting, there was no need to fear a unanimous vote in favour.

“Are you sure? If we eliminate the opposing option here, it’s inevitable that there will be expulsions. There’s no way for you to survive, Ryūen.”

The possibility of unanimity through opposition was left open by Tokitō and Ryūen.

“Everyone wants to avoid running out of time. If that’s the case, then it’s either you or I. We’ll make it a unanimous decision. That would be more interesting for the class, right?”

There was no way he was going to accept Tokitō’s suggestion, so Ryūen urged a unanimous vote in favour.

“Humans are selfish, you know. They won’t be happy to come forward if there’s a risk of being expelled, but if either you or I are going to be expelled, they’re going to change their minds, and I’m sure they’ll be happy to vote for us if we promise them an extra 100 class points.”

“You think the people who are voting in favour now will agree to expel me?”

“Well, I doubt it. If it smells bad, you can vote against, right?”

“Fuck you. It’s not me who’s getting expelled, it’s you, Ryūen!”

“I see. If that’s the case, then why don’t we just decide to have a face-off?”

The four remaining votes were cast in the name of hiding, and the students who disliked Ryūen but had no choice but to vote against him. Tokitō was confident that if they repeated the vote to expel Ryūen several times, the number of votes in favour of him would increase as the time remaining decreased.

“Fine, if you’re going to go that far..”

Just as Tokitō was about to accept the challenge and agree to the offer, the sound of tapping on the desk echoed through the air.

“Wait, Ryūen. Let me give Tokitō a moment of my time?”

The owner of the sound was Katsuragi. He hurriedly stood up and called out to Ryūen.

“Ah? What do you think you’re doing, Katsuragi? I don’t remember giving you the right to speak, do I?”

“Nor do I intend to have my say taken away.”

Katsuragi replied unperturbed to the instruction to shut up and turned to Tokitō.

“As you say, it’s not wrong to think that as long as the number of people who don’t follow Ryūen doesn’t reach zero, we’re safe. However, what Ryūen says is also true. If a decisive vote is held with the restriction that it must be held until either Ryūen or Tokitō leaves the school, the emotions of the students will fluctuate greatly with the time remaining. If that happens, the one who can control the majority of votes, that is, Ryūen, will have an overwhelming advantage.”

“I told you. Don’t assume an advantage just because of that, Katsuragi. The truth is that many in the class don’t welcome Ryūen. They’re just frustrated because they’re being held back by force. As time runs out, more and more people will surely stop protecting and defending him. Even if it’s the stone dog Ishizaki.”

“What?!”

“You once stood up to Ryūen, remember? Remember that rebellious spirit.”

“Ah, that was...”

Last year, during the incident on the rooftop, when Ayanokōji had a dispute with Ryūen. The story was that Ishizaki had defeated Ryūen and temporarily took control of the class. Tokitō cited that incident.

“I don’t know what happened back then, but you think you’ll win in the end?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Then let me ask you a question. If Ryūen is expelled, who will organize this class after that?”

“You can discuss it or whatever you want. However, you’re the only one who’s a stranger, Katsuragi.”

“It’s true that as an outsider, I may not be an option. But it’s also true that if

we can't show a clear next leader, we won't be able to make a decision. I can't catch up with or overtake Sakayanagi."

Katsuragi looked at the big picture of the situation and continued to try to persuade him, but Tokitō would not stop.

"So what? If I wasn't prepared to stab this guy in the back from the beginning, I wouldn't have come forward in the first place."

"Kukuku, from the beginning? Yet you waited this long because you knew what exactly you could achieve. That it amounted to nothing."

"Shut up!"

"You're not going to be able to do anything about it unless there are a few like-minded people with you."

Having confirmed that there were several votes that didn't follow Ryūen, Tokitō started to move as well.

"Please, Ryūen. Please give Tokitō a chance."

In response to Katsuragi's words, which he saw as solely in Ryūen favour, Ryūen snapped his fingers once.

"Fine. Tokitō, I'll give you a chance. The next vote depends entirely on your one vote. If you vote in favour, then I will expel you."

"What the hell did you just say to me? Do you really think you can expel me?"

"Yes. In the next vote, all but your vote will go to the against vote. So, it'll be 1 for and 39 against. In other words, if you vote no, the issue will be unanimously resolved."

"Hey, when did the four in favour votes disappear except for me?"

"Kuku. I turned in those four votes during this interval."

"Get your head out of your ass, there's no way you can do that."

In addition to remaining stubbornly in favour of the idea up to this point, Ryūen has spent most of this interval talking with Tokitō. There was no pretense of turning anyone else over.

"Then give it a try. Vote the same way you've always done, and you'll get your answer."

There was less than a minute left in the ticking interval. The air-conditioned room was kept at a comfortable temperature, but Tokitō's back was starting to sweat. A mere threat, a bluff. It was hard to believe that anything had changed in this interval. But what if the votes in favour of the proposal were really changed into votes against? That would indicate that students other than Tokitō were in favour of Ryūen. He could take the same defensive measure as Ibuki by running away to vote against the question before it was unanimously approved, but he could not choose that option because it would expose his disgrace. In any case, a

runoff with Ryūen would be inevitable.

If that happened, it would be certain that Tokitō himself would be defeated.

“You’re ready to drop out of school, aren’t you? Don’t hesitate to vote in favour.”

“I don’t need to be told by you.”

Eventually, the time for voting arrived. Tokitō boldly cast a vote in favour.

“Then we’ll show the results of the vote.”

The results are displayed on the monitor at the same time as Sakagami’s announcement.

**[Results of the thirteenth round of voting:]**

*2 in favour*

*38 against*

“Ah!”

Tokitō’s heart must have raced more than anyone else’s when he saw the results. This was because, as Ryūen had said, all but one of the four remaining votes had gone against.

“Ha, sure, I was freaked out. But hey, it just means there’s another student out there who’s just as strong-willed as I am! The one who didn’t give in even after being threatened to this extent!”

He shouted and let out a roar that was equivalent to declaring himself the winner.

But instead of looking at Tokitō, Ryūen turned his gaze to another student.

“What do you think you’re doing? You voted for, didn’t you? Katusuragi.”

“What?” Tokitō was surprised when the name of a person he hadn’t expected was mentioned.

“That’s right. If I had voted against, it would have taken the form of one vote in favour and thirty-nine against, as you declared, and it would have been brought to a decisive vote. If that had happened, it would have been impossible to pass this test except by expelling one of us.”

“That’s the way it was supposed to go. Depending on your answer, you won’t get off scot-free either.”

“There’s one reason. I think that Tokitō is a necessary student for the class. No, it’s not just Tokitō. I’m an outsider who came here from Class A. That’s why I’ve been looking at this class from an objective point of view. As a result, I’ve come to understand that there is not a single unwanted student.”

“You’re saying that a timekeeper who doesn’t follow instructions is a necessary student?”



“Yes. In fact, I consider him to be a valuable asset. He is someone who can disagree with you without hesitation, just like me, or even more so than me. Of course, the way you did it in this special test is wrong, though. I just don’t like the way you put the class in danger, just to drag Ryūen down.”

Katsuragi threw a look and a word not only at Ryūen, but at Tokitō as well.

“If you don’t like the fact that Ryūen is the leader, then make your case fair and square in a way that doesn’t involve anyone else. If that argument is correct, I will side with you without hesitation.”

“But... but until just before, four of my friends voted...”

The existence of invisible reinforcements that have pushed Tokitō this far. It was also a source of comfort.

“Such a thing doesn’t exist from the beginning. It’s just an illusion.”

“Illusion, you mean...?”

“To be precise, I should say that it was eliminated in the repeated voting. There were five votes in favour that remained after the excessive filtering. The ones who cast those votes were you and...” Katsuragi circles around, slowly moving his gaze and pointing. “Shiina, Yamada, Ryūen and myself.”

With that answer, Tokitō, and none of his classmates could comprehend.

“What the hell are you saying... that Ryūen also voted in favour...?”

“When the number of in favour votes reaches five, there is only one anonymous name vote left. However, that was all blown out of the water when you came forward.”

“So during this interval, Ryūen was mocking and laughing at me in his mind...”

“That’s not it. I was merely trying to give you a chance. You could have just voted in favour without bothering to challenge me. That way, eventually, the vote would be unanimous in your favour, but the next vote would have just force you out of school.”

“So you were just playing mind games to insult and humiliate me!”

“No, I wasn’t. I was giving you a chance to not get expelled.”

“What the-”

“But you didn’t realize the possibility and tried to push forward. I’m sure you didn’t think that Ryūen was giving you a chance, even if it was a roundabout way.”

“I’m going to-”

“But no matter how much I lecture you, if you won’t listen, that’s it. I know it’s going to take some time, but can you please give Tokitō one last chance? I’d like you to give him one more chance to vote against before we all vote in favour.”

“You want me to give him one more chance? I’m not so naive, am I?”

“You’re at fault, too. You were too provocative, and you overlooked the thread of salvation. Now that everything has come to light, you’ve finally given Tokitō a choice.”

“And if he doesn’t listen, you won’t object to his expulsion, will you?”

“Yeah, I have no objection. You can do whatever you want.” Katsuragi closed his eyes and crossed his arms. Katsuragi wanted to leave it up to him to decide what to do with himself.

If Tokiyō voted in favour, he knew he would be expelled.

On the other hand, if he voted against, the vote would be unanimous and he could avoid expulsion.

But to vote no meant to give in to Ryūen’s way. It would be a serious blow to Tokitō’s pride.

“Then we will start the 60 second voting period.”

With Sakagami’s words, the countdown begins.

Thirty-nine people, except for Tokitō, finished voting within the time limit, but the count still does not stop.

Sakagami looked up once and glanced at Tokitō.

“It’s been explained to you in advance, but after sixty seconds, penalty time will accumulate.”

Tokitō looks down and stares alternately at the for and against text on his tablet.

“Damn... damn it.”

It was supposed to be a full blown counterattack. But halfway through, he found himself alone. Everything was just being made to dance on the palm of Ryūen’s hand.

He felt frustrated, embarrassed, and shameful.

All sorts of negative emotions surrounded Tokitō’s mind and would not let go. Pride peeked out of his face, saying, “I’m not going to give in to Ryūen at this point.” He dispersed gracefully. No, he could deliberately vote in favour of the proposal and buy himself some time; if he continued to vote against the other 38 students, he might be able to make Ryūen’s plan a failure...

No, it would only cause a lot of trouble for his classmates and make him even more annoying than Ryūen.

That’s not what Tokitō wants.

“Damn you, Ryūen.” Said Tokitō under his breath as he cast his vote.

“Everyone has finished voting. Now I will announce the results.” Taking a breath, Sakagami operated the tablet and showed the results on the monitor.

**[Results of the fourteenth round of voting:]**

*0 in favour*

*40 against*

“Since the vote was unanimous, the question has been rejected. This concludes the special exam.”

Ryūen’s class, which seemed to have a strong possibility of having students drop out, was confirmed with all students remaining.

“Tokitō, you...”

Ishizaki turned around and spoke to Tokitō, who had his eyes downcast and was getting up to leave. However, before exiting, he stopped and looked back one last time.

“Don’t get me wrong, Ryūen, I’m not approving of your methods. If I decide that you’ve done something that prevents our class from moving up to Class A, I’ll eliminate you as soon as I can.”

“You can come at me anytime. And when you do, I’ll take you on without mercy.”

“Mmm...” It was complicated for Tokitō to stay here, so he left the classroom quickly.

After witnessing this, Katsuragi walked up to Ryūen’s side.

“That was unnecessary, Katsuragi. They thought I was welcoming an expelled student, remember?”

“I suppose half of them were. But the other half of you were exploring the possibility that you weren’t, weren’t you?”

“Watch yourself, do I look that naive to you?”

“I don’t know if you’re naive or not, but if your goal was to control the vote completely, then it’s important to have students in your ranks who are loyal to you without going the extra mile. However, after the second vote, you gave instructions to Shiina, the main target, while giving an earful to the appropriate students. If you only talk to certain students, they will think you are planning some kind of strategy. Then, through Shiina, you gathered friends who would vote in favour of the plan through repeated discussions. And I was one of them. The reason for this was because you knew that I would protect Tokitō, right?”

“You’re protecting Tokitō? Where did you get that information from?”

“Shiina overheard me and Tokitō talking about you. I wouldn’t be surprised if you knew about it from her report.”

“I was just misled by the fake in favour votes and carefully selected the ones who would vote in favour. Of course, I had to expel the guy to get the class points. It was a shame.”

After Ryūen left the classroom late, Katsuragi turned to the eyes that had been watching them.

He was honestly impressed to see Shiina smiling and chuckling gently.

“So it’s possible that it was Shiina’s own decision to draw me in...”

But either way, it doesn’t change the fact that Ryūen prepared the strings to help Tokitō, and then gave him a chance. When Katsuragi looked at the students who were relieved that no one had been expelled, he was convinced.

Katsuragi was convinced that this class had the potential to defeat Sakayanagi and become Class A. And he knows that he wants to pursue that path together with this class.

## Chapter 6: Arisu Sakayanagi's Decision

**A** LITTLE OVER an hour had passed since the start of the special exam.

Class A, led by Sakayanagi, was making good progress on the questions, completing the polls with breaks in between. And then they arrived at the final question.

### [QUESTION FIVE:]

*Gain 100 Class Points in return for the expulsion of one classmate.*

*(In the event of a unanimous vote in favour, a vote will be taken on the student to be expelled)*

### [Choices:]

*For*

*Against*

Surprised by the keyword “expulsion”, the students cast their first votes silently, as per the rules.

To avoid any unforeseen circumstances, Sakayanagi, like Horikita, had instructed the four classmates closest to her in advance to make sure that their votes would be split.

As there are two options, the result of the vote, which took place with two confirmed votes in favour and two against, was...

### [Results of the first round of voting:]

*2 in favour*

*36 against*

That was the outcome.

With the exception of the two controlled votes in favour, the results reflect the opposition expressed by all students.

“Well, that’s to be expected. So what are you going to do, princess? Are we all going to vote against next time?”

Hashimoto, who was in charge of always voting option 1 first, and therefore would have voted in favour here, asked for confirmation immediately after the interval.

“What do you think? Hashimoto-kun.”

Not expecting to be asked that question, Hashimoto was a little surprised, and went over the question again in his mind.

“When drawing a quick conclusion, I disagree. However, when I think about it calmly, I feel that 100 class points is surprisingly not ridiculous.”

“So you’re saying I should go for the 100 class points even if it gets one of my classmates expelled?”

“No... I wouldn’t go that far. I just think it’s a question of whether we should take it lightly.”

“If this had been the end of the competition and the end of school life, I would have been forced to adopt a policy of cutting classmates. However, this class is alone at the top. It would be rather nonsensical to choose to drop one superior student in order to pick up 100 class points here.”

“Of course. I just don’t want to have to cry about that 100 class points in the future, okay?”

“The reduction in the number of students is at the same time a disadvantage. Simply put, the total amount of private points gained each month will be reduced, as well as the morale and trust within the class. An interesting way to solve this would be to take expel a student and save them using 20 million private points. It is also possible to gain class points by not sacrificing someone, but this would affect the forthcoming sports and cultural festivals, and even though there would be a 100-point gain, if you take into account the future unseen factors, I don’t think there would be much of a gain or loss no matter how you look at it. Or is there anyone in this class who will volunteer to leave the school?”

After saying that, Sakayanagi took a look around the class. There is no way that any of the students in Class A, who are alone in the lead as Sakayanagi says, would voluntarily offer to drop out of school.

“The other classes in the three-way battle will be troubled. And even if you make the difficult choice of selecting a student to leave the school, the class wouldn’t necessarily rise. It’s not that simple to lose a fellow student.”

With that one statement, Class A’s policy was set.

If Class A had chosen to expel someone, they would have done so unanimously, without any sense of dismay.

And nine times out of ten, the student chosen by Sakayanagi would be expelled.

“I do not see you and your classmates the same as Katsuragi-kun and Yahiko-kun, who have left us. I’m not going to cut off my friends, who are helping me.”

Sakayanagi told such a lie to the class.

In the unlikely event that Class A were to be driven to the brink of ruin,

Sakayanagi would have no hesitation in choosing to expel a student. However, if she chooses to expel the students when the class is not in a crisis, it will create a sense of distrust. She simply decided that she had more to lose by going into that situation now.

That marked the end of the first interval, which left more than half a minute to ensure that all students submitted their votes.

**[Results of the second round of voting:]**

*0 in favour*

*38 against*

The classes lead by Ryūen and Ichinose were also unanimous in their opposition to the proposal.

“With the above, all questions of the unanimous voting special examination are completed. This class has the fastest time to complete the special examination. All other classes are still in the middle of the special exam, and therefore you are asked to quietly leave the room as instructed by your teacher. You will spend the rest of the day in the dormitory for self-study, as scheduled.”

Although students we’re not allowed to go out of the campus, the time they had was practically free.

## Chapter 7: Horikita Suzune's Decision

“I WILL NOW announce the results of the vote.”

[Results of the tenth round of voting:]

*1 in favour*

*38 against*

It was a scene we'd all seen before, repeated once again. Appeals for people to come forward will change nothing. No amount of discussion will change anything. The number of votes in favour will neither increase nor decrease. The results make one wonder if there is really no real fair voting going on, just the same screen being shown over and over again.

“As it was not unanimous, we will now start the interval.”

Even Chabashira-sensei, who announced the standard phrases, showed signs of fatigue.

Now that she had told us about her past, all she could do is watch this issue play out as a teacher.

“Why is that? Is there really anyone who's voting in favour?”

It was not hard to see why Keisei would want to ask the question. At this point, the debate had already been exhausted in all its forms. How many times had Horikita and Yōsuke try to persuade them?

“If you placed your vote against... please raise your hand.”

If calling on those in favour of the motion was futile, Yōsuke requested that students who are against the motion raise their hands. He was determined to find a way through, even if it meant proposing meaningless reverse patterns.

One hand on either side of me stretched out in a line upwards. Of course, I raised my hand too. It is clear from this that 38 people, including Yōsuke, voted ‘against’ without hesitation.

The only one who didn't raise his hand was Kōenji.

“I won't raise my hand, but don't worry, I'm voting against.”

Kōenji replied to Yōsuke, who looked at him anxiously.

“Can I trust you, Kōenji? In fact, I think you're still voting in favour of it.”

“How many times have we had this discussion? You never get tired of it.”

Sudō, there is no further reason to poke at Kōenji. It is not unreasonable to believe that there are people in this class who continue to lie and lie.

There was a student who proudly raised their hand to say they are voting



against, and yet they are voting in favour.

“I don’t want to think that any of the people who have just raised their hands are telling lies. But I’m going to go through it again, and this time I’m going to look each one of you in the eye and ask you directly. If any of you are voting in favour, please tell me honestly. No, I want you to vote against in the next vote.”

Ten minutes of scratching feet. Horikita took the time and effort to work with each person. I was sure they’re as tired as the rest of the students, but I couldn’t say the same for me.

Haruka, Airi, Keisei and Akito too. Ike, Sudō, Mii-chan, Matsushita, all of them. Whether it was Kushida, Onodera, Okitani, or Mori, everyone answered by looking straight into Horikita’s eyes.

“I am voting against,” They said.

Eventually, Horikita reached the end of the class, the last one beside the door.

Her eyes were a mixture of impatience and anxiety, but they were still filled with fire.

“What about you, Ayanokōji-kun?”

“Of course I’m voting against.”

“Right...”

This means that we have once again completed a round of interrogation with each individual. There is no change in the declaration that all the classmates are casting their votes against.

The only thing left to do is to try to appeal to their remaining pangs of conscience and get them to vote against...

“It’s almost ten minutes. Go back to your seat, Horikita, and start voting.”

You’ve tried everything, and now it’s time to vote again. The answer;

**[Results of the eleventh round of voting:]**

*1 in favour*

*38 against*

The result is the same. There are no more words to add. Only the same, same, same results will be shown.

“Oh my God! I’m going out of my mind! I don’t know what’s going on!”  
Scratching his head wildly, Sudō slammed his elbow down hard on the desk.

“Hey, but what are we really going to do? We’re running out of time, aren’t we?”

Until now, the students had been convinced that the one in favour who persisted would eventually break. Horikita and the rest of the group knew that

there was no way they could allow time to run out.

Absolutely, almost, surely, probably, maybe, the in favour voter will vote against for fear of running out of time.

And just in time, unanimously against, we pass the special exam. She must have been painting such a picture, as she started to work towards the next sports and cultural festivals.

However...

The vote in favour persists.

Waiting another ten minutes, half an hour or an hour will not change that fact. The only thing that lies ahead of us is the worst possible route: running out of time.

Nine minutes to go until the next vote. These nine minutes are no longer just nine minutes. Once past this point, we would be under the two-hour threshold. For the past three hours, Horikita had been fighting to meet this final challenge.

It's not that Horikita's strategy was naive. Even if I had done everything in my power to get a unanimous vote in opposition, it would have been impossible.

What is it all about? What is the underlying reason?

This is because all forms of persuasion, all forms of negotiation, all forms of action are meaningless.

The protester is fighting to avoid a unanimous vote.

What is most frightening is that the person who voted in favour of the task does not see running out of time as the biggest negative. Normally, this would not be possible in this particular test. When we look at this task objectively, the priorities of the three choices are fixed and determined.

Oppose  $\geq$  agree  $>$  time out.

This is an absolute inequality that is shared by all four classes and all students. It is this solidification of priorities that makes the special examination possible, the basic premise, so to speak. But... what happens when there is even one student with a different inequality order?

Agree  $>$  time out  $>$  oppose.

If such a distorting and irreconcilable preference is established, the task is no longer possible. That's why the school has strict monitoring and rules to prevent any intervention from other classes. In order to prevent them from signing contracts with people like Sakayanagi and Ryūen, who will invite them into their classes if they let the time run out, or give them large amounts of private points.

The special examinations became chaotic and confusing when students who did not get it right were thrown into the mix. If you continue to be stubborn, you will only run out of time.

So what should we do? With two hours to go, I had only one thing to do.

Unanimity in favour.

That is the best solution. There is no other way to pave the way for this task. The same idea is probably already in Horikita's head.

However, I have not been able to take the plunge. When it comes to cutting out classmates, it's not an easy thing to do. It is more difficult than unanimous opposition to select one person for expulsion. Once you've taken the first step, there's no turning back.

This is because it is not acceptable to say, "Well, we can't send any students out, so we'll go back to the other side."

I was still hesitant to go ahead with the plan when it came time to vote. What a disaster. The ideal route has become impossible, and we are already running out of time to do the things we need to do in order to get to our destination.

The extra time will hinder the chance of unanimity in favour of the task and the subsequent selection of the one who will be expelled from the school.

But still, I would like to try one more time for unanimity by opposition, even if it means losing precious time.

A feeling of irrationality that I had never felt before washed over my mind.

What decision would you have made in this situation? I asked Horikita Manabu in my mind.

There was no answer in sight, but I decided to modify my plan. I decided to give it one last chance without changing my strategy.

"Then we will announce the..." After tallying up the results, Chabashira-sensei was momentarily at a loss for words. "Results of the vote."

**[Results of the twelfth round of voting:]**

*2 in favour*

*37 against*

"No, no, no! Why? There's more votes for it!"

After a long period of time, one person turned in favour, from the 38 who had been consistently opposed to this task. It would have had enough of an impact to crack the united opposition.

"It's like I'm having a bad dream..."

This vote was cast by me.

It's not just one vote. It was a strong vote in favour of the motion by one of

the 37 people who were united, with the exception of Kōenji.

Horikita, who no longer thinks such thoughts out of the blue, goes into thinking mode again. What should be done if it is not possible to bring the number of votes in favour to zero?

Horikita immediately understands that this is a vote that has to be passed to avoid running out of time. Whichever way this last task is unanimous, there is always an option worse than that.

Time running out. Even without the expulsions, our class would lose 300 class points, which means that assuming that all the other classes had cleared the exam, the difference would be 350, and if any class had approved the last task unanimously, the difference would be up to 450 class points.

With such a huge gap between us, there is no guarantee that we will be able to catch up even if we have more than a year of school left. No, it's hopeless. It's no laughing matter that we avoided expulsions but had to give up Class A too.

And once this notion becomes widespread, it is inevitable that people begin to question the point of continuing to vote against it. It would be easier to mobilise a united opposition than an immovable supporter.

We can move forward half a step from the rigid status quo, even if the biggest hurdle awaits us: who will be expelled?

“Hey, hey. I guess we'll just have to vote in favour, won't we?”

“What are you talking about? If we do that, someone will have to be expelled, won't they?”

“But, you know, if time runs out, we're all finished, right?”

The gradual erosion of the opposition. The first candidates for the move are students who are confident that they will not be expelled.

On the other hand, students who continue to vote against tend to be those who think they might be expelled.

An ever-increasing number of internal votes in favour.

However, it is unlikely that a single student will come forward to say they voted in favour. Of course. If it is known that you are in favour of the task, you may be targeted for expulsion.

Only when the vote is unanimous in favour can we move on to the selection of a dropout on equal footing.

**[Results of the thirteenth round of voting:]**

*5 in favour*

*34 against*

Three votes turn in favour.

Who voted in favour of it? Their voices are still strong, but that's as far as it goes.

**[Results of the fourteenth round of voting:]**

*12 in favour*

*27 against*

The steadily increasing flow of approval does not stop, and the numbers keep growing.

Finally, for the first time, the vote in favour swelled to double figures, nearly a third of the class.

In the next round of voting there will be even more votes in favour.

With only an hour and a half to go, the deadline was looming over us.

“Well, I want you to wait. If you think it's really a good idea to lean in favour of it here, you're wrong!”

Undeterred by the crisis, Yōsuke waited for the students to speak up in agreement with him.

“I understand that we have to avoid running out of time. But that doesn't mean that making it unanimous in favour is the solution the problem, you know?”

“Yes... Going forward, we have to get 39 individuals to be unanimous. It's even harder to get unanimity for than it is to get unanimity against it. We only have an hour and a half left. Do you realise that?”

In order to end this task, we have to decide who will leave the school.

“It's not too late. We should pitch against it, in my opinion.”

“I agree. We can't get carried away.”

A group of classmates who keep getting emotional.

It's about the time we were no longer able to make rational judgements about whether we were right to agree or not.

“Above all, you know you shouldn't vote in favour of it; twelve people have voted in favour of it, and not one of them has come forward. Isn't that right?”

Even if we repeat the vote and the number of votes in favour increases, we will not be able to achieve the ideal unanimity without a major intervention to force it. Originally, I would have moved for unanimity in the next vote, but I decided that now was the time, ahead of schedule.

“Can I give you my opinion?”

“Eh?”

Horikita was surprised to hear me speak up, as if she hadn't expected me to say anything.

“Horikita, I voted in favour on the 14th round just now.”

This is a lie. I had already voted in favour of it on the 12th round of voting. But nobody can prove that.

“How come Ayanokōji-kun is...”

“There is nothing to be done, and time is running out if we continue to stick to our opposition. There is no other way but to vote for it. I think we all know that by now.”

In order to increase the number of people in favour of the task, someone has to take on this role.

From the seat beside me, Satō looked anxiously toward me.

No, it’s not just Satō. It’s everyone who is concerned about this situation.

“It’s not going to solve the root of the problem. In the end, you’re going to get into trouble over who to expel.”

“Yes. But we can break out of the rigidity of the situation. Even if we find out who has been voting in favour of the task all along, I don’t think they will vote against it. In other words, we can’t hope for unanimity in the end. But now it is possible to achieve unanimity in favour. And we can bring the only defector to justice, the 38 of us. It’s a forceful way to bring about unanimity.”

There’s one person in common between me and Horikita.

Of course, there is no guarantee that it is that person, but you know what I mean.

“It is-”

“Justice? Do you think we have the right to judge a student who is just voting in favour?”

Yōsuke caught me at the end of my sentence and countered.

“I do. If we can’t make this unanimous, we won’t move up to Class A. I don’t think anyone thinks that the students who know that and continue to vote in favour are completely blameless.”

“But, but, but that’s... closer to the end of the time limit, I’m sure it will be the other way around...”

“More? There are only a few more opportunities to vote. Are we going to involve all our classmates in that slim possibility? The less time you have, the more you close off even the way to escape in favour of it. That would mean nipping unanimity in the bud altogether.”

It didn’t have to be said, but Yōsuke and his classmates knew it. But the biggest hurdle for many students is the fact that they don’t want to take the first step.

“It is true that there are many students who are hesitant to vote in favour. That is why we would like to identify the one who continued to vote in favour of

the task from the beginning and arrange for them to be expelled from the school. In other words, we will guarantee the safety of the students who are currently voting against it.”

Satō, who had been listening to me more than anyone else, raised her small hand.

“I’m glad to hear that, but it doesn’t matter if we don’t know who’s voting... in favour of it. In the end, when the time is up, we’ll just have to come up with a random candidate for expulsion. I’m scared.”

“If we can’t narrow down the expulsions, once again we have the possibility of a time-out. What we need to avoid now is staying here and not taking any steps forward when there is a chance that we can clear the exam.”

To encourage students who are unsure, I dropped more information on them to help them make a decision.

“As Horikita said a little bit ago, I know who’s been voting in favour.”

“Then why don’t you just say it here and now? But Horikita refused to tell us their name for a long time. Doesn’t that mean she doesn’t really have any idea? I mean, she’s bluffing, or she thought that if she threatened you, you’d vote against her, right?”

Miyamoto’s reasoning is not correct, but it is certainly not unreasonable to think so.

“If you’ve really got your eye on them, you know, let’s all try to convince them.”

“I can’t do that, which is why I’m doing this now. The mention of this person’s name will never move a vote in favour of it. They’d rather be stubborn and carry it through to the end. We want to avoid that.”

This was both an invitation to agree and a last-minute plea from me.

Because if you’ve been told this much, you certainly know that the only person who can decide is you. If they are afraid of being exposed, only one person may vote against them in the next vote.

“Be prepared, Horikita. Your opponent is trying to defeat you. There is no other way but to fight a battle of hunt or be hunted.”

Aside from the silent Horikita, I also looked at another person.

“And Yōsuke. I understand that you don’t want anyone to drop out of the class. But if you don’t want them to drop out, then you’ve got to do something about it before the time runs out. Do you understand?”

The day before the exam started, I had warned Yōsuke about this. I could see from the sidelines that he was struggling to get to his feet. I don’t understand why you want to keep resisting.

“But I-”

“The next vote will be the difference between us and our destiny.”

“I’m...”

It’s a hard decision, but Yōsuke has changed compared to before. He has grown since the uninhabited island exams and last year’s class poll when he was stuck at a standstill.

“Yes, you’re right. It’s... no good troubling the whole class with just my thoughts...”

With his head hanging down, he decided to act on his own initiative.

“I’m going to vote in favour. And as Ayanokōji has said, I think we should adjust to expel the one who has been voting in favour all along.”

The decision of Yōsuke, the heart of the class, would have changed the situation even further.

“All that’s left is you, Horikita. It’s time for you to be ready to avoid running out of time.”

Time is running out before the next round of voting begins.

“Please. Please, just one more time, one more chance to make it unanimous against. If we don’t achieve unanimity in opposition at the next vote... I’ll be ready.”

There is no next time. We’ve succeeded in creating that situation.

The final vote for unanimity by opposition began.

However, things can sometimes diverge greatly between the ideal and the reality.

**[Results of the fifteenth round of voting:]**

*1 in favour*

*38 against*

“Damn it! I knew it was a bad idea!”

This is a dangerous way of pushing the vote that had begun to flow in favour of the vote back into opposition. With the time limit looming, even that last strategy to make it unanimous was unsuccessful.

But now everyone has understood.

The student who continued to vote in favour of this is prepared to run out of time.

“Horikita, Yōsuke. Okay?”

I have succeeded in confirming my decision to both of them and clearly obtaining their approval.

At any rate, the necessary preparations have been made for the struggle to expel the student.



Now that the two main players, Horikita and Yōsuke, have made their intentions clear, the majority of votes will be in favour. However, it is easy to imagine that students who are worried that they might be expelled will be hesitant to vote in favour.

That is why those who are prepared to throw in their lot with the opposition must also be prepared to do the opposite.

“If the vote remains against in the next round of voting, we need them to say exactly why, and you already know how painful it is to consume 10 minutes of your time with one vote.”

With time to spare, it was no wonder some students were still complaining.

However, with barely an hour left on the clock, the road out was completely cut off. It’s a challenge to force students who don’t have the ability to make decisions to do so.

“Now that it’s come to this... we have no choice but to pick and choose who gets expelled.”

“Are you seriously going to do this?”

“I don’t want to lose any of my classmates either. I don’t want to lose anyone, but if I don’t expel someone here, the damage to the class will be enormous. I have to avoid that.”

If you look at the class points tally so far, the pain of losing nearly 300 class points here is well known.

Intervals are compulsory for 10 minutes.

We must be willing to resist the urge to run away and vote against it.

**[Results of the sixteenth round of voting:]**

*39 in favour*

*0 against*

It was unanimous. With this result came a sense of fear and anxiety among all.

“Unanimous in favour, or...”

Chabashira-sensei muttered to herself as if she were prepared for everything and continued on her way.

When you make this decision, the only choice left is to either expel a student from the school or run out of time. The latter, of course, could mean a losing battle for this class to graduation.

This means that within these 39 students, there was someone who will be expelled within an hour or so.

Of course, I knew who should be expelled.

“Individuals will be identified either by candidacy, which will be allowed only once, or by selecting the name of the student displayed on the tablet and casting a vote of nomination. However, in the absence of a candidate, and if at the end of the interval there is not a majority of nominations, the vote will be taken by random selection as previously explained.”

Naturally, there are many students who look at Horikita and I as we decide who will be expelled from the school.

I can't wait to hear your name, the pressure is on.

An important and precious interval, incomparable to anything we have seen so far. For the same amount of 10 minutes, you will be additionally asked to choose who you would like to nominate.

“Unanimity by approval has been decided... I would like to at least let them adopt a policy of waiting for this one interval to confess themselves. Depending on the circumstances and the case, I could choose to run out the clock and help that student.”

Of course, such a suggestion would not stifle criticism. I would never accept such a choice, losing class points. But Horikita kept silent from there and began to listen and bear the complaints.

I need to know when the time is right, so I'll be silent on the idea. It was a dark and difficult time, with complaints directed at us, and each of us observing each other. Of course, it was not possible to select a specific dropout, and the time for the interval approached us.

When you see your name on the monitor, you feel your heart being grabbed. Especially when it's your first vote, you can't deny that the momentum is strong and the vote could be unanimous.

“Sensei, you don't mind if I nominate myself, do you?”

“Of course.”

“Then please vote for me.”

With that said, Yōsuke came forward as the specific student just before the time was up.

**[Student Selection:]**

*Expel Hirata Yōsuke from the school.*

**[Choices:]**

*For*

*Against*

This vote had a different weight to the previous ones.

If there are students who vote in favour, they are directly telling Yōsuke that they don't care if he disappears, and that they want him to disappear.

**[Results of the seventeenth round of voting:]**

*6 in favour*

*32 against*

The silence was such that you could hear students gasp and exhale.

“What are we going to do? Are we really going to be able to expel one of us from here?”

“Time is running out, let me ask you both. Who was the student who voted in favour all along?”

Keisei can't wait to hear the answer.

“Of course I will give you the name of the student I have in mind. But I know it's not as simple as that.”

“Isn't it simple? We don't have a choice anymore. Because once we've decided to expel someone, we have to find out who they are as soon as possible, even if it's just one second.”

There are still many students who regret and are anxious about having chosen to vote in favour. I'm sure they're also feeling the mental strain of having wasted 10 minutes earlier. That's why I wanted something to make me think that I'm not making a mistake by choosing to vote in favour.

“The next vote, if time goes on like this, someone will be chosen at random, right..?”

It's no wonder Sudō is unsettled. Even Yōsuke got six votes in favour.

“Don't worry, Ken. I'll vote against for you... so you can definitely protect me too, okay?”

“Naturally, Kanji. That's right. If we protect each other, we'll be absolutely fine, won't we...?”

“Aah~”

The students were losing their cool. A faint cry escaped from one of them.

She held her mouth and hid her eyes, but it is clear what the voice was saying.

“Kikyō-chan... are you okay?”

Mii-chan rushed over and put her hand on Kushida's back.

“Hmm, I'm sorry... I don't know how I got into this mess. I started thinking about that and I couldn't stop feeling regret...”

“That's true for me, too. But if someone doesn't drop out... we're not going

to...”

Most of the students do not have such a feeling. We were made to do something somewhat unrealistic.

“I regret my choice so much now, I should have kept voting against until the end, no matter what...”

“That’s what we wanted to do. But we don’t have a choice. If we run out of time, it’s minus 300 class points.”

To justify his vote in favour, Keisei said that this was inevitable.

“But that doesn’t erase the regret I feel for voting in favour of when I was told to do so..!”

Unanimous in favour, she confessed that he regretted having played a part in it. The same feeling, but not in words, began to show itself more strongly in the students.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself, Kushida-chan. Because they’re all the same... aren’t they?”

Sudō and Ike also comforted her.

“I’m so frustrated... I’m so frustrated...”

Tears rolled down her cheeks. Wiping them away, she looked up, her body trembling.

“I think we actually had a chance to make it unanimous in opposition. If we had persisted and kept trying to persuade them, I think those who were voting in favour would have understood in the end...”

“Maybe, but time was-”

“I certainly understand what Horikita and Ayanokōji were saying. We just have to avoid running out of time, don’t we? Yeah, I know that. But even if we were to be penalized, we should have been a class where no one was left out, shouldn’t we?”

Kushida let out feelings that’d been building up for a long time.

“No, but he said it was still the guy’s fault for voting in favour. Absolutely.”

“No one should be expelled. No one should be expelled from school because of their academic or athletic ability, it’s a small thing. You can’t decide who should be expelled just because of that.”

Kushida is even willing to cover up for those who are in favour of the situation that led to it.

“But, if that’s the case, how do you decide who to expel?”

“Then why don’t we just... have a raffle?”

“No, you can’t. If you expel anyone because of that... I’m sure everyone won’t all be happy.”

Wiping away another flood of tears with her fingertips, she continued.

“I, for one, am prepared to take criticism.”

Putting her hand to her chest, Kushida appealed to her classmates.

“I think... and I think Ayanokōji, who was the leader of this special exam, Horikita-san... who urged people to vote in favour, should take responsibility for that.”

I knew it would happen. The first move was from Kushida.

These words are those of the intense desire of an anonymous person who has unmistakably voted in favour of the proposal.

“I feel so bad about mentioning their names that I almost hate myself. But I can’t let time run out. Someone has to carry the weight of this... So, I’ll take the role of the hated one...”

We don’t want anyone to be expelled.

Nevertheless, as long as someone has to be expelled, selection is inevitable. Those who sentence us to restructuring suffer just as much as those who are restructured.

This is a role that Kushida has taken upon herself. It takes a lot of determination and a lot of reason to name names. With the right wording, she was able to make her classmates aware of our names, which was the purpose of the initiative, without making them feel she was the anonymous supporter.

Kushida is much smarter than I thought. Normally, in Kushida’s position, you could stay silent until the end and not be expelled. She has a lot of friends who trust her, and there are plenty of students who will vote against her expulsion. However, Horikita and I already know that Kushida is the anonymous supporter. If one of us were to raise a fist and blow the whistle on her, it could lead to unforeseen consequences. In the event that you’ve got a lot more than one person in your corner, you’ll be able to use them as a defense.

By mentioning my own and Horikita’s names ahead of time, if anyone says anything to discredit her, she can make it sound like it’s because of resentment over the decision to expel someone.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!”

It was Kei, not Horikita or me, who was the first to object to Kushida’s idea.

“Why should Kiyotaka have to be expelled? You were about to run out of time, so you just said let’s put it in the same disgusting way and agree. Where’s the responsibility in that?”

“Yeah. Yes, I agree. I know exactly what you mean, Karuizawa. I honestly think it’s wrong to even name names now... but you can’t move forward if you don’t.”

“I’m not going to vote for Kiyotaka’s expulsion. At that point, you know he’s never going to be expelled, right?”

“Wait, Karuizawa. That’s a bit selfish.”

“Huh? Didn’t Hondō-kun just promise to vote against you and Onizuka-kun? It’s the same thing.”

“Erm, but I never said let’s make it unanimous in favour of it...”

“You’re so selfish. If I don’t declare my intentions, how am I going to avoid being expelled? You won’t be able to go to Class A because your time is up? So what? Kiyotaka is everything to me, I don’t care if I’m in Class B or Class D.”

Kei has been venting her anger relentlessly, but it was time to stop.

“Stop it, Kei. What Kushida is saying is correct.”

“But... but!”

This is where Kei stopped, glaring at Kushida with a frustrated and annoyed look on her face.

“If you let your emotions get the better of you here and continue to argue, the person who should be most responsible for what Kushida said will blur, and the subject will shift from me and Horikita. You know that much.”

“Yeah...”

If I hadn’t lost my cool, I would have gone for it, but I didn’t. If I give a strong enough order, she has enough reason to restrain herself.

As a result, it’s not bad to be forced to speak for what your classmates have in their hearts.

“I’ll tell you, I won’t support Suzune’s expulsion. It may not be ideal with the whole unanimous thing, but it’s not Suzune’s fault. I blame the bastard who sat on his hands and knees and didn’t come forward. Do you think that we can go up to Class A without Suzune in the future? Never.”

“Certainly... decided that Horikita should be given protection. But in the end, if we fail this special test, the action itself will be meaningless; wouldn’t it be the same if we lost 350 class points?”

Keisei answers, holding his glasses.

“I’m sure you can reel them in with Suzune!”

“This school is not that sweet. The 300 class points that Kōenji got in the desert island exam was a miracle. If you exclude that, how long did it take us to finally reach the class points we have now? It’s not very realistic, is it? Horikita is a big hole to fill, but it’s not worth losing 350 class points to keep her.”

Will he be able to cover the 350-point handicap with Horikita, or will he be able to fight as an equal without her?

It’s hard to put a simple value on this, but what Keisei said is generally true.

“I can’t agree with Kiyopon or Horikita’s expulsion from the school right now. Because I think they should be listened to first, not because of my personal relationship. Because the worst person is the person who kept voting in favour of

it, as Sudō-kun said, right?”

At the intervention of Haruka, Kushida looked up as if she had been caught off guard.

The explanation was not to protect me because I was one of them, but in a way that said it was too early to decide.

“Yes, you’re right. I think I may have lost my cool a little... But if Ayanokōji got the name of the person who voted for it wrong... well, even if he didn’t get it wrong, if he said the name, it would probably destroy the whole relationship.”

Don’t say the wrong name by mistake. I couldn’t help but feel that kind of pressure. Anyway, the baton is now passed to me again.

“You’re in the middle of a conversation, but I’ll stop you there. You have ten minutes to decide who you want to vote out of the school. If you can’t do that, we’ll have to have a random vote.”

“Right. We’re running out of time to vote. You have to do it. Please nominate me for expulsion.”

“Oi, hey Suzune! What do you think you’re doing?”

“If I’m going to put one vote between us anyway, I want to make sure it’s the right one. Because I want to see how many of my classmates want me to leave the school.”

If the vote is unanimous in favour, the student is expelled. On the other hand, if the vote is unanimous in the opposite direction, the student will be exempted from expulsion. And if the vote is not unanimous in either direction, we will have to start all over again, including Horikita.

“In the following event, we will start a 60-second poll for Horikita Suzune.”

A vote for or against expulsion began for Horikita.

How many students will vote in favour of Horikita’s expulsion? It seemed that all the votes had been cast in about 30 seconds, and Chabashira-sensei displayed the results on a monitor.

**[Student Selection:]**

*Expel Horikita Suzune from the school.*

**[Results of the eighteenth round of voting:]**

*16 in favour*

*22 against*

Am I the only one who thinks this is an interesting result?

The only person who is likely to vote clearly against Horikita is, objectively speaking, Sudō. And then there’s Kōenji, who doesn’t want to let go of his only

ally, Horikita.

On the flip side, the rest of the students were asked to vote purely on whether they agreed or disagreed with Horikita's disappearance. For the 16 anonymous students, Horikita's presence is not that important.

Or is there a segment of the class who would be happy with anyone leaving as long as they themselves didn't have to leave school?

"You're all idiots! All those who voted in favour, raise your hands or I'll kill you!"

Sudō stood up irritated, as if he thought that only a few votes at most would be in favour.

"Stop it, Sudō-kun."

"I can't stop!"

"You're only wasting our time with your fussing. Let's talk more constructively."

"Horikita-san is right, Sudō-kun. Unanimity is the ironclad rule for this special exam. Even if there are thirty-seven votes in favour, as long as you keep opposing it, Horikita-san won't be expelled."

Yōsuke convinced him that there was no need to vent his anger anywhere. Exactly as he just said, it only takes one person to stay on your side if you are unhappy.

It is also the only way to absolutely prevent expulsion from the exam. Only one vote. With an unshakeable defensive vote against, you can avoid the fate of expulsion.

On the flip side, if you lose that last vote, there is nothing you can do to prevent being expelled.

"We really don't have much time left. It's time for you to give me the name of the students you think was voting in favour."

"I know. But before I answer, I just want to make a suggestion."

"A suggestion?"

"Ah. I'm going to give you a name now, because I don't think this is going to be just a statement. Because if I say the wrong person, reputational damage won't be the end of the story."

"That's... for sure."

"That's why it's not a proper statement, and on the flip side, if it turns out that I said the wrong person, then I'll take the blame and I'll be expelled."

"Hey, Kiyotaka!

I'll take responsibility. Hearing these words, the class is in an uproar.

"Oh, are you sure you're okay? Ayanokōji-kun... I don't want any of my classmates to be expelled and Ayanokōji is one of them..."



“Thanks for your concern, Kushida. But I’m fine.”

“You say you’re going to leave school, but Karuizawa-san is against Ayanokōji-kun’s vote, right? That would mean...”

“I won’t let that happen. Taking responsibility also means stopping those opposing votes. If the time comes, I will make Kei vote yes. Do you understand?”

“Wow, I get it, but I believe it’s never going to happen.”

“I understand and accept to a certain extent what Kushida said. I was the one who led the vote to the choice of expelling someone, so of course, I should take some of the blame. However, someone has been stubbornly voting in favour since the very start and I feel that person should take the blame in it’s entirety.”

“Let’s face it, there’s a student in this class who tried to sneak in a good deal of anonymity by having someone drop out, isn’t there?”

This is where Kei joined in to protect me.

“Yeah, I agree with you...! That’s the person who should take responsibility for...”

“Yes, that’s what I mean. It’s the student who voted in favour who’s at fault.”

Airi and Haruka, and even Akito followed this trend to provide support.

“You’ve prepared yourselves... haven’t you?”

A last word of advice: Kushida’s anxious eyes stare at me.

“As long as you are naming names, you have to be prepared to pay for it. Above all, I can speak out and risk my own expulsion because I believe I am as close to 100 percent certain as I can be.”

“Wow, okay. Then I’ll believe Ayanokōji-kun.”

With the word “believe”, the intense eyes from Kushida kept on looking at me.

The timing of the reveal has been pulled back, which has further increased the interest of the students. Apart from the one who actually voted in favour, the rest of the students are inherently less anxious. That is why we are waiting for the name of the person who has been secretly voting in favour to force an expulsion all along.

They want a good reason to slap you, and they are waiting for the right moment to shout abuse down your throat.

“The person’s name is...”

Who I am going to expel and who I have decided to expel.

I’m going to reveal it all here.

“Kushida. It’s you.”

Silence. Not even the ringing in your ears can reach you, a world where sound has completely disappeared.

I know, Horikita. While you conclude that you have to go in favour of this, I understand why you can't take the plunge.

But Kushida did not back down. She was determined to get Horikita or I kicked out of the school for this task, and she kept voting for it. Whether or not she realizes that this is a bad move is no longer a small matter.

I've decided that Kushida can't be rehabilitated, but you wanted to see her through to the end.

The sacrifice of the class, and the possibility of that sacrifice, how could I not have mentioned the name so far? You may not have been able to save Kushida, but you don't have to sacrifice her yourself. I didn't know what Horikita was thinking at this moment, but I could clearly see that she was looking at me more calmly than I expected.

If Kushida has chosen to stand in the way of our efforts, then we have to fight.

I'm the one who has to beat this person.

"What...?"

A voice leaked out, incomprehensible.

This was probably a sentiment shared by almost all the students, not just Kushida.

"W-What?"

She still didn't feel her name had been called and pointed to herself. Or maybe they'll tell you their name, you've already guessed that. That's why I also came prepared for it, setting it up ahead of time. But even so, I think I couldn't really decide to sell Kushida. It's even more so because I think I have some weaknesses against me.

"Yes, you did. It was you who, when urged to vote against it, stubbornly continued to vote for it."

Even my classmates, who were ready to slap me, didn't say a word.

"Or, could it be because... I said that Horikita-san and Ayanokōji-kun should take responsibility?"

Seeing Kushida's tears welling up with grief, Hondō hurried to follow up.

"No, I don't care how many times you say it, Ayanokōji, it can't be Kushida-chan..! You're just saying it because of a grudge."

"It has nothing to do with that. I've been thinking about it since before you named me, or even since the first vote on the fifth task."

"An accusation, eh? Well, of course it would seem so in the circumstances."

It's just a random excuse to make up for almost being expelled. It's obvious to everyone that it looks that way.

"There's no evidence anywhere that they kept voting against it. Of course

not, because this is an anonymous vote. But I'm going to show you that you're the one who kept voting in favour. Do you have any objections?"

"I can't tell you how awful it is. I was the first one to name you two... but I was prepared for it. I've decided to sacrifice myself to protect my class, even if I have to face lies and slander."

Whatever they are going to say, they are all lies. By putting up that line of defence, you ensure that your supporters do not leave you.

"First of all, I would like to tell you why I thought that Kushida was the one who kept voting in favour. It is because there is a student in this class that she really wants to expel. Of course, you won't believe me, but hear me out. The person she wants to expel is Horikita and myself, who she herself mentioned by name."

Many people are confused as to what the hell I am talking about. This is a debate in which not a single mistake can be made.

"I gave you those two names, so that's how it's going to be, huh..."

"No, you don't. From the very first day she entered this school, Kushida has always recognized Horikita as a hindrance more than anyone else."

Kushida will understand, even if she doesn't like it. I'm going to disclose all the information I know about Kushida here and now.

There is no way to stop her as she continues to play the role of a pretty, pitiful girl.

"Kushida. You have something in common with Horikita that your other classmates don't, don't you?"

"What? You mean, common ground...?"

Even though you know it, you have to adopt an attitude of not knowing anything.

I could interrupt the performance, but I dare not to.

The defensive instinct to protect yourself will make you suffer even more in the future.

"Um... Oh! Are you saying that we're from the same middle school?"

No one would have ever heard of such a story before. My classmates were surprised to hear the information at first hand. The only way is to reveal the cards that Kushida has been hiding.

"Yes. I don't think a single one of these students knew about that, did they?"

The person in question, Horikita, is now staring straight at the podium, her face expressionless.

But on the other hand, it is easy to see the eyes of her classmates.

"Well, wait? It's true that I never told anyone about it, but I just never had the chance to talk about it. It was a reasonably big school, and we never even had

the same class. It took me a long time to confirm with Horikita-san that we went to the same school...”

Kushida claimed there was no way she would have wanted to expel her from the start.

At this point, some of the students, unable to see the situation with Kushida, took action.

“Come on, Ayanokōji. You said you could tell who voted in favour, so I just shut up and listened. That’s impossible.”

It was Ike who denied it. And his voice soon spread.

“That’s right. What Ayanokōji-kun is saying is ruinous and bitterly unfair.”

“What’s with the habit of leading people to agree with you, and then only mentioning Kushida-san’s name when you’re pissed off?”

“In the first place, why are we talking about wanting to expel her just because they were in the same middle school? I mean, if that’s the case, did Ayanokōji also go to the same junior high school as the two of you?”

The usual questions popped up from classmates. The grievances that erupt multiply from one to two, two to three. One friend after another appears without asking.

There can be no doubt that this is a powerful weapon in the hands of Kushida.

“Kushida, are you really that kind of a character? There’s something wrong with you, Ayanokōji.”

“Yeah, I know, I know. I’d say it’s kind of scary. I’ve always had a quiet image...”

Not only do they protect her, but some of them begin to distrust me for my unusual behaviour.

“Don’t blame him, guys. I’m sure Ayanokōji-kun doesn’t want to talk about it either. I know what it’s like to be in a situation like this and want to blame someone else...”

She picked up the words of her classmates exquisitely and pretended to protect me while setting me up.

“You’re too kind, Kikyō. You can’t let him say whatever he wants.”

Automatically, when the spokespersons of Kushida go berserk, I felt that my right to speak was being revoked.

But I also have weapons to fight back.

“It’s Ayanokōji-kun who is having an important conversation right now. We shouldn’t interfere halfway.”

So said Yōsuke, giving a warning to any student who tries to interfere with my words.

“Yo yo, Hirata. It’s no use listening to Ayanokōji’s lies anymore.”

“We should only comment on truth or falsehood when we have all the information. Of course, if it turns out to be false, I won’t condone it either.”

“Is it really worth listening to?”

“Yes, it’s something you have to listen to. It’s not just Kushida-san who’s been named, it’s Ayanokōji-kun’s own future that’s at stake. Isn’t that right?”

I had told Yōsuke that I may control the vote when there is no time left.

But there was no way of knowing in advance what the task would be, and of course he hadn’t heard about Kushida.

As a purely neutral person, he must judge without error.

“I have nothing to do with where they come from. I don’t have anything to do with where they’re from, and it doesn’t mean much that they went to the same secondary school. But it’s true that Kushida had a big secret in secondary school.”

“Stop it, Ayanokōji-kun... Don’t pile on any more lies...”

Tears stream down her cheeks and she begins to cry on the spot.

“Hey Kiyopon, I’m on your side... but even Kikyō-chan is with you. What can I say, is this really a story that needs to continue?”

As I said, the Ayanokōji Group is a group of people who have been involved in activities in the past. Although she doesn’t have a lot of friends, she gets on well with Kushida outside of the group.

If you care about both sides, it is only natural that you should also try to stop this conflict.

“Haruka. You’ve been waiting for the existence of the anonymous student to come to light, haven’t you? Then you need to hear this story out.”

“But, because Kikyō-chan is...”

“No. I know you think so, but Kushida is not who you think she is. I’m sorry, but I have to go on. Kushida’s secret lies in the true nature she keeps hidden.”

“Kikyō-chan’s... true nature..?”

“Yes. On surface, Kushida appears to everyone to be a good person. She is kind, caring, good at her studies, good at sports, a perfect student. But what if the truth is that she is more jealous than anyone else, and is only satisfied if she is first? What if, as a result, she has a history of destroying her class when her true nature was revealed in junior high school?”

“I honestly can’t believe this story. But even if it were true, it doesn’t add up. It is true that the same junior high school student, Horikita, may know about her past. But how does Ayanokōji-kun know about it? I don’t think Horikita-san would tell anyone.”

“It wasn’t long after I started school that I had the accidental opportunity to

see Kushida's true nature. She was not the mild-mannered person she usually was, but she was a person who let her negative emotions out."

Even after all this, Kushida doesn't make any attempt to glare at me.

She continued to play the role of the sweet girl who looked at the poor student who was telling lies. It is because of the strong pride that she believes she'll be absolutely fine if she does so.

Of course, having bad things said about you, whether true or false, was a bad factor that would cast a shadow over the rest of your school life. However, it was also a sign that she was determined to get Horikita expelled from the school.

"I want to be seen as a kind person, but I don't want my true nature to become known. On the other hand, she can't stand the situation in which Horikita and I are holding her weakness. Why, because she always wants to be on top of the caste."

"One... more minute or so and the interval will be over."

We were in the middle of a conversation, but just to make sure, Chabashira-sensei informed us of the time.

"So, what are we going to do, next vote?"

"That's the only way to get a vote on... for now, Ayanokōji."

In the current situation, I would of course be the next in line.

"Don't..."

But it was not Kei, nor Haruka, but Kushida who stopped him.

"Enough is enough... I can't take it anymore, my heart can't take it any more..."

"K-Kushida-san?"

"If I only said what I really meant, it would be the same all the time, I don't want Horikita-san or Ayanokōji-kun to be expelled. I even made Ayanokōji-kun lie about me by mentioning two names... I don't want to have to go through this bitter, painful argument anymore! So... I'll drop out... and then we'll all be back to normal again, right?"

A student who volunteers to be a candidate for expulsion.

This special test, one of the criteria for selecting individual names, will be accepted if only one person comes forward voluntarily, without taking a vote, as Horikita and Yōsuke have just shown.

"Are you sure, Kushida? Once you say it, you can't take it back."

"Yes, it's fine... Do you all agree that I should be expelled? Please..."

When Kushida's name was selected with the word, the task is displayed on the tablet.

The class was upset by her unexpected candidacy.

**[Student Selection:]**

*Expel Kushida Kikyō from the school.*

**[Results of the nineteenth round of voting:]**

*5 in favour*

*33 against*

In due time, the vote was cast on Kushida, and while the result wasn't unanimous, it held overwhelming opposition.

“Huh... why?”

“There's no way they're going to expel you for this. See?”

The 33 pupils who voted against responded with a nod of the heads to show their solidarity.

“Ayanokōji. I honestly think it's disgusting that you're attacking Kushida-chan just so you don't get expelled yourself.”

Apart from my vote in favour, only four people voted in favour of Kushida's expulsion.

I'm tempted to say “only”, but I'm rather surprised that there were five votes.

“Next is Ayanokōji-kun's turn, right?”

If things go on as they are, there will be a vote to expel me.

That would be the best chance of unanimity in favour in the current situation.

But only if I allow them to make that decision 10 minutes later.

“Ayanokōji-kun, you say that Kushida-san's true nature is something else, but I won't just suddenly believe it.”

“That's right. In the first place, has there ever been any attempt by Kushida-san to expel Horikita-san? If she really wanted to expel her, she would have taken action long ago, wouldn't she?”

If you wait for the right opportunity, you will naturally find a voice that demands what you have to say.

“It's not easy to get a classmate expelled from school. However, I have been a target of Kushida at least once before, in a special exam similar to this unanimous special exam.”

By avoiding direct expression, I allowed my classmates to dig up their memories.

“Ah, the Class Poll exam... I'm pretty sure that's when Yamauchi-kun and Kushida-san...”

Yes. Last year, for the first time, we had a vote in our class that resulted in a

student being expelled from our class. In the end, Yamauchi was expelled from the school, but one of the people who used Yamauchi to try and push the class to expel me was Kushida. I'm sure it was still fresh in everyone's mind.

“Coincidence? We've had two similar exams and both times I've been a target of expulsion, and both times it's Kushida who's involved. It's too good to be true.”

If you remember those days, you will understand that it was strange for Kushida.

“It's true that sometimes I think it's just a coincidence. But Ayanokōji, if Kikyō-chan is deliberately trying to get Ayanokōji expelled, would she try it at such a coincidental time?”

It's not as simple as that.

“Kushida thought I was on her side. You didn't think I would expose your whole school life like this, did you?”

“An ally?”

“Oh. Am I saying that wrong? Kushida.”

“I'm the one, what should I do, Ayanokōji-kun...? What is the right way to answer?”

Basically, Kushida can only deny or ask back.

As long as I can't affirm it, the initiative is always with me.

“Give me proof, Ayanokōji. If you're going to blame Kushida-chan any more, you're going to need it.”

It was Hondō who came out in force. It seemed that he had extraordinarily strong feelings for Kushida.

“That's true. It may be pointless to continue this story without evidence. I'll tell you why Kushida was trusting me from now on.”

Don't panic, just make sure the water soaks in.

“It was a long time ago. Kushida threatened to expel me from school, and I made a deal with her which involved me giving her half of my monthly private points in exchange for her not expelling me.”

No one had ever imagined that such a story would be told, and it came as a slight surprise to Kushida's defenders.

“Isn't that right?”

“What...?”

Maybe she hadn't expected this to come up, or maybe it had been in the back of her mind but she hadn't decided how to respond. Either way, Kushida was at a loss for words.

She can't honestly admit that she's been given private points.

On the other hand, it is difficult to deny that you have received them.



Even if she can falsely claim that she hasn't received any in this moment, the truth will come out when it's confirmed later when we get our phones back.

This is because the fact of who transferred how much and to whom will remain in the transaction history.

"How is it? Can you tell me that you haven't received a single point?"

"That's..."

I'm not going to let you take your time.

Just as I was about to turn my gaze to Chabashira-sensei, Kushida's lips quivered as she replied.

"S-sure... I receive private points every month from Ayanokōji-kun..."

Kushida, who has denied most of what I have said, had to admit it.

If I were to get a confirmation from Chabashira-sensei, I can say that I know the flow of points at this moment, and you can't avoid that the situation will be bad at once.

There is some skepticism as to whether the teacher, Chabashira, is aware of the transfer of points between individuals at any time, and whether she would leak personal information, but Kushida is not willing to take that risk.

"But, but the... reason is totally different! Ayanokōji-kun asked me to keep them for him, so I didn't even use... one point, of course?"

There are only one or two ways to justify the fact that you receive half of your classmates' private points every month: either because they asked you to keep them, as Kushida said, or because they gave them to you for free.

If you say that it was given to you unilaterally, as in the case of the latter, you will have to make up for it, so they almost asked you to keep it. That's how it goes.

"I didn't give them to her to hold for me. I was paying the price, the condition that I wouldn't be expelled."

"That's a lie."

I offered her half of my private points for the deal. I'm sure Kushida remembers it well. I even took the time to record the day. But such a thing can be sealed off without being used, depending on the circumstances.

No, rather the opposite. It is a double-edged sword.

"Lies, huh? But, Kushida, when you signed this contract with me, you said you recorded it for your own insurance, didn't you? If that recording comes out of your phone or something, you won't be able to get away with it."

"R-recording? I don't know anything about that..."

She denied it once, despite being overwhelmed. The recording is probably saved somewhere, but apparently not on her phone. You don't carry around a risky recording directly with you, do you? That would have made this quicker, but no

matter.

“It’s the same thing if you’re hiding the recordings somewhere unknown. We signed this contract in February this year, and I was also recording the conversations we had. I recorded it so I can use it as a weapon if something goes wrong.”

She looked at me with her eyes opened wide. I don’t think she could have imagined that.

“I’ve listened to the recording several times and I remember every word. “I’m going to give you half of my private points moving forward.” I think that’s how I started.”

“That’s a lie. I’ve never heard of such a thing.”

“That’s certainly not a bad offer. But I’m sorry, I’m not in need of private points. I guess more money is better than less, but I have enough.” So replied Kushida.”

“I don’t know...”

“If you want, I can ask Chabashira-sensei to bring my phone now.”

“I don’t mind. But you can’t do it, we’re in the middle of a special exam, remember?”

“If you use your mobile phone, it can lead to cheating, so it must be confiscated. However, you can leave all the operation of the phone to Chabashira-sensei and just ask her to play back the recorded data. Because this way there is no room for cheating.”

Of course, I do not believe that such exceptions are granted unconditionally during special examinations.

However, Kushida’s anxiety was so great that she could not help but look at Chabashira-sensei in front of her.

“You wouldn’t like it if I had Chabashira-sensei bring in mobile phones. All the hard work you’ve done to cover it up will be for naught. But you already know, don’t you? I’m not going to stop.”

What is Kushida thinking now, with fewer and fewer voices in the room?

She turned her back to me and stopped moving, as if she had gone rigid, and kept her eyes focused on the front.

Kushida, of course, remembers that day and, being a cautious person, she would have made sure that the recording was in working order. In other words, she heard it repeatedly. By saying the whole exchange, some words must have matched the audio data in her memory.

“You may have enough to spend as pocket money, but you can never have too much in the case of an emergency.”

There has definitely been a big change in Kushida, who used to be all about

being a victim.

She has reached the point where it is impossible for her to continue pretending to be an angel in this class.

“Oh, shut up already...”

A classmate gulped. They’d heard a voice that they couldn’t understand, wondering who had just said that.

The only way to stop her from saying any more is to show her true colours. But if she reveals her true nature, everything will be destroyed.

“You know what Chabashira-sensei said. Private points are for your own protection-”

“Shut up, shut up, shut up!”

The words of rejection and obstruction reach me, but I do not care, I will continue to the end.

“That proposal. No matter how you look at it, Ayanokōji-kun is at a disadvantage. If you’re saying that this is a crisis where Ayanokōji-kun is going to drop out of school, I can still understand that, can’t you?” I don’t know. This was the conversation between me and Kushida before the deal. If you can listen to the same audio that I just said here in front of everyone, it should solve everything.”

It doesn’t matter if I really have the recording or not, it’s not important. The only thing that is necessary and important is the fact that the lines match the actual exchange.

“That’s enough!!!”

Kushida shouted to silence me.

The whole thing started in the first-year, when Ichinose Honami had become vulnerable, and I knew Kushida would have plenty of dirt on her classmates. When I’d asked her for help, I’d offered to give up my private points. No doubt the conversation that preceded the offer, wherein Horikita and I were demanded to drop out of the school, will remain intact.

You’d thought you’d have a convenient hand, but you were wrong. You’ve left yourself a trail of evidence that will lead to your own downfall.

“Please tell me exactly where in the conversation you want me to leave it. So that myself and the whole class can understand.”

The others, hoping that there was a mistake, just watched Kushida anxiously.

“Sorry...” Briefly, Kushida muttered an apology.

“To what?”

“Indeed, I promised not to fight with Ayanokōji-kun in exchange for half of his private points. That’s true, so...”

Not an apology to me, but an apology to my classmates for lying to them.

“And now I don’t think about it anymore! I really want to be friends with Horikita-san and Ayanokōji-kun. I’ve never voted in favour of expelling someone...!”

Kushida stopped and raised her voice in an attempt to hang onto the complete anonymity of the name.

The way her classmates looked at her was very different from the warmth they had shown her in the past.

Even if I didn’t have all the students completely in my favour, it was no longer possible for her to go about her daily life as before. She seems to understand that completely.

“I wonder if the truth is that Ayanokōji-kun kept voting in favour?”

“What does that mean?”

“Ayanokōji-kun wanted to expel me from school. So he took action to force the vote to be unanimous in favour of it. Because it’s strange... that he’s always quiet and unassertive, but spontaneously moves to expel people from school now.”

Kushida, who is as close to black as it gets, tries to shift the blackness from herself to me.

I’m sorry, but I’ve already predicted that you were going to use that strategy.

“Hey, Karuizawa-san.”

Brushing her hair, she turns her gaze towards Kei.

“What?”

“It seems like you’re dating Ayanokōji, but did you know that when we first started school, Ayanokōji was desperately trying to get me to go out with him?”

“What is that, what are you talking about?”

Kei is more calm and objective than most people, but even she has her weaknesses.

It’s when love is involved that uncontrollable emotions explode.

When it was mentioned that I was a candidate for expulsion earlier, she aggressively defended me at her own risk. This is why Kushida must have been able to see the flaws in Kei’s heart.

“You even touched my breasts in the dark when I didn’t want you to, didn’t you?”

“Ha... breasts! What do you mean, “breasts”?”

“I knew you didn’t know. He did such a terrible thing to me as soon as we started school.”

A feeling of disgust begins to spread among the girls, including the boys who have taken a liking to Kushida.

“I tried to gently tell him to stop right then and there, but I was... too scared to do anything about it...”

“I know it sounds self-serving, but there is no such thing as a fact that I touched her breasts.”

“Well, that’s what Kiyotaka says!”

“That’s true, you have to say that. But really, Ayanokōji-kun touched my breasts.”

“Kushida. I hate to say this, but isn’t that unsightly?”

“It’s not the same as the recording you made, but I have proof too. I have a uniform with Ayanokōji-kun’s fingerprints all over it, and I’ve kept it as it was at the time. You know what will happen if I submit it to...?”

Just as I said I had a recording on my phone, she pulled the same stunt on me.

If this proves to be true later, it will be me who will be in the deep end.

“Explain to me what you mean by that.”

From the point of view of a woman who is being told the story objectively, it is understandable that she would want to ask for an explanation.

“There is no such fact at all. It’s more a matter of whether it’s true or false. You speak of clothes with fingerprints on them, but how well preserved are they? If it was just after she entered the school, it has been a year and a half. It’s not easy to get a print from a piece of clothing, and if it’s not preserved well, it’s not in good condition. I don’t think it would be possible to get fingerprints.”

Even the surface of clothing is bumpy due to knitting, making it difficult to see fingerprint lines. Considering factors such as UV rays, moisture and dryness, we can say that it is 100% impossible.

“...”

Just like the recording data, none of the cards you have are usable.

It doesn’t matter how many other cards you have in your hand. There is no excuse that anyone can think of. I won’t allow it.

“If there had really been such damage in the first place, I should have been pursued immediately.”

“Why... why... why... why..! “

Kushida stormed over to me, grabbed me by the collar and glared at me intensely.

In the face of a furious Kushida, I proceeded to talk to her in an amicable manner.

“At one time, you were working with Ryūen to get me and Horikita expelled. Isn’t that right?”

One after the other, Kushida’s secrets were exposed for everybody to witness. At this point, it won’t have much of an effect on me if I provide new information that is partly wrong.

“Why, why, why!!!”

The hand that grasped my uniform became stronger.

“Why are you betraying me?! You promised not to be hostile, remember?”

“Of course, I didn’t want to antagonise you. I wasn’t interested in the fact that you have two sides to your face. That’s why I wanted to make it a unanimous decision without naming myself or Horikita until the end. But when someone’s expulsion is at stake, there’s no choice. I have to protect my classmates.”

For the past year and a half, Kushida has been steadily building up bonds with her friends.

And now it all came crashing down.

With no words coming from anyone, Kushida began to slow down.

“Ah... ah... no, hey. Not anymore.”

Kushida’s face contorted in disgust at her own disgrace, and she looked resigned, as if she had realised everything.

But she soon regained her composure and, with a smile on her face, released her hand from my chest.

“Fufu... I’ve been a fool, haven’t I? That deal was a mistake...”

The angry demeanour disappeared at once, and words of indifference came out of Kushida.

“I thought I knew that Ayanokōji-kun was a tough opponent, but I still didn’t think he would betray me here. It’s unexpected, it’s unexpected.”

“Wait it’s, lies Kikyō-chan... what Ayanokōji-kun just told us... he’s lying, right?”

“Lies? I’m sorry, but it’s all true.”

“Such a... Why...?”

“Some things have to be protected at all costs. Don’t you understand? How could you possibly know? Oh, my God, I’m done with everything.”

She shrugged her shoulders, unconcerned with her own predicament.

“Yes. I couldn’t stand Horikita-san and Ayanokōji-kun. I just couldn’t forgive the two of them for knowing my secret that I kept hidden. I’ve been trying to get the chance to expel them for a long time.”

“I’m certainly surprised at the last task, but still, you knew you couldn’t push it too much, didn’t you? You knew what would happen if you tried to force it.”

Even if she hated us, there were plenty of times when she could have stepped aside. Nevertheless, Kushida continued to vote in favour of the proposal and repeatedly acted in a manner that could be described as half-crazy. This is something I always felt was out of character with Kushida during the exam. For a moment her eyes wavered, and she looked perturbed, but this soon faded away.

Before the special exam, she had asked Horikita to be our leader. It seems that she was expecting this kind of task...

“Apart from that I couldn’t stand the situation where people kept knowing about my past. I knew it would be extremely difficult to get Horikita to drop out of school, but I couldn’t resist the urge.”

The students who had been protecting her would have been at a loss for words. The fact that she was planning to expel Horikita does not mean that her friends are to blame.

Of course, she was guilty of forcing the class to choose the route of expulsion by continuously voting in favour of it, but it is still difficult to say that we could win a unanimous vote in favour of Kushida’s expulsion. We need more damage to be done to this class in order to make sure she is expelled.

“You can’t make Horikita or I leave school. That’s too bad.”

“In the next vote I will be expelled. This class will get class points because of my sacrifice, huh? Good for you guys. I think you can move up to Class B now.”

It’s hard to believe that those words were spoken to a group of people who had been friends up until this afternoon.

“There’s nothing left for you to turn around.”

“Fufu, you’re probably right. But...”

Bringing her face close to my neck, she whispered coldly, “I’m sorry.”

“You can at least show a little resistance, can’t you?”

It was a whisper, but more than enough for the class to pick up on. It’s safe to say that Kushida had been preparing for this in private, without the need for us to rile her up.

“You can’t. You don’t have any more friends who will vote against your expulsion.”

“No, I don’t. If I’m going to be expelled anyway, I’m going to have to destroy the whole...”

The true nature that led to the collapse of her class in middle school begins to show its face.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Don’t you know? The secret of this class that only I have. I still have time until the end of the interval, so I’ll tell you everything.”

“There’s nothing in it for you is there?”

“And there’s no loss. Ayanokōji-kun is going to get in trouble, so it’s time to get started.”

Yes, that’s it. Let out the truth and the stress you’ve been accumulating for so long. That way, everyone will be amazed and awed by your twistedness.

Only then does any room for sympathy disappear and unanimity is achieved.

“Other than Karuizawa-san just now - yes, Shinohara Satsuki consulted me about various things, right?”

Shinohara Satsuki was the first target of the myriad of spears aimed at the large number of girls.

“What, what, what!”

“Shinohara-san is not particularly cute or pretty, or rather a bit ugly, isn't she? Maybe that's why it's so amusing that only ugly boys like Ike-kun and Komiya-kun come on to her. Did you know that Karuizawa, Matsushita, Mori and others laughed at such a thing?”

A single pike instantly fractured into countless pieces, and one by one the names were called, and the targets were distributed.

“No, don't do that! I didn't say that! Don't you lie to her!”

Mori immediately denied this, but Kushida had no intention of letting the matter rest.

“Huh? You laughed at them, saying they were the most perfect match for each other. Don't worry, I laughed and said, “Don't do that!” but I felt the same way. Is that right... Nene...?”

“No, no... I was just, you know...”

“Shinohara, it seems that Ike-kun confessed to you on the boat and you went out with him, but it was a pretty easy choice, even though you were wavering between him and Komiya-kun until just before that. Or are you planning to go out with Ike-kun on a trial basis and then go with Komiya-kun, who was closer to your true love?”

“Oh, hey, Satsuki!”

For Kushida, there was flammable material lying around all over the class. As soon as a fire started in one place starts to spread, the words fly to new material.

“Speaking of romantic connections, Wang-san has been asking me for advice.”

“No, please don't!”

“Don't? By don't, do you mean stop talking about Wang-san's love for Hirata-kun?”

“Huh!”

Mii-chan was forced to suddenly look at the person she has a crush on in the middle of the classroom.

In an instant, her face turned red and she started to cry when she saw Yōsuke looking at her.

“Stop for a second. It's only the beginning. That's not the only secret I've heard from everyone. Do you want to try something a bit more serious for the next



time? Let's see, for a start, we could try Hasebe-san."

"Kikyō-chan..."

"Oh, stop calling me by that familiar name. You can't even make friends, and you call people by their nicknames just so you can feel closer to them. I'm sure it's annoying to people who hear you call them that."

In the meantime, Shinohara and Mori and Ike and others continued to force each other to lie about what they had said or didn't say, while Kushida shifted her focus to Haruka.

The interval will soon be over, but the unanimous decision to expel Kushida will be imminent. If we drag our feet here, Kushida will continue to reveal more and more secrets.

# 1

After only a few minutes of listening to Ayanokōji-kun's story, the people around her have made a 180 degree change in their opinion of Kushida-san. Her friends used to be as strong and united as Ayanokōji-kun's group. But now, for some reason, they seem to have a very fragile relationship.

Even I, who knew Kushida-san's background before anyone else, would have recommended Kushida-san if I had been asked to nominate someone in favour of expulsion.

I may have seen the power of Ayanokōji-kun before anyone else in the school, and I'm not sure I'll ever forget it.

The class was like a picture of hell. At the end of the interval, the voting begins for Kushida-san, who will have the votes of the majority.

That's probably the end of this special exam. Our class will get 100 class points while making sacrifices. This will be a valuable asset for us in our quest for Class A.

But... Yes, I need to sort out my situation first.

I am sure that I am in the same flow of time as everyone else, but for me, every second ticks by slowly but surely. The second hand of the analogue clock, which doesn't look like a classroom clock, is slowing down, as if it is about to stop.

On the contrary, my senses were getting sharper and sharper.

What is my purpose? I asked myself.

The answer, of course, is to graduate as Class A. So class points are very important. It's obvious. So how much is Kushida-san worth?

It is difficult to assign a clear value to each student.

But if you ask me whether it would be worth at least 100 class points to expel her, I would say no.



Then I'll change my thinking. If you fail the special test, you will lose 350 class points. If I were to save Kushida-san instead, could I be sure that she would be powerful enough to be worth it? I don't think it's absolutely impossible, but it's difficult.

It's not just about her, it's about me too.

We expel Kushida-san because she is not worth 350 points. This is a normal thought.

Then what will happen to me, Horikita Suzune? What will happen to the student known as Kushida Kikyō? Do you just want to help? Or do you just want to cut them down?

By concentrating my attention, I transcended time and erased any notion of extraneous sound.

Can I just leave it all to Ayanokōji-kun? No. Then think about it. What is right, what is wrong, and is there anything that only I can do?

I recognise, respect and think again about Ayanokōji-kun's abilities.

A ray of light shone through the darkness behind my eyelids.

Oh, yes, I see.

Eventually, I arrived at one definite answer. That Kushida-san will be expelled from school here and now...

It is not the right answer.

And that I am the only person who could save her now.

The frozen clock thawed, and the second hand started to move once more.

## 2

One by one, students began to support Kushida's expulsion from the school, but one student stood up for her.

"Don't go any further, Kushida-san. You won't be able to turn back."

"Huh? It's just starting to get interesting, isn't it? Don't interrupt me, Horikita-san."

"Not so fast. I can't listen to any more ugly stories."

"Is the truth about me so ugly?"

I think she took it as a compliment and looked at Horikita with the most cheerful face of the day.

"Yes. At least I don't think these revelations are beautiful. But it's not only you that I find ugly, but also the people who are now calling for you to be expelled from the school for leaking their secrets."

The unexpected scolding and reprimanding of the classmates was unbearable.

"Why us? We've done nothing wrong!"

"You guys told Kushida-san a secret you didn't want anyone to know. Why is that?"

"Well, that's because I thought I could trust Kushida-san! And yet..."

"Yes. Kushida-san was trusted more than anyone else in the class. Usually, it's not easy to gain the trust of people. And there are probably only a few people in your life with whom you can share a secret that you can't even tell anyone. Of course, I don't admire Kushida-san for leaking your secrets. It's understandable that you're surprised that there's more to her than meets the eye. But we all have two sides to our story, don't we?"

It would be a rare person who lives a life of honesty and truth.

"Hey, but it doesn't matter; she kept voting in favour. That's unacceptable, isn't it?"

"Right. As for what you did to get myself and Ayanokōji-kun expelled, you made a choice that was too selfish. You must bear a heavy weight of responsibility. But instead of making her pay for it with expulsion, you can use her skills to pay us back many times over in the future."

Here, Horikita's point would have been understood by her classmates.

"Are you saying that you won't expel Kushida-san?"

"Yes, you're right. I think... I think I want to keep Kushida-san in this class."

"Huh? What selfish thing are you saying when you thought I dropped the

conversation?”

The choice was not to expel Kushida. It was Kushida herself who was the first to object to this.

“Why are you defending me? You’re not going to vote for another girl from here, are you? Or are you just going to have fun beating me to death? You’ve got good taste, you know that?”

“I don’t like to make jokes, unfortunately. I’m serious.”

“If you’re serious, I’ll make you change your mind. Let’s resume the continuation of hell.”

“I didn’t think it looked much like ‘hell’ when I saw it.”

“Heh. Then what would you say it looked like? Tell me.”

“It wasn’t dumb, it wasn’t funny, it was just plain ugly. I saw nothing but a mere foolish idiot.”

“What?”

“Sure, you can study better than most people. But you are fundamentally stupid to the point of being fatal. In the first place, when you were in junior high school, your classmates found out who you really are, and you broke the class by revealing all their secrets. You came to this school to make amends for that, but unfortunately you met me again, who attended the same junior high school as you. And as soon as you started school, Ayanokōji-kun saw your true face? That makes me laugh. Not only that, he wasn’t even interested in your past, but you couldn’t stand his existence on your own and kept insisting on expelling him from school by telling us every detail. After all, you thought you were being clever by making a deal with Ayanokōji-kun, but you just ended up being taken advantage of. And this is the end result? You were so focused on the fact that we were in favour of expelling a student that you lost your footing.”

Horikita sighed unsparingly and insultingly.

Kushida, who had been smiling and laughing with a sly smile on her face, was now transformed into an angry young girl.

“You don’t know how I feel, and you don’t know how I like it! I want to be the best! I want to be happy, even when I’m stressed as shit! What’s wrong with trying to get rid of you when you’re in the way?”

Kushida clasps her hands together. Her hands are so tightly clenched that the blood vessels seem to bulge out of them.

“You have some personality problems, but that’s the same for me. But you’re a much harder worker than I am.”

“Don’t lie, you’re making me laugh. You always have to say things that make me mad, don’t you?”

“I’m not lying, I’m just telling you the truth, which you love. I am honestly

amazed and envious of your effort and talent to get to know so many people, both boys and girls.”

When told this, the pupils, enraged by Kushida, retort.

“What’s so great about us being harassed by Kushida-san now?”

“Be kind with lies. Faking kindness. That’s terrible? That’s just frivolous. Think again how difficult it is to be kind. Do you have the talent to smile at everyone, to reach out to everyone, to help everyone?”

How stressful it must have been for her to deal with all her friends on a daily basis.

Many of us would like to be like Kushida, but we know we can’t be. Listening to other people’s unimportant stories, cutting through all this, cannot be continued by an ordinary person. She has done this with a gentle smile and has supported many people from the shadows.

“Stop. I don’t want to hear any more of this bullshit from you.”

“Why? You’re good at looking into people’s minds, don’t you know? I don’t mean to make fun of you, I don’t mean to insult you, but I really appreciate you.”

Horikita blocked the students who tried to refute this story as if she were ahead of them.

“She has a talent that no one else has, and to expel her is a huge loss to the class.”

“Shut the fuck up!”

“Therefore I cannot agree with Kushida-san’s withdrawal from the school. I’m going to put my own money on it and do everything I can to make sure we make the best of her. No, I will definitely make the most of her.”

“I told you to stop!!!”

“You never know. It’s only when I knew everything about you that I developed a great liking for you.”

Looking back, Kushida uncovered her dark past with no hesitation. In reality, it could be irrelevant to getting us expelled. Deep down, perhaps she partially wanted us to listen to her story, to share her feelings.

Kushida's face was wet with tears. Crying like a child, her frustration built up and all she could do was cry.

Regret! Regret! Regret! Were the only words she said repeatedly.-

*(TL Note: We do not know what Kushida is “Regretting”. She could be regretting her actions in her previous school, regretting her failure to persuade the class against Suzune and Ayanokōji, or she may be regretting her actions against her best friend Mii-chan. It’s quite vague, but it may be revealed in a future - KayL (Japanese Reader))*





It's no wonder. Anyone who knows Kushida's true nature will stay away. Yet, for some reason, Horikita, who had been keeping her distance, closed that distance to Kushida.

Kushida had no such idea.

Horikita, whom she hated so much, was the first person who could understand her. It is still too early to tell whether this will be accepted, but it has certainly brought about a change in Kushida. I had decided that it would be impossible to win Kushida over and had devised a strategy to get rid of her.

Horikita, on the other hand, decided not to exclude but to protect. But then it is inevitable that the next problem will erupt.

"We're in the middle of a conversation, but it's almost the end of the interval. What do we do?"

What to do, of course, is to volunteer as the specific student, or to nominate a candidate, for who gets the vote.

"We're running out of time. The people who are voting for Kushida-san, please vote for me. I'll explain later."

She appealed to her classmates to nominate her, as she could not use her already used one-time candidacy.

"Jeez, don't be silly! I'm the one who's going to get expelled! Just nominate me and vote me out!"

"I'm not joking. I'm telling you, you're the one who created this situation and you're going to be held accountable until the very end. And I'm not going to expel you as a penalty. If you do, I will make fun of you for the rest of your life. I will make you a laughing stock forever."

I know that some students were not sure who to nominate in the end, but that is not the point.

"It's time. Voting will now begin for Horikita, who had the majority of the votes for the nomination."

Even if Kushida were to be chosen by recommendation, it would be meaningless as long as Horikita votes against her expulsion. There was a vote for and against Horikita's expulsion, but of course it was not unanimous. The cheap provocation must have worked well enough for Kushida. Everyone has less than 60 seconds to complete their votes.

**[Student Selection:]**

*Expel Horikita Suzune from the school.*

**[Results of the twentieth round of voting:]**

*1 in favour*

*37 against*

“Now that we are in the interval, I will say it again. I’m going to express my opposition to Kushida-san’s expulsion.”

Kushida was ranting and raving in inarticulate language, but Horikita was no longer paying attention. This hurt Kushida’s pride again, but also succeeded in silencing her. If she were to be expelled from the school here, she would have no way to fight Horikita.

But it was unexpected. I was planning to screw them over, whoever they were. The inside of my head gets hot. It’s not just a joke that she wanted to protect Kushida. She said she was confident that she could use her strengths to overcome her major weaknesses.

So, Horikita has taken her foot off the gas a stage earlier than I’d expected.

Of course, this is not to say that there is no material to refute from here. Many students are still determined to expel Kushida, who has now been reduced to absolute evil.

It’s not that they can’t force their way through, but now that Horikita has raised her voice, it’s hard to assume that she will simply quit. There is no denying the possibility that, if time runs out, the school may choose to keep the number of students who drop out to zero. I’m sorry, but that is unacceptable.

“But, Horikita-san. I wonder if protecting Kushida-san means choosing to run out of time.”

Yōsuke asked about the points that need to be checked right now.

“I know that protecting Kushida-san is not the end of the story. I’ve got my own answers.”

I don’t think so - no, that’s not what you mean, Horikita.

“We must avoid failing this special exam. It’s an absolute must that someone is expelled.”

It meant that she was not only prepared to rescue Kushida, but also to cut someone else at the same time. Even though I could feel Horikita’s growth, I took action before she could speak.

There is no need for Horikita to take on the cruel role of announcing the expulsion of a student.

“Wait a minute.”

I forcefully interrupted Horikita's attempt to continue. The judges here are mentally overloaded, no matter how much justification they may have for their actions.

It is easy to say that it is also an important experience, but it is too much for Horikita at the moment. Above all, if you make even a single mistake, you are bound to run out of time.

I am the only person who can create a unanimous decision to expel somebody from the school.

Wait, no. You're looking at me like that. And I understand. It's obvious that the person that Horikita and I have in mind is the same person.

"Kushida, the only student who kept voting in favour of expelling a student, deserves to be expelled. But she's also a capable student, as Horikita says. Then we'll have to think of a different approach."

"Well, wait a minute, Ayanokōji. The people in the class voted in favour of you because you're not a traitor. Now you're telling me you're going to do away with that and choose someone else to expel? I'm not convinced!"

"It's not just Ike who is unhappy, I'm sure it's all of us. But we still have to make a decision. We have to lead in a way that is as fair as possible."

"Fairness is... There's no way to do that."

"The option of gaining class points by expelling someone. The expulsion part is often seen as a negative, but if certain conditions are met, it can be a positive, as in the case of the traitor who voted in favour of the expulsion and was supported by many. If the class points gained are worth more than the student being expelled, then it is a decision well worth choosing. In other words, the only people who should be expelled are those who are currently unwanted in the class. So what is the criteria for this? It is the sum of all their parts. Someone who has academic ability, physical ability, or any ability that doesn't fall into those two categories. To put it simply, students who have the ability to lead, such as Horikita, or the ability to organize a group, such as Yōsuke and Kei. Those are the ones you can exclude. Of course, if you think I'm being patronizing, you're free to argue."

As the time is about to expire, the classmates were silent, not wanting to interfere.

"And this story should not include the future, or their prospects. It is difficult and speculative to objectively assess who will actually grow and by how much. In the final analysis, the OAA is the impartial arbiter."

It is the school's quantification of the student's ability, without the student's emotions. As of September 1st, the lowest score in this class was 36 points overall.

Many students check their rank and score, but not many know who is at the bottom each time.

“The student in this class who currently has the lowest OAA is... Sakura Airi.”

I replied, not looking at Airi in particular, but looking around at the whole scene.

“What about... What are you talking about? Don’t joke around at a time like this.” Haruka stood up and glared at me with a furious glare.

“I’m just giving an objective opinion. It’s up to the class to decide if they agree.”

I’m not going to listen to personal opinions and continue talking.

“Objective”? What’s objective? The OAA rankings are what? Does that make it OKAY to expel Airi? And why would... Kiyopon say that!”

“Then who do you think should be expelled?”

“Well, that’s...!”

“People who are not prepared to name names directly have no right or entitlement to choose who to expel.”

“Oh, Ike-kun! He’s not that different from Airi in terms of academic and physical ability!”

It is true that on the OAA, he was once tied for last place with Airi.

But now he has added one point to his tally to 37. He’s one step ahead.

“Then let’s simply ask here. All those opposed to Airi leaving the school, please raise your hands.”

Haruka immediately raised her hand. Almost at the same time. Akito and Keisei also raise their hands.

Of course, this would be natural for the Ayanokōji Group.

“Three, huh? Next, which students are opposed to Ike leaving school?”

A number of boys, including Sudō, and girls, including Shinohara and Mori, who owed a debt of gratitude to Shinohara, put their hands up, and there were 11 clear objections.

“Why are you...”

“Building friendships is also a fine skill. I must say that Airi is inferior to Ike in that respect.”

“Can you look Airi in the eye and say that?”

“Is that what you want?”

“Huh? Stop it!”

When I was about to look into Airi’s frightened eyes, Haruka stopped me.

“We can have hand-raise votes for Hondō, Okitani, or another student, but it will not be less than three votes for Airi.”

“What is that... you’re seriously kidding. We don’t have many friends, that’s for sure. But that doesn’t mean you can expel Airi in this way!”

If I had any other choice, I would do it. But we're past that stage now.

"If we're being... honest... losing 300 class points is critical."

One of the Ayanokōji Group, Airi's friend Keisei, quietly lets that slip.

"Yukimū, you can't be serious! Don't tell me you agree with Airi's expulsion too!?"

"No, no! I'm not in favour of it yet!"

"Not yet? You mean you're going to agree to it? Huh? You've got to be kidding me!"

"Well, no but...!"

As if realising everything, Haruka bit her lip and made a decision.

"It's disgusting. It can't be. What is this... I thought we were friends?"

The cold voice is directed at me, and also at Keisei, whose true feelings have leaked out.

"And so are the others. No one wants to protect her. That's right, you guys don't care what happens to Airi, or who you don't get along with, as long as you save yourselves. You put Kushida-chan first just because you have a little use for her? You're going to abandon a girl who's trying her best to keep up with the class and not cause trouble? Oh yeah, oh yeah, this is the best class ever."

Keisei's unintentional comment proved to be an offence to Haruka.

No one wanted to make eye contact and they delegitimised themselves so as not to get involved.

"Enough. I'm not going to expel Airi. If you want, you can vote for me. I'll happily be expelled from the school."

Haruka tries to protect Airi by bringing up her voluntary withdrawal from school.

It's all part of the plan. In fact, that statement only strangles itself.

"Wait, wait, Haruka-chan! I can't expel Haruka-chan either!"

"It's okay, Airi. You have to stay in this school. I didn't like this class in the first place. But after I got to know you, and Kiyopon, Yukimū and Miyacchi, every day was fun. Even though Yamauchi-kun left the school, I thought that it wouldn't happen again, and I thought that I can do well with everyone here..."

Staring at Chabashira-sensei, Haruka makes a formal statement.

"I'm the candidate for expulsion. It's almost time, isn't it?"

As I predicted, the declaration would take precedence, and Haruka would step up to the guillotine.

"OK? Airi, you must definitely vote in favour. The others don't have any problem with it, right? You can protect yourselves, so there's no reason to vote against it."

"That's not... I can't vote in favour of that..!"

Airi shouts that she can't vote in favour of Haruka's expulsion.  
"It's okay, I have nothing to regret if I have to leave school to protect you."  
"But...!"  
"That's enough discussion. We will now start the voting."  
On the basis of Haruka's strong will, a vote is taken in favour and against.  
The results are shown on the monitor...

**[Student Selection:]**

*Expel Hasebe Haruka from the school.*

**[Results of the twenty-first round of voting:]**

*35 in favour*

*3 against*

Almost all the students voted in favour of the proposal, but three voted against it.

The three of them must have been an easy guess for Haruka.

"Airi!"

Of course, it is clear from the vote that Airi definitely voted against.

"I can't do it, I can't! I can't let Haruka be expelled!"

"He said he was trying to protect you! And don't even get me started on Miyacchi and Yukimū!"

Haruka was ready to be expelled from the school, but it turns out that some students don't want her to be expelled.

"I don't want you to be expelled from school... I can't vote yes."

While showing a bitter and agonizing expression, Akito and I look each other in the eye and answer clearly.

"Then why Airi?"

"I wouldn't say that... but if you're asking me to take one or the other I'm..."

"I'm so sorry!"

Suddenly, Keisei shouted and interrupted the two boys. He stood up and bowed his head.

"I voted in favour of... and if we don't, the class won't be able to reach Class A..."

He answered, confessing the whereabouts of a vote that would not be revealed if he'd kept quiet.

"What? Then who is the other one? The one who put the other against in this situation!"

"That vote was mine."

“Ah! Kiyopon, what’s wrong with you?! You don’t have to defend me!”

“I told you. I have a new policy that I will cut the least able students in this class. Whether it’s you who wants to drop out, or Kushida who tried to drop out, I’m not going to change this policy, no matter what new students come forward. I can’t change it.”

If we take a step back here, there will be no unanimity in favour.

“It is a fact that Sakura is the lowest ranked in OAA, and cutting the students who have not contributed much to the class is not so bad. It’s not that bad, is it..?”

I am prepared to take the risk of speaking out in this situation and I will give my opinion.

“Don’t be silly. Think about it in your own surroundings. If one of your dearest friends were to drop out of school, would you be able to laugh about it afterwards? I wouldn’t. I would never!”

“It is Airi who should be expelled. There is no other choice anymore.”

“No no, Kiyopon! No matter who agrees with you, only Kiyopon has to be on Airi’s side!”

I know. And because I know that, I’m going to speak.

“I’m not going to change my mind. If Haruka continues to disagree with Airi’s expulsion, then this class will have to end here.”

“Then why don’t you do what you want? I will continue to oppose Airi’s expulsion from school until the very end!”

Only one. If you continue to oppose us until the end, she will not be expelled.

That law is absolute. The most efficient way to break that law is to...

“Thank you, Haruka... It’s all right now.”

In a trembling voice, Airi laughs as if she has realised everything.

“Ai...ri...?”

“If there is one student in the class who deserve it... maybe it’s me. There’s nothing wrong with what Kiyotaka-kun is saying, Haruka.”

“Airi!”

“You’re right about everything. If someone has to drop out, then I, the biggest drag on the class, should disappear.”

Directly stop the person who is voting against it using the person who’s going to be expelled from the school.

“I can’t! I would never let Airi be expelled from school! Never!!! I don’t care if this class doesn’t move up to Class A, I’m going to make sure that we all graduate together with Airi!”

“No, you can’t. Even if I do, I’m sure I’ll regret it a lot. I’m sure I’ll regret it for a long, long time, that it was my fault we didn’t make it to Class A.”

“It’s all right! There’s nothing wrong with you! I’m just protecting you because I’m selfish!”

“Thank you... But there’s no way I can put that kind of responsibility on Haruka-chan.”

“What, what’s that... There’s no such thing as..!”

Preventing students from dropping out is not always in their best interests. If this happens, a vote against will only make Airi suffer.

“Self-sacrifice sounds good. It sounds good to the ears. I’m sure the people in our class are deeply relieved to have someone like Haruka in their lives. If the class is really running smoothly, it might be a good choice to make. So, Sudō, are you willing to sacrifice yourself for the sake of the class?”

“No, no... I’m that-”

“Satō, what about you?”

“Wow, me? I’m not really like that-”

“How about you, Onodera?”

“Probably can’t-”

“If you ask anyone else any more, the answer would be the same. Basically, no one wants to sacrifice themselves.”

“I’d really like to be expelled. Then you wouldn’t have any problems.”

“We rely on students who are willing to sacrifice themselves. Once they learn that easy way, when they are put in a similar situation in the future, they will repeatedly ask for volunteers voluntarily. It’s too late to try to make a fair decision.”

“I don’t know... I don’t understand that logic! I want to protect Airi! That’s all I want!”

“Even if Haruka defended her by expelling herself from school, Airi could get expelled the very next day.”

“Don’t talk to me in terms of an indeterminate future.”

“There is no definite future anywhere. So, you have to make the best of it.”

No matter how many words I put in front of her, she doesn’t seem to be able to hear me.

But Airi’s ears have definitely heard. That’s the important thing.

“It’s okay, it’s okay, Airi. I’ll keep voting against. No matter who else votes in favour...!”

“Everyone... me... please vote for me...” In a muffled voice, but one that everyone could hear, Airi said.

Haruka grabbed both of Airi’s arms and resisted desperately.

“I hate it. Absolutely not... I had such, such a good time yesterday... This morning was just like any other morning. I met up with Airi before coming to



school. We chatted and chatted and chatted about the cultural festival and talked about... Even today, you were going to call Kiyopon after school and surprise him! You can't just take that away from me!"

There are less than ten minutes left. This means that this is practically the last vote. Whoever is going to leave the school, there is no one who can easily vote against it. That is the weight of the final vote.

Shaking her head from side to side, Airi does not accept the helping hand extended by Haruka.

"I don't like it, I don't like it, I don't like it!"

Like a child, she refused, denied and screamed.

Each time, Airi expresses her gratitude to Haruka, but still persuades her to accept it.

It can no longer be changed.

Realising everything, Haruka sat there as if collapsing.

"A person with no ability has accepted it and stepped forward. We owe it to them to respond. It's easy for you to vote against on the next ballot. But even if you vote against, Airi will not be able to stay in this school. She will leave the school with a strong sense of responsibility for what she has done to her classmates and will not be able to look forward. The only way to save your best friend Airi is for you to vote in favour of her expulsion."

"I-I... agree..."

Airi embraced Haruka from the front as she was collapsing.

"Thank you, Haruka... Thank you for all the help you've given me. I couldn't give anything back to you, but... listen to my last selfish request."

"I don't like it, Airi... this kind of..."

"Vote in favour of me."

She thanked her, gently stroked the hair of a weeping Haruka, and raised her voice towards Chabashira-sensei.

"I'm volunteering as candidate. Please vote for me."

She asked Haruka to stand up and take a seat, and Airi returned to her seat to take it all in.

But even after the vote has been declared, voting time is not over.

Voting continued past 60 seconds and past 70 seconds.

The students have 90 seconds. In the next 70 seconds or so, Haruka will be expelled from the school.

If my best friend Airi disappears, I will disappear too. It's not hard to see why this thought crossed her mind.

If you choose to make that weak choice here, so be it.

As the 100 second mark ticked by, the clock was ticking down to 40

seconds. She just kept crying and showed no sign of reaching for her tablet.

“HARUKA-CHAN!”

It was anger from Airi like I had never heard before. The loudest voice I had ever heard.

As if slapped in the face, she looked up in surprise, and at Haruka’s crying face, Airi smiled and nodded.

If we don’t make a decision and vote here, it will be a denial of everything Airi is.

“The voting is now closed. I will announce the results.”

**[Student Selection:]**

*Expel Sakura Airi from the school.*

**[Results of the twenty-second round of voting:]**

*38 in favour*

*0 against*

Chabashira-sensei, who had been watching the fierce exchange, forgot to report the end of the exam and just looked at Airi and Haruka.

After being expelled from school, Airi stared straight ahead, as if she had accepted everything. On the other hand, Haruka, who couldn’t protect her, tried her best to hold back her sobs, but she couldn’t hide them from the speechless class.

“Ah, ah, Chabashira-sensei. Please proceed.”

The invigilator, who had so far been silent and calm, except for the minimum of cautions and warnings, seemed to have forgotten to remind us about the signal for the end of the special examination.

“With regard to the expulsion of Sakura Airi from the school by a unanimous vote in favour, the last task is completed. The choice is accepted and 100 class points will be awarded. Just to be clear, there is only one way to undo this expulsion. Only if you have 20 million private points at this moment and use them...”

It was Chabashira-sensei who tried to continue the explanation, as obligated, but stopped halfway.

“I don’t think I need to explain any further.”

Even if we collected all the private points of all the students in our class, we would never reach 20 million points.

“The other three classes have already finished their special exams, but I’m going to ask you to go home right away today. As for Sakura, you will have to come with me to the staff room afterwards, so stay in the classroom.”

“Yes.”

Airi replies to Chabashira-sensei in a quiet voice, but without hesitation.

“That’s all. Everyone please leave your seats. Follow the instructions and leave the room.”

We were informed and we all left our seats, although at different times.

Airi was told to stay where she was. And Haruka, who can’t even stand up, tried her best to stand on her trembling knees, but she couldn’t seem to get her legs up.

Her breathing had become ragged and she was beginning to experience symptoms similar to hyperventilation.

Akito and I, unable to see this, rushed over to her and forced her to stand up so that Haruka could hug her.

Because nothing good will come from leaving it here.

As soon as we stepped into the corridor, our phones were returned to us.

And Keisei followed soon after.

“You’re something else, aren’t you? I’m not going to tell you that you did anything wrong. It’s just that I’m still not sure if I can say you did the right thing. No, there’s no point in talking about this. Just... forget it.”

While having a desire to spit it out, Keisei turned his back on me and started walking down the corridor.

It would be pointless to wait here for Haruka or Akito.

Legitimacy is irrelevant. It’s not like I don’t think about the fact that I’ve taken the initiative to cut off an important member of my group. Kei approached me. I noticed that she was upset, but I stopped her with my eyes.

For today, it is better to let Kei be quiet, as if she is also in mourning.

There is no need to buy hate with unnecessary things. As I recall, Chabashira-sensei wanted to meet me after the special examination was over.

When I looked at my phone I saw that I had received a message and the meeting was at 6pm. I’ve got some time.

Deciding that it was best not to stay, I decided to leave.

If I headed straight for the front door, I would bump into Keisei and the other students.

I’ve got an appointment with Chabashira-sensei, so I think I’ll just wander around the school, where there’s not a lot of people around.

“Ayanokōji-kun.”

I knew she was following me, and when I couldn’t see anyone anymore, she called out to me.

“What’s the matter? Didn’t you say something to Kushida?”

“No. She’s not going to answer any questions now. I just warned her not to

get desperate.”

She had many friends around her, but at the end of the exam no one said anything to her.

Immediately after showing her true nature, it is understandable that she is difficult to get close to.

“Sorry.”

As her hair, which was a little longer than before, swayed, Horikita bowed deeply.

“This special exam... I was not good enough... I was not good enough.”

“Not enough? You did the best you could, didn’t you? This was a much tougher competition than last year’s Class Poll exam.”

“No matter how tough the fight was, I put a big shackle on you... and you had to take all the responsibility that should have been spread out.”

It was inevitable that a student would be expelled. That’s why Horikita wanted to show her intentions.

“I’m the one who told you to keep quiet. That’s fine.”

“It’s not good. It’s left a big scar on your precious group. It doesn’t seem very... like it can be repaired in the future.”

“It’s okay. In fact, there may come a day when this is more convenient.”

If she had been involved, the blame could certainly have been divided equally between the two of us.

But that’s not what I wanted.

“Convenient..? What do you mean?”

“No, don’t worry about it, it’s a small thing.”

Of course, I don’t think I’ll be able to change my mind and convince myself of that any time soon, but I don’t want this special exam to be the way I carry on next time.

“Look on the bright side. We’ve gained 100 valuable class points to move closer to Class A. These points are not to be scoffed at.”

“But we’ve lost... Sakura-san.”

“As a result, the class average was raised to a higher level, which is a positive thing. It’s a perfect end point.”

“Don’t do that. You don’t need to act unreasonably cruel.”

“Unreasonably cruel?”

I wanted to deny it at first, but I decided to go along with it.

“Maybe you’re right. I was probably trying to suppress my painful feelings.”

“Kiyotaka-kun!”

From the end of the corridor came a familiar, gentle voice.

At the sound of her voice, Horikita turns around and is surprised to see her.

“You... Sakura-san...?”

The physically weak Airi walked towards us, out of breath.

“I’m going...”

“Yeah.”

Horikita hesitated to speak to Airi when they passed each other, but was unable to do so.

She couldn’t think of any words to say to those who were leaving.

“I really wanted to show you, Kiyotaka-kun, at the end. How about...?”

On the verge of voting, Haruka was saying Airi was going to surprise me, was this what she meant?

“You look different. No wonder Horikita didn’t recognize you for a moment.”

“It’s a bit... late to be brave, though... hehe.”

Airi, who had taken off her glasses and dressed up her hair, smiles wryly.

“It’s not for me to say, but please take care of... Haruka-chan.”

“I understand.”

“Bye-bye, Kiyotaka-kun.”

She smiled the biggest smile I’ve ever seen on her face and turned away.

*(TL Note: When Kiyotaka “decided to go along with it” it meant that he was hiding his feelings until Suzune pointed them out. This interaction is essential to understand Kiyotaka's intentions – KayL (Japanese Reader))*

She started to walk, but then her steps slowed down and she almost stopped.

Still, she put her best foot forward and never looked back.

I can hear her voice in the empty corridor. Sniffling noises and stifled crying. Such a scene reminds me of one I used to see myself.

The losers always look back on their inability, and regret it when it is far too late.

Whether it’s in the White Room or this school, that fact remains the same.



## Epilogue: A Farewell to the Past

THE FIVE HOURS of the unanimous special exam had come to an end. Not long after, we heard that we were the only ones out of the four classes to have an expulsion. More than a few of the students must have regretted it. However, the fact that we gained 150 class points in this special exam, where three classes gained only 50 class points, will definitely help us in our future battles.

If we finished September like this, we would finally be able to move up to Class B. After school, I was waiting for someone on the stairs leading to the rooftop as promised. About 10 minutes later than I had planned, a person showed up.

“I’m sorry to keep you waiting. It took me a while to finish up.”

“No problem. By the way, did it end the way you wanted it to? Or was it the other way around?”

“Don’t ask me a hard question, there is no real right answer in that test. I believe that. There’s a chance that someone will see us here. Shall we change places?”

“That would be wise.”

With a faint raise of the corners of her mouth, Chabashira-sensei began to climb the stairs to the roof. She took out a key with a simple blue name holder.

“Every year, the school’s attitude toward rooftop use is getting tougher. Maybe in the near future it will be more difficult to get on the roof here as well.”

Even with the fence in place, there was still a risk of falling off. In addition, the rooftop is also a disadvantage because it can be used for minor abuses, as Ryūen once did. Chabashira-sensei quietly walked out onto the roof, leaned against the railing and exhaled.

“It’s been a long day... really,” Chabashira-sensei said to herself, genuinely stressed by the special exam. “As I mentioned during the exam... I took the same exam in my senior year of high school.”

“It seems so.”

I don’t know where she’s staring, but Chabashira-sensei just stares straight ahead at the sunset.

“If you forgive me, you can listen to my confession...”

“It’s called the Sacrament of Forgiveness. I’m not much of a religious person, but it’s fine.”

The unanimous special exam she is said to have attempted when she was a student. She said that she had the same question, but the situation of the class

would change the expression she would show.

“I remember that day as if it was yesterday. We, the 3rd year Class B, were on the verge of catching up with Class A before the graduation exam. The difference in class points was only 73 points. Even if we couldn’t upset them with the little time we had left in our daily lives, we were in a position to turn the tables with just one special exam.

That was a close call, and I’m sure Class A didn’t think they had the advantage by that margin.

“In the meantime, the unanimous special exam began. There were five questions. Like you, we were able to make it through the fourth question, despite our differences of opinion.

“You said the last question was the same.”

“Well... it was. It seems that my memory is a little fuzzy on today’s exam.”

I’m not sure if it’s because she’s confused about the timeline or her mind is distracted.

“Of course, the first time we voted, there were only a few in favour and a majority against. But as the debate continued, the situation began to change dramatically. If Class A voted unanimously in favour, the margin would have grown to 173 points.

“You didn’t know what the graduation exam would be at that point, did you?”

“No. In the event that Class B takes first place, Class A’s second place may not make a big difference in class points. The difference in rewards between first and second place is 100 or 150 points. Of course, it could be more than 200 points, but there was no guarantee of that, you know. The debate heated up as time went on; there was no way that Class A would choose to drop out, so they all voted against it as well, and unanimously survived the special exam. There were those who argued that we should win the graduation exam and become Class A students, and those who argued that if Class A would not choose to drop out, then that would be our chance to turn the tables. We talked about all kinds of scenarios.”

Even though it was the same question, the topics that came up were still completely different depending on the situation of the class. Only two options. But the only way to get there is to go through many, many twists and turns.

“After a great deal of time and discussion, the right answer never came. Whether to take Class A even at the cost of sacrifice, or to choose your friends and throw yourself into a tough battle...”

Chabashira-sensei’s moist eyes didn’t move from the sunset.

“Eventually, my classmates slowly began to lean towards the idea that Class A would make the sacrifice to get the 100 class points. As the conversation started to progress on that assumption, the opposition slowly began to shift in favour of



the idea.”

“It’s not easy to come to a consensus when someone is missing, is it? As usual, there are students with low abilities and poor communication skills. It is inevitable that students with one or two habits will be the first to be expelled.”

“I agree. Once the vote is unanimous in favour, it is impossible to withdraw it. It’s not easy to get everyone to vote in favour of it, you’re right. Something happened to change that situation. In the case of this special exam, I promised that only traitors would be expelled, and I was able to convince them to vote in favour.”

“There was a boy in my class. The student was... well, I guess the best way to describe him would be to say that he was a combination of Hirata and Ike.”

“Yōsuke and Ike?”

“I’m not sure how to put it together, but it’s hard to imagine. He was both a leader and a mood maker for the class.”

I see, he was a student who somehow included the merits of Yōsuke and the merits (and demerits) of Ike.

“We had been struggling on the last question until he finally decided to speak up. He decided that he would have himself expelled as it fell under his job as leader.”

I guess he decided that he couldn’t abandon his friends who had fought with him for three years.

“The only special exam left is the final graduation exam. It must be painful to be without a leader, and that’s one option... but not the only one.”

Of course, it is difficult to say that it is a wise choice. But if all the classmates were on equal footing, it would be extremely difficult to choose one. There is also the option of letting luck take its course, but I’m sure there are many students who are not convinced.

“But then again, it was never unanimous.”

“Why? It was agreed that the leader would leave the school, wasn’t it?”

“No. One person voted against the student’s expulsion until the very end. The one vote against never turned into a vote in favour, and the remaining time was whittled away. I, of all people, was the one who kept voting against it.”

From the flow of the story, I thought it might be so, but that means...

“So, to Chabashira-sensei, the student who was the leader was not just any leader?”

Closing her eyes, Chabashira-sensei lightly chuckled and slowly opened her eyes again.

Then she looked up at the sunset sky and affirmed deeply.

“I’m not sure what to say. For me, that student was a leader, a friend, and a... and a lover more important than anyone else.”

The two of them overcame many hardships and came to understand each other. The future was supposed to be about grabbing the most happiness out of the remaining school life and aiming for Class A. So Chabashira-sensei couldn't let go of that.

"If I continued to vote against it, my classmates will naturally be confused and angry. Some of them turned their opposition to me. Well, it's a natural process."

"But if Chabashira-sensei didn't drop out of school, that means..."

"That's right. I protect him, he protects me. Such a stalemate went on and on. We couldn't finish the special exam on time, so our class was down 300 class points, and Class A had chosen to expel a student, so the difference was 450 points. In total, the difference was 523 points. In an instant, the distance between us and Class A, which was within striking distance, opened up to a desperate extent."

It's a gap that no amount of big-opportunity graduation exams will be able to turn around.

"If it's any consolation, your boyfriend didn't drop out of school, did he?"

"I don't know what I was protecting him for, but when the unanimous special exams ended, our relationship naturally ended as well. It was only for a day... or even less than 24 hours. After that, we lost the final exam, and our three years amounted to nothing.

"What happened to him after that?"

"I never saw him again. I don't even know where he is now. He was everything to me when I was in high school. Now that I think about it, it's so dumb. If you think about it over the course of a long life, three years of high school is only a small part of it. Even if we didn't make it to Class A, we should have fought to the end with no regrets.

Does this mean that the Chabashira-sensei has been regretting her choice for 11 years? In this case, rather than a mistake, it would be better to say that she continues to worry about whether her choice was the right one or not.

"I was not qualified to graduate from Class A. But what was I supposed to do? Should I have strongly convinced him to drop out? Or should I have cut myself off when he told me he was leaving?"

"There's no real right answer to this particular test. It's probably impossible to get a perfect unanimity from the heart. That is, unless you have a student who is thoroughly unskilled and no one needs him or her..."

"The failure to see this is the cause of defeat...?"

"The first time he convinced everyone to give up unanimously, the student decided to drop out of school in order to keep his chances of going to Class A.

What he took was to first get a unanimous vote in favour and then think about it.”

Chabashira-sensei nodded.

“If I had cut him out...”

“Were the graduation exams so easy that you could win without a good leader? Your class lost the unanimous exam even though you didn’t have any dropouts, right?”

“Yes. If we had been able to fight as a united team and in perfect condition, we might have been evenly matched.”

“I mean, you can’t choose to be leaderless. But even if someone else was missing, we still couldn’t win the Class A. If that was the case, the only way was to stay with the options of for and against. You had to refuse all temptations and inducements to agree and stay the course.”

“Even if I had stayed, I would not have been in a position to be persuaded to vote against, which is what you’re saying.”

“There is no need for persuasion. The sensei’s class was divided on the opinion of winning. If the votes don’t coalesce, eventual defeat by running out of time is inevitable. When that happens, the proponents will absolutely move to consolidate the votes against. Even if they resist with their mouths, what if it is the final vote with less than a minute left? If you vote in favour, there is no time to expel the next particular student. The interval time is a fixed 10 minutes, but the voting time is a maximum of 60 seconds. If you adjust the time by deliberately delaying the vote, you can bring it to a final vote without a minute’s gap.”

If you choose in favour, you lose 300 class points for failing to clear, and if you choose against, you gain 50 class points for clearing.

“There is no way you can choose the former with only one choice. You can either run out of time and lose 300 class points, or you can make sure to clear the exam and get 50 class points, even if you don’t get the extra 100 class points, to take the graduation exam with Class A. There was only one conclusion. Of course, I’m not sure if I could have made up the 173 class points.”

The students were not ready to give up the idea of winning, and were caught up in the immediate 100 class points. The leader was able to take advantage of this psychology and succeeded in getting them to agree.

However, the strategy itself was a mistake.

He failed to see the heart of Chabashira-sensei, and the stubbornness of the opposite sex who became his lover.

“I’m... If I had a student like you back then, I would have...” She was about to say something, then perhaps thought better of it. “No, it doesn’t make sense now. You can’t go back in time. But let me ask you this, Ayanokōji. Sakura must have been a member of your close group. And moreover, that girl had special

feelings for you.”

“You know very well.”

“I’m a homeroom teacher and I can often tell by the way my students look at me.”

I wasn’t particularly fond of her special skill.

“Wasn’t there a way to save Sakura and blame the sacrifice on others?”

“I don’t know. Horikita had the power to make change. It wouldn’t have been enough time for a serious challenge.”

“Didn’t it hurt your... heart?”

“Of course, it would have been best if we could have avoided expelling Airi. As for me, I tried to bring the matter to a unanimous vote by any means possible, but Kushida couldn’t stop me. I decided that there would be no solution unless we chose to expel the students and then cut off their path and hunt them down. However, if we were willing to be consequential, there might have been a possibility of unanimity through opposition. At that time, Kushida was so disturbed by Horikita’s presence that she accepted the choice to stay at this school. That was not in my assumptions at all. I’m not the only one who wants to help students who are close to me. Now that it’s happened, the only thing left to do is elimination. At this point, there is no choice but to give superiority to classmates. Whether they can study or not, whether they can play sports or not. Communication skills. Insight and observation skills. We can only look at objective data, the OAA rankings.”

If we look at the system the school has created, we can see who should be expelled even if we don’t want to.

“Of course, there are a few students who are not so different from Airi. But if a quarrel starts between students who are on the same side, their friends will naturally take the side of protection. However, with Airi, the only major obstacle was Haruka. In the end, there wasn’t much of a loss.”

“So you’re saying that you intentionally sacrificed your own happiness for the class...?”

“Personality is also one of the deciding factors. Because of Airi’s personality, she’s not good at imitating people who don’t want to quit or appeal to them not to vote for her. A good friend of hers, in this case Haruka, will not vote in favour of it. However, the only exception to this is the self-report from Airi. There’s no way Airi could choose to stay in school after annoying the class by making them sacrifice 300 class points.”

“You even knew Sakura’s state of mind.”

“Overall strength, familiarity, personality. And as a final push, I need to be informed by someone important that Airi is the one who should be expelled. If I

told her, she will have no choice but to understand her fate.”

“Ayanokōji... you’re...”

“People may call me a monster. No one wants to be the one who made the “evil” choice. In the end, someone needs to make these decisions. It’s the only way to succeed in this world.”

“In this school, expulsion is a constant companion in every possible situation. As a teacher of this school, I’m prepared to accept it and do my best. Still, I will never be able to make a decision like yours without hesitation.”

Admitting the weakness of her own heart, Chabashira-sensei said so.

“I don’t know you very well, but how many people have you cut down? I’m sure it’s something I’ll never understand.”

How many people have I “cut down?” I hadn’t thought about it. Just as we don’t remember the colour and shape of each stone that falls by the roadside, those who learn with us and those who teach us will disappear if they are incompetent. That’s just artificial selection.

“Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today, Ayanokōji. I regretted the choices I made in the past and stood still for a very long time. But it turns out that I didn’t have time for that. I will fulfill my role as a teacher to guide the students in my class to continue fighting without regret.”

“It seems that through this special exam, you were able to make a deal with the past.”

The profile of Chabashira-sensei who spoke was somewhat radiant, unlike before.

“It’s not that I haven’t dreamed of Class A before. Even when I try not to think about it, I end up hoping for it. That I might be able to fulfill the dream that I never could. And every time I do, I ridicule myself for being so stupid and erase it from my memory. That’s how it went on and on.” Chabashira-sensei turned to me and gave me a smile I’d never seen before. “I’ve decided, Ayanokōji. I’m going to make sure our class graduates from Class A, anyway I can.”

“It’s fine to be enthusiastic, but make sure you don’t deviate from your position as a teacher.

“No, of course I know my position. I’m not sure how much I can do, but I’m ready to do it. Actually Ayanokōji... You say things that are uncharacteristic of a normal student.”

“What type of things would a “normal” student say? “

“Well... I can’t answer that question, because I’m not a student.”

“If you’re done talking, I’m leaving.”

“Right. I’m sorry to take up so much of your time.”

“No problem. Then, I’ll leave now. *Chabashira-sensei.*”

I've been calling her that lately, but I said it with emphasis. She will be fine now. Through this special exam, she has grown as much as the students. Her mind, which had been stuck in the third year of high school, had quickly begun to catch up to her current age.

## Postscript

The year 2021 is coming to an end. When I was cleaning up my house, I found my graduation books from elementary and junior high school, and I was reading them again. In my graduation essay from junior high school, I wrote that I wanted to work as a writer because I had no talent for drawing (I wanted to say that, but I was too embarrassed to specify it). I was moved to tears when I found it. There are some things that are better left unnoticed, aren't there?

Joking aside, the second semester of the second-year version has started, and there are a lot of big events coming up in the second semester, especially the cultural festival and the school trip, which will be a new story not seen in the first-year version. so please look forward to them. Looking back on volume 5, there are almost no students from other grades in this volume. The story with the first and third graders will continue to unfold, but this is a book that reminds us that the main focus of this story is the second-years..

Now, I have a little announcement to make! One of the things that I've been waiting for for a long time, but couldn't quite make it happen, was to make a manga version of the second year. One of the things I've been waiting for a long time is a manga adaptation of the second-year story, and now that it's finally ready, I'd like to announce it here. Starting with the December issue of Monthly Comic Alive, the manga of "Welcome to the Classroom of The Elite" will be serialized by Sasasa Sane Neshia. Thank you very much for your support. I'd also like to express my deepest gratitude to Yuyu Ichiichino for continuing to draw the first-grade version of the manga, and thank you for your continued support of my inadequate Yomi.

Lastly, in the afterward for the next volume, I have a thought that I've been keeping in my mind for the past two years, and I hope I'll be able to touch on it.

The next time I'll see you will be at the beginning of 2022, see you next year!

## RoyalMTLs Afterword

*PrinceYG#6558 (u/TheLaw4465): Translator*

- Yo, Prince here, hope you guys enjoyed reading this latest volume. Well well, this is the third translation we've put out, so do give us a round of applause. Personally, I thought this volume was alright but Y2V4.5 still reigns supreme. My favourite chapter was "Ichinose's Choice" even though it was more so Kanzaki's choice. I'm super excited to see how he progresses with this challenge. I was quite disappointed when I found out there were no appearances from the first years and third years (besides Yagami) but Kinusaga has made a vague statement that perhaps the next volumes will shift the focus back on them. That's when I'll see you all next. See you in February!

*Rhyamar#7433 (u/Rhyamar) (Rhyamar84 – Wattpadd): Translator*

- Hey. Although this is my first time translating a COTE volume, I'd say most people reading this will know me as the Kushida simp who's cropped up on the subreddit over the last month or so. Some may even recognise me from Wattpad! Regardless, I hope you guys enjoyed reading this vol as much as I enjoyed co-translating it with Prince. Imo, this volume was probably the best y2 COTE volume so far; more specifically, I liked how both Horikita and Ichinose's classes were handled here, and it was enjoyable to see Kiyotaka openly take the wheel for once. Oh, and just F for Kanzaki. It seems like Yagami and Nagumo will become involved in the upcoming volume's more, as a result of their absence in this one, which I'm rather excited to see how Kiyotaka handles. Anyway, you can probably expect me to return to help translate y2v6 when it comes out, too, so I'll try my best to bring everyone faster and higher quality MTLs alongside Prince when that time comes. Thanks for the read!

*Amadeus#6844: Editor/Proof Reader*

- Greetings. I'm Amadeus. Which option would you have chosen for the second task? I would have gone with Kyoto! Or Hokkaido. HOT SPRINGS DICK COMPETITION!! This is also my first time participating with translating a light novel volume, it was fun! I started reading the series at the beginning of October, and finished in mid October. Surreal experience. It is a joy to be able to help out the process of new volumes going forward. I am looking forward to it! As for this volume, I thought it was tremendous, one of the stronger volumes of Year 2. We



finally got bitch Kushida exposed; as well Ayanokouji! The class now knows he is ruthless. How is he going to deal with the attention going forward? Other highlights were of course every Kei scene, Shiina showing off her own brilliance without getting even a word of dialogue, and... the impending implusion of the Ayanokōji Group. No more boring conversations! People will be disappointed by Kinu's desire to prevent Kushida from being expelled - but I want to see her suffer from humiliation before she gets booted out. Sakura getting yeeted was certainly surprising, but a welcome one in my mind. I can't wait for the next volume, which should be the sports festival. Nagumo vs Ayanōkoji??? (*Please do more than make your third year sheep stare at him, Nagumo.*) As a side note, Kanzaki's classmates are a bunch of retards. I have a soft spot for Ichinose though.

*Cast#5942: Editor/Proof Reader*

- Hi there, It's Cast. I really enjoyed reading and editing this novel and believe that Kinusaga did an amazing job. I agree with Prince however, and think that 4.5 was still a little more entertaining. Anyways, I hope you enjoyed reading this TL and please let us know about any mistakes throughout the novel, either through personal DM's or in our Discord. Thanks.

Thanks Kinugasa (the author) for writing this novel in the first place, please do support him by buying one of the official copies of *Classroom of The Elite* somewhere down the line.

See you in four months!

- RoyalMTL Team

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