

"Alright, so...what's up?" Raizo asked. "Did I kill a guy in my sleep or something?"

"I'd be very concerned if that was the case," Juri answered, "but no. It's much more simple than that actually. Let's get straight to the point. Starting today, you officially work for the school's security force as a reserve. Your equipment and uniform will be delivered to your current residence. As for your pay, would you like us to send it to the same account as your monthly allowance or would you prefer to keep them separate?"

"I'd like to separate them," Raizo said.

"That's fine. I just need you to input a bit of information and we'll be transferring funds straight to your account," Juri replied, taking a tablet out of a bag being held by the principal. Raizo, taking it, quickly entered the information they required, such as the client card number. "You'll receive an email from your bank whenever you're paid. It's quite a sum, after all," the principal added. "Oh, and I know your owner has two rooms, so which would you like us to deliver your uniform to?"

"Err...room 334, please," Raizo replied.

"Not a problem," Juri said. "Well, that's it. We already have your cell phone number from when you registered, so you'll receive a text or something from the administration whenever you're called into action. Don't worry, it's not too common."

"Now, head back to class!" the principal cooed. "Say, could you get Chinatsu into a goth loli outfit for me—"

Before she could quite finish her sentence, principal Ueno's puppet grabbed her and dragged her away down the hall, waving to Raizo as she left.

"Well...that was interesting," Raizo muttered to himself as he walked back into the lecture hall, hearing the bell ring as he shut the door to the room.

"Alright, ya stupid kids! We're starting actual combat training today, so get your asses off your seats and get moving! We're heading to one of the gymnasiums, so keep up!" Chinatsu bellowed as she turned and walked towards the door of the lecture hall.

"I can't believe it...right after lunch?" Hikari complained.

"Well, beats sitting here for both the morning *and* the afternoon," Satomi laughed. "I'm usually so bored I could all asleep at any minute."

"You were almost finished with high school when you died, so it makes sense," Raizo sighed. "At the end of the day, this is still second year material being taught to a third year. Besides all the puppet-related lessons, you should already know all of this."

"Well...yeah," Satomi said. "What about you though? You were a village boy, right? Did you even go to school?"

"Hell no," Raizo shrugged. "I learn fast though, so I've been keeping up pretty easily. When I first became a puppet, I just learned about swords. Or, well, not really. I learned about weapons in general, but I've always had a preference for blades. Swords, knives, you get the idea."

"Wow. Scary kid," Satomi snickered.

"I know, right?" Raizo agreed.

"Come on!" Hikari called to them from the door of the lecture hall, having left their side at some point. "If we're gonna do this, we gotta show everyone how awesome we are!"

"And by that, she means she wants us to kick ass in her stead," Raizo muttered. "Let's go. I can't wait to lay waste to the battlefield!"

"Uhh...edgy much?" Satomi laughed.

"How's this even fair?" Hikari protested.

"Indeed, this isn't fair at all!" Elizabeth agreed. "Why are we stuck together for this?"

"You're sisters. Get fuckin' bonding," Chinatsu answered. "Alright, kids. We're gonna have a quick exemplar match. The puppets are gonna sit this one out. Almost all puppets are programmed with *some* combat abilities. It's built in. Humans, however, are different. We have to train to gain ANY real combat skills. So, we're gonna have the students with the most victories in the class to demonstrate combat techniques in a two-on-two sparring match. Everyone's going to be using sheathed blades and much lighter training pellets instead of bullets. This way, injuries probably won't even break the skin."

She sighed. "You four better do me proud or I swear to God...alright. In the red corner, we have the Oshiro sisters. In blue corner, we have Mariko Nakano and Ayane Tanaka—oh wait a minute, since when did *you* rack up so many wins?"

"I'm sitting at 26 victories at the moment," Ayane answered. "I do a few matches each day, actually."

"Wow...so we're tied?" Mariko cried in surprise.

"Yes, just below my 27 wins," Elizabeth nodded.

"Damnit, so am I the lowest one here?" Hikari complained again. "DAMNIT RAIZO! Why're you always sick or injured or something? And satomi, could you *try* to be available more often? Jeez! It's like you're unreachable!"

"How about you realize we're the reason you have any wins at all?" Raizo muttered under his breath, his expression deceptively calm.

"Shut up and get ready," Chinatsu snapped. "On a count of three, we begin."

"One—" Marie began.

"THREE!" Chinatsu cried. "Fuck the two!"

"Whatever," Hikari rolled her eyes.

Ayane drew her lance, making a dash forth as Mariko briskly strung her bow and fired one of her blunt training arrows straight at Hikari, who was virtually dozing

off. Elizabeth drew her sabre and pulled her gun from its resting place inside of its holster at her waist, firing a shot to knock the arrow away as she narrowly parried Ayane's attack. "Could you do something?" she called to her sister.

"Fine, fine," Hikari said, drawing forth an elegantly crafted rapier, with tiny carvings lining the blade.

"Y'know," Satomi mumbled from the sidelines, "I think that's the first time I've seen her hold a weapon."

"That's because it's the first time she's used it since enrolling at Dosia," Raizo said.

"Say what?" Satomi laughed. "No way!"

"DO SOMETHING!" Elizabeth cried as she leapt back and forth, dodging arrows and parrying melee strikes. "Alright, alright," Hikari groaned, turning to Ayane. Taking a defensive stance, she took a deep breath. "Alright, come at me," she taunted.

"Your funeral," Ayane shrugged, lunging. Almost effortlessly, she batted Hikari's blade aside and knocked her across the gymnasium.

"Damnit!" Elizabeth cursed under her breath, only to take a blunt arrow to the stomach. Caught between her two opponents, she desperately tried to fight them off. However, her gun had run out of ammunition and needed to be reloaded, and Ayane was continuously putting pressure on her, making it impossible for her to stop and reload.

As she leapt around, trying to stay in the fight, Raizo sighed. "Wait for the volley of arrows," he muttered. "That'll be the end of her."

As he finished his sentence, Mariko loaded half a dozen arrows into a single shot, firing a wild volley all in one go. Elizabeth, managing to parry one and dodge three more, was struck by two before being rammed into the ground by Ayane. "Curses," she muttered.

"Hope I didn't hit ya too hard, city girl!" Ayane laughed, reaching a hand out and helping her classmate up. "Ya had a good run."

"Look on the bright side," Mariko agreed, walking over, "you lasted more than one hit." Turning to Hikari, the group noticed her barely conscious, rubbing her head. "W-what happened?" she asked. "Did we win?"

"Did we—for the love of God!" Elizabeth complained.

"Damnit, you kids...that was so fucking anticlimactic!" Chinatsu complained. "I was expecting a good show, but here I am, utterly disappointed." She shook her head. "Well, that was a bad example, but you can all see that being incapable of fighting like miss Hikari Oshiro over there can be a little bit of an issue. Try and do better than she did. It's not a high bar."

"HEY!" Hikari complained.

"Shut up!" Chinatsu snapped. "Now, as for puppets, they all have some combat capabilities, but you've probably all watched your puppets fight before. Instead, we'll try something fun." Reaching back she grabbed a massive halberd,

standing a good half a foot taller than her. "Puppets are powerful, but you can still stand up to 'em and hold your ground, to say the least. Usually. So uhh...who's first?" she asked, curving her fingers and motioning for any challengers to come forth.

Not a single puppet stepped forth.

"What, *nobody*?" Chinatsu laughed. "Am I that scary?"

"Hardly," Raizo answered. "With all due respect, Ms. Saitou, I'm pretty sure nobody knows how to respond, that's all."

"Oh? Come on, it's not that big a deal," Chinatsu shrugged. "What do you say we have a little surprise exam?" she suggested. "I've been meaning to conduct a few tests with you anyways, so how about it? You and me, right here, right now."

"I'll take you on, if you're sure," Raizo said.

"Oh? Getting cocky, are we?" Chinatsu laughed.

"I'd...try avoiding that word from now on, but sure, I guess you could say that," Raizo sighed.

"Well, let's go, kid," Chinatsu said.

"You're on," Raizo answered, stepping forth. Placing his left thumb gently against the guard of his sword, he took an attacking stance. "Whenever you're ready."

"Listen, kid. Don't go getting too arrogant," Chinatsu said. "The fact that you're powerful doesn't mean you're invincible. Same goes for me, of course, but still. We've never fought properly before, so we'll have to see if you live up to your notorious little reputation, 'Blood Prince.' Am I right?"

"Damn right," Raizo said, "but we've taken too long already. Enough talk. We shall speak with our weapons."

"Bring it!" Chinatsu cried.