

## XVIII

Satomi absentmindedly twirled her streak white hair, biting her lip in anticipation as she waited for the bell to ring, signaling the start of class. Beside her, Raizo pinched the bridge of his nose as he sighed to himself, thinking about what he should do to deal with Satomi's frustrations. Across the room, Kasumi sleepily rubbed her eyes, trying to stay awake as she read her textbook to stave off the boredom.

As students began to file into the lecture hall, Raizo noticed Satomi's eyes darting back and forth between the door and her own fingers, which were shaking uncontrollably. Silently, he clenched a fist.

Hikari walked in, followed by her sister Elizabeth. The two were locked in a heated debate. Koharu entered after the two, shaking her head as the sisters argued back and forth. Parting way with her sister and ending their bickering, Hikari approached her puppets. "You two are early," she said. "What's going on?"

"I-it's nothing," Satomi replied, averting her gaze.

"Huh. Alright then," Hikar answered with a shrug as she sat down.

*Friggin' idiot...how gullible are you?* Raizo thought. Stopping himself from saying so out loud, he sighed.

The class settled down as Chinatsu got up in front of everyone, clearing her throat. "Alright, class, we have a new transfer student who'll be joining us today. Please come in," she said, her announcement finished. The room fell silent for a few moments. Irritated, Chinatsu repeated in a louder voice. "I said 'come in,' alright?"

Another moment passed before the door swung open dramatically. Satomi's eyes widened as the boy with long brown hair and bright green eyes entered the room. "The name's Naoki Goda," he announced casually, marching in, "and I bring with me my puppet, Noa," he said, gesturing toward a puppet who had entered behind him with long, blonde hair and dark, red eyes. With a smile, he continued. "I ended up skipping two years of school 'cause I got caught up in a bunch of family business, but here I am, ready to roll!" he declared.

"Wow," Hikari mumbled to herself, "is it just me or do you two also hate this asshole already?"

Satomi didn't answer, her expression almost blank. She seemed to not have heard the question at all. Raizo, on the other hand, nodded gently in agreement. "I see what you're saying, young miss. Reminds me of someone I know."

"Wow, you know someone else like that?" Hikari asked. "Man...your life must've sucked..."

*And it still does,* Raizo thought. *Maybe you'd make a good pair with that guy.*

"Alright, find a free seat anywhere in the lecture hall," Chinatsu sighed.

Naoki smirked and he leaned over to her desk. "Then...may I have the pleasure of taking a seat beside you?" he asked.

"Let me answer that with a question of my own," Chinatsu replied, glaring at him. "Do you want your eyes gouged out?"

"E-err...I'll pass, on second thought," Naoki answered, backing away. Hikari and her puppets watched as he headed away from them towards the other end of the lecture hall.

*If he tries that shit on my girlfriend, Raizo thought to himself, I'm just gonna friggin' kill him.*

Approaching Mariko's table, Naoki leaned over once more. Without even looking him in the eye, Mariko pulled a dagger out from her uniform's pocket, bringing it before his neck in one swift motion. "Back off," she ordered coldly.

Naoki, sighing, nodded and stepped back. His expression was clearly frustrated but nervous at the same time. *Looks like Mariko managed to scare him a little, Raizo thought, chuckling to himself. Friggin' wimp...it's just a dagger...*

After a bit more wandering around, Naoki settled for a seat surrounded by other males. He seemed to finally have recognized that his little stunt didn't do him any good.

Satomi carefully watched him, her eyes occasionally darting towards him before jumping right back. She took a deep breath and sighed. *What am I gonna do?* she thought. *I don't even know how I feel about him anymore...I mean...I think I still like him but I also...like Raizo and I...I'm not sure. I don't even know how I'd react if he recognises me...or if he...oh God...*

Raizo watched her nervous fidgeting from the other side of the table. Shaking his head, he turned his attention back to the lesson. *Something's up with Satomi, he thought, that much is obvious. The question is WHAT is up with her. My instincts tell me she knows that guy but...I'll see. Now's not the time.*

As the bell rang, signaling the end of class, Satomi stood up immediately. Grabbing her bag, she systematically marched out of the lecture hall. Raizo bit his lip. *Shit, he thought.*

"H-hey! Did she just ditch us?" Hikari cried, picking up her bag. "C'mon, let's go!" she said, grabbing Raizo by the arm and dragging him out of the lecture hall.

Raizo increased his pace to a jog. *For once, I agree with Hikari, he thought. We should catch up to Satomi and get her talking...that is, if she's ready to talk to us about it.* He shook his head. *I don't know exactly who the hell that Naoki guy thinks he is, but if he's being a thorn in my friend's side, then I'll gladly remove him from the picture...assuming that's enough. And if Satomi needs my help in another way, then I'll just have to see what I can do, he added to himself. But I don't think I'm good for much...besides killing, that is.*