

Cote 18

Chapter 18 18: Bet

"Today is our official meeting. My name is Hashimoto Masayoshi. I hope we can get along from now on, Mitoma." Hashimoto Masayoshi introduced himself in a serious tone. Even though he looked like a frivolous pretty boy and spoke in a casual way, he didn't come off as unpleasant.

On the other side, Kaoru Mitoma heard an even simpler introduction.

"Kitou Hayato."

The other person gaze was fixed on him, but there was no visible reaction on their face.

"Well then, I look forward to working with you. If there's nothing else, I'll be leaving now." Kaoru Mitoma gave them a slight nod.

"Running off and leaving a girl behind—don't you think that's a bit rude, Mitoma-kun?"

Sakayanagi Arisu smiled faintly, her eyes full of teasing.

"No, I don't." Kaoru Mitoma replied flatly.

"So rude to girls. I thought Kamuro-san was just making things up when she told me about you." Sakayanagi Arisu sighed in mock disappointment.

Kaoru Mitoma turned to look at Kamuro Masumi, who crossed her arms and stubbornly looked away. That reaction made it obvious she'd told Sakayanagi Arisu about his earlier request. Just what kind of leverage does Sakayanagi Arisu have on you to make you spill something like that?

But Sakayanagi Arisu quickly dropped the subject and, smiling sweetly, asked, "By the way, what do you think of Katsuragi-kun?"

From a class perspective, Katsuragi Kohei was more than capable, and he had a good character. Otherwise, people wouldn't have gathered around him as soon as the school year started. The two factions that have formed so far—Katsuragi Kohei managed to gather his own group thanks to the way he usually acts, even though he probably never intended to lead the whole class at first.

But now, he has no choice but to think about leadership. It's simple: if Sakayanagi Arisu had shown her abilities from the very beginning, Katsuragi Kohei probably wouldn't have had any thoughts of competing for control. But Sakayanagi Arisu deliberately waited a week before making a big show of her presence, which means she did it on purpose.

Katsuragi Kohei must have sensed something was off by now, and he's deeply puzzled by Sakayanagi Arisu. As for why Sakayanagi Arisu did this, even Kaoru Mitoma can't answer. Judging by her attitude, she doesn't seem to care much about the class, so maybe it's something personal. If it's personal, then it probably just comes down to different interests.

Thinking back to what Sakayanagi Arisu did at the time, and how she paid attention to him, could it be that she was just bored?

"Katsuragi is smart, has a great memory, does well in his studies, and treats people well. He's calm and careful, has his own opinions, and is good to his classmates. Whenever there's a dispute, he's always the first to step in and stop it. I really can't see any flaws in him."

That's not just empty talk—this is the conclusion Kaoru Mitoma came to after quietly observing him for a few days. Without a class committee or a natural leader, most of the time it was Kohei Katsuragi who took the initiative to step up—whether it was settling arguments between classmates or helping someone with their troubles.

All in all, he was someone you could count on. If Arisu Sakayanagi hadn't intervened, the leader of Class A would basically be Kohei Katsuragi.

"His reputation really is impressive, but my opinion's a little different from yours," Arisu Sakayanagi mused after a moment.

"He's excellent, but he's not cut out to survive in this school. If left unchecked, he'll end up leading Class A to lose."

"That's why you decided to step up?" Kaoru Mitoma asked.

"I have a lot of things I'm not good at—like sports, for example. There's no way I can compete with anyone in that area. So I need strength outside of myself to accomplish more." Arisu Sakayanagi didn't seem the least bit self-conscious about her physical condition. Taking her cane away probably wouldn't bother her.

"If that's the case, I hope you can pick up the pace a little."

"Heh, is it because you don't want to see the class fighting among itself, Mitoma-kun?"

"No, what I mean is, if you don't hurry up, I'm going to step in." As soon as he finished speaking, the atmosphere grew heavy and silent. Everyone reacted differently. Hayato Kito expression barely changed.

Kamuro Masumi looked at him like, 'Are you seriously still saying that at this point?'

Hashimoto Masayoshi glanced at Sakayanagi Arisu, who still wore that faint, unreadable smile.

"Heh, looks like it's my loss. I didn't get to see you get serious, Mitoma-kun." Sakayanagi Arisu sounded genuinely regretful, but her eyes were full of danger, like she'd just decided to make him her rival from now on.

"Wanna play a game?" Kaoru Mitoma suddenly asked.

"Go ahead," Sakayanagi Arisu replied seriously.

"As students of Class A, we're about to be surrounded and targeted by the other three classes. If we slip up even a little, our class could fall straight to the bottom." Kaoru Mitoma paused. "Only the best leader can keep that from happening. I don't think you're up to it."

"Heh, you're really underestimating me. I can't just take that as a joke, you know?"

The smile on Sakayanagi Arisu face grew even more dangerous.

"Mitoma, do you think Katsuragi a better choice?" Hashimoto Masayoshi cut in.

"My opinion is the same as Sakayanagi."

Kaoru Mitoma shook his head.

"You don't mean yourself, do you?"

Connecting it to what he had just said, Kamuro Masumi found the idea truly shocking. Having two leaders in Class A was already a big deal—was a third one about to appear?

"Before the end of first year, I'll take control of the entire class, and I'll make sure Class A stands at the very top."

Kaoru Mitoma ignored Kamuro Masumi words, as if he was simply stating a fact.

"Until then, Sakayanagi, you can try to stop me. You'd better hurry, or I'll be really disappointed in you."

As soon as he finished speaking, the atmosphere instantly froze. Kaoru Mitoma words once again caught everyone off guard. Under his gaze, Sakayanagi Arisu was silent for a moment, then the corners of her mouth slowly curled up.

The next second, she started laughing in a strange, broken way, her whole body trembling uncontrollably, her eyes shining.

"Hehehehe... I knew I wasn't wrong about you... This is great... I haven't felt this way in so long, never been this... excited... "

Masumi Kamuro stared in shock.

'You actually broke Sakayanagi that fast?'

No, rather than calling it that, he preferred to think of it as prescribing the right medicine—hitting Arisu Sakayanagi right where she was most sensitive.

"Heh, what if I stop you?" Arisu Sakayanagi quickly regained her composure, though a smile still lingered on her face.

"If you can do it, I'll be your dog and call you master every day,"

Kaoru Mitoma said shamelessly.

"But if you can't, you have to put on cat ears and a maid outfit, call me master every day, and do whatever I say."

Yeah, no matter who won, he was going to get something he wanted. In a way, Kaoru Mitoma couldn't lose.

"That's disgusting,"

Masumi Kamuro was the first to react.

"So you're actually a lolicon?"

Even Masayoshi Hashimoto looked weirded out. He'd never heard anyone make such a blatant demand before. But Arisu Sakayanagi just smiled a little.

"It's fine. Mitoma-kun is a teenage boy, I get that you have Hentai thoughts about girls. But only if you win."

At this moment, the girl met Kaoru Mitoma gaze bravely, without a hint of fear.

"Heh, I accept your invitation. Now, do your best, and don't let me down."

She put a little extra emphasis at the end of her sentence—this girl seemed to hold grudges.

Right now, Sakayanagi Arisu didn't think she could lose at all. To her, this was nothing more than an amusing game.