

## XXVII

Kasumi, still pretending to be asleep, watched with a single, barely open eye as her owner gently stroked her boyfriend's chest. She bit her lip gently in jealousy.

"How many times have you done it with her?" Mariko asked, poking Raizo on the cheek. "Two times? Three? Four? I wonder," she muttered. "Please stay asleep," she whispered. "If you don't, you won't get to enjoy a bit of playtime with me..."

Kasumi stirred, causing Mariko to jump. "Oh, I thought I woke her for a second there," she mumbled. "Well, in any case—"

"M-miss Nakano?" Raizo's voice asked. Mariko turned to face him, her cheeks turning red as a tomato. "U-uhh...ohh...g-good day," she replied nervously.

"May I ask why you're straddling me?" Raizo inquired, rubbing his eyes and blinking a few times.

"Th-this is...umm...listen, I can explain...I just...uhh...well," Mariko stammered, "I wanted to take your temperature, you see, and Kasumi was sleeping so peacefully, so I didn't wanna disturb her...so I just came over and went for it, but then you...err...yeah..."

"R-right," Raizo mumbled. "Well, you're the doctor," he chuckled. "Did you get your results or do you wanna go grab a thermometer before you try again?"

"Y-yeah!" Mariko replied. "W-wait, I mean...uhh...no, I have one on me, but like...y'know...ummm...damnit, I just...please don't tell Kasumi about this, okay? I don't want her to get the wrong idea..."

"About what?" Raizo asked. "You're here to check my temperature, are you not?" he inquired, masking his sarcasm.

"Y-yeah," Mariko nodded. *I can't tell if he's playing along or if he's kidding!* she thought. *I really hope he's not mad...oh God.* She cleared her throat. "R-really though, please don't tell Kasumi..."

"I don't think I need to," Raizo chuckled.

"Yeah, you don't—say what now?" Mariko asked.

"Boo, surprise," Kasumi said in a monotone voice, sitting up.

"Shi—umm...listen, Kasumi, please, you gotta hear me out!" Mariko cried.

"Mistress should...not steal hubby from me," Kasumi pouted. "I don't...think I'm ready to...share with two others yet..."

"Yeah, fair enough," Mariko laughed. "Wait, two others?"

"Morning!" Satomi cried, popping out from beneath the sheets. Mariko leapt back in shock. "H-holy crap, cover your tits! And...what the hell did you eat to get 'em *that* big?" she asked.

"Why is it that the thing you're concerned about is my bust size and not what I'm even doing here?" Satomi asked in response.

"Huh. Good point. What're you even doing here?" Mariko demanded.

"Shit," Satomi mumbled. "Walked right into that one..."

"Mistress is...being a hypocrite," Kasumi commented.

"I—damn, you're right," Mariko mumbled.

"So...foursome time?" Satomi suggested. Raizo cut her off with a sharp chop to the forehead. "What the hell do you think I am, a sex machine?" he snapped.

"Well, I mean...you *do* go pretty nuts when we're going at it," Satomi mumbled, scratching her cheek in embarrassment.

"And hubby...does certainly have the...bodily features for it," Kasumi agreed.

"You two...goddamn," Raizo mumbled. Turning back to Mariko, he sighed. "So exactly what's going on? What did you come here at this hour? And why in such...*revealing* clothing?"

Mariko gulped. "W-well...I just thought...thought that..."

She slapped herself gently.

"I figured that the only way Hikari was getting you to stay with her was through *some* sort of enticing, y'know? And since you didn't seem to have any sort of romantic relationship with Satomi at the time, I figured that since Kasumi's your girlfriend now, if I just gave you a little extra *incentive*, you'd leave her, get it?" Mariko explained. "I...I guess I also felt a little jealous that my own puppet outdid me in terms of sex appeal, but that's beyond the point, I swear!"

"Oh, just you wait," Satomi laughed. "Raizo's just gonna pull a cool line, and all of a sudden you'll be putty in his hands. Three ladies in one night? Not bad, partner!"

"For your information," Raizo said, "I'm not pulling any 'cool lines' or anything. I was completely serious when I said I'd protect both of you, and I still intend to do so. However," he said, ruffling Mariko's hair, "you're a wonderful girl who any man would be lucky to have. You don't need to be jealous, you just haven't found the right person yet...or maybe just not the right time. Things like that take time, right?" he smiled.

Mariko stood speechless.

"C'mon, there's no need to rush. We'll all support you, y'know?" Raizo chuckled. "Just wait until you meet the perfect man, alright Mariko?"

Mariko's finger twitched as he said her name. She felt her own heart pounding like mad.

"And *there's* the lady-killing line," Satomi laughed. "My darling is a natural-born playboy!"

"Hey, that doesn't sound like a compliment," Raizo said.

"Oh yeah?" Satomi giggled. "Then what was with you suddenly switching to her first name?"

"What?" Raizo asked. "Wait, I—oh, crap. Uhh...damn..." he sighed. *This is what I get for calling EVERYONE by their first names in my thoughts*, he told himself. *Note to self: be more careful about letting your real thoughts slip out in the future...especially around Hikari, assuming I still wanna eat dinner, that is.*

Turning back to Mariko to apologize, Raizo found her spacing out.

"U-uhh...miss Nakano?" he called softly.

"C-call me by name again, please," Mariko mumbled, her face red. "Just one more time, pretty please?"

Kasumi covered her mouth to hide her giggles. Satomi sighed. "See? What did I tell you? Ladykiller, right here!" she said.

Raizo gulped. "M-Mariko?" he called gently.

Mariko's body stiffened for a moment, She blinked a few times. "Y-yeah, I'm good for now," she mumbled. "L-listen, please forget about this whole mess, laright? Oh, and you can just call me by name. The formality's seriously not something I'm used to," she joked.

"Your excuses are...futile," Kasumi said.

"D-don't pay any attention to that!" Mariko cried.

Raizo chuckled. "Alright then...Mariko."