

XLVIII

Raizo stretched as he pulled out his phone and pulled up his contact list. He chuckled to himself. The number of contacts had doubled since the morning; he had four, but now he had eight. Whistling a merry toon, he dialed Ayane's number and placed the phone to his ear as he continued to walk. Almost immediately, she picked up on the other end. "H-hello?" her voice said.

"Ayane, I'll cut to the chase. I forgot to ask earlier, but what room are you in?" Raizo inquired casually.

"Well, that was straightforward, my love," Ayane replied with a giggle, "but I'm so glad you asked! I'm in room 301, alright? I'll be waiting, my dearest!"

"Just give me a minute," Raizo said. "I'll be there soon, so I'll hang up for now."

"N-no, wait! You can...still talk with me on the phone until we can see each other in person! I don't mind...I like hearing your voice," Ayane said softly.

Well, THAT's...not creepy at all, Raizo thought with a hint of sarcasm. "Err...I think I'll just hang up for now. I need to save the power on my phone in case of emergencies, and I'll literally be there in about a minute, okay?"

"Oh, fine," Ayane replied in disappointment. "Then I'll make some tea for you in the meantime!"

"Sounds good," Raizo said, pulling his phone away from his ear. Waiting a moment in case she had anything to add, he confirmed that the brief conversation was over and ended the call. Checking his battery, he sighed. *18%, eh? Guess that wasn't all too much of a lie after all...*

About a minute later, as he promised, Raizo had found his way to the room labelled '#301' in the girl's dorms. *Oh boy*, he thought, raising a hand to knock on the door. However, before his hand could reach it, the door swung open dramatically and Ayane stepped out, giving him a tight hug. "Oh, I thought you'd *never* get here," she cooed. "Come in, come in. The tea's ready." Taking his hand with a cheery expression upon her face, Ayane lead him into her dorm room, decorated with various posters and finely designed furniture. Vases of flowers surrounded the room, giving each little section of the area a distinct scent.

Pulling Raizo gently along through the room, Ayane finally settled down as they reached a large sofa with a dark purple velvet backrest and seat, and neatly painted golden legs and rims. Taking a seat, she patted the spot next to her, signaling for the object of her affections to be seated beside her.

As he slowly took a seat, Raizo's eyes instinctively scanned over his surroundings. He made note of every single potential exit to the room, from the door to each and every window, all locked tightly. He also noticed the light sources in the area ranging from the chandelier above the dining table to the scented candles by his side. *What a way to end off my first month at Dosia, huh?* he thought to himself. *It's been nice...though I didn't expect to meet so many people nad get into so many...interesting relationships...ah, good times.*

He felt his jaw curving up into a goofy smile. *Wait, what's going on, anyways?* he wondered. *There shouldn't be a reason for me to feel so drowsy...is there some kinda drug in those candles?* Glancing over to his side, he narrowed his eyes, allowing his animal instincts to start taking over. Almost immediately, a faint trace of some sort of smoke filled the air around him. *I should stop this*, he told himself, forcing his own human instinct to regain control. *Whatever that drug is, it's affecting my head. If I let my animalistic side take over, then whatever the drug is meant to do will only come on faster...and stronger.*

Glancing over to the opposite side, he noticed Ayane staring intently at him, slowly pouring a cup of tea. Her smile was blindingly radiant, almost to the extent where Raizo felt he needed to cover his own eyes. As she finished pouring their tea, she set the teapot down on the table and leaned a bit closer to him. "So...how do you feel, dearest?" she inquired.

"Uhh...full disclosure, I feel like I'm about throw those drugged candles out the window," Raizo answered casually, shrugging. "I dunno, have you noticed that though? It's some sorta...an anesthetic, perhaps? I'm not a doctor, so I wouldn't really know."

"W-whatever could you be talking about?" Ayane asked, giggling. "Do you...dislike the scent of the candles, perhaps? If so, just say the word and I'll put them away for you."

"I'd appreciate it," Raizo replied. "It's piercing the smell of those wonderful flowers you've got."

"As you wish," Ayane said calmly, walking over and taking the candles, putting them out and moving them away to another room. Raizo glanced around quickly, waving his hand a little to disperse some of the candles' scent. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out the vial of Satomi's lavender-scented perfume. Popping the vial open, he poured a drop onto his finger and smeared the perfume right under his nose, allowing the scent to directly flow into his nose. *I figured she'd try SOMETHING but this was just a precaution...I didn't imagine she'd ACTUALLY try drugging me with a scent*, he thought. *Oh well, I suppose I have the over-suspicious part of my psyche to thank for this one...*

Placing the cap back on, Raizo slipped the vial of life-saving, lavender-scented liquid back into his pocket as Ayane returned to the room and once again sat down side him. "So...do you feel tired?" she asked. "Could I perhaps offer you a massage while we catch up a little?"

"There's no need for that," Raizo answered. "However, I *would* love to catch up a bit on our past, so I suppose I'll take you up on that offer."

"S-sounds fine to me," Ayane replied, clearing her throat. "So...tell me what happened after you...*disappeared*."

"Well, skipping any pointless or gruesome details, I found myself up for *auction* of all things—it was absolutely ridiculous—and was purchased by a rather tall blonde lady with a sumptuous-looking dress. As it turns out, that woman was miss

Oshiro, my young miss' mother. They tell me I died as a twelve-year-old. And, well, it's been five years since then," Raizo explained. "I spent the earlier days of my new life trying to make the two daughters of the house happy."

"And you got attached to your current owner?" Ayane asked.

"Err...quite the opposite. A bit over sixteen months later, they announced that they'd be buying a *second* puppet," Raizo said. "I'd be given to one of the girls and the other one would get the new puppet. However, since I spent all my money on a new weapon instead of something 'fancy' like clothing or whatever, they branded me a bit more of a hooligan, I suppose. That said, they gave me to Hikari Oshiro and bought the other daughter, Lady Elizabeth, a new puppet. Her name is Koharu."

"I see," Ayane mumbled. "So...you just bought a weapon? I don't see why they'd judge you for it."

"During the year prior to Koharu's arrival, they expected me to be both a playmate and a bodyguard for the girls. They handed me an iron katana and told me to make do. How could I? The thing was a joke! The weight was completely off and it'd break in seconds in a real fight," Raizo complained. "So, I spent my own money to obtain a *real* blade...and got stuck with my young miss in exchange. I bet it would've been worse if I got *rid* of the Katana though. I still have it."

"Hmm...is that so?" Ayane muttered. "That's quite...*unfortunate*. Say, dearest," she said, "would you like to lie down? You're starting to look a little sick..."

"I should be fine," Raizo answered. *So the drug WAS an anesthetic, hmm?* he thought. *I mean, of course. Why else would she constantly be wondering if I was TIRED and such? Makes sense...I suppose this whole 'catching up' thing is also to stall for time. Alright then...I'll play your damn game...*