

XIX

Hikari chased after Satomi in a full sprint. "W-wait, get back here!" she ordered. Satomi, hearing her owner's voice, stopped and turned around to face her friends. She looked down, her face red.

Raizo, walking over briskly, wore a serious expression on his face. Reaching forward, he grabbed Satomi and held her by her shoulders. She jumped a little at their contact, and he looked her in the eyes. "What's going on with you?" he asked bluntly. "Listen, I'm gonna give it to you straight. I don't wanna pry or anything, but if you're willing to tell me then answer me this: from where do you know Naoki Goda?"

Hikari, standing beside him, nodded vigorously. "Y-yeah! *Clearly* you know him from somewhere, right? I figured! I knew all along!" she proclaimed.

Learn to lie one of these days, okay? Raizo thought, a little smirk appearing on his face. *Don't worry, just...hang in there, stupid.* Turning back to Satomi and returning his expression to that of a serious one, he stared right into her eyes, as if trying to look through them into her mind. "Either answer or push me away. It's your choice," he declared flatly.

Satomi stood still for a moment. Tears began to form in the corners of her eyes and her lips began to quiver.

"Wha—oh, look at what you've done, you numbskull!" Hikari shouted. "You went and made her cry!"

Satomi closed her eyes, allowing her tears to flow freely. She threw her arms around Raizo, crying into his chest. With a sigh, he gently stroked the back of her head, caressing her slowly. "There, there," he whispered. "I'm here to listen, but you've gotta be willing to tell me first," he said calmly, his apathetic voice replaced by a tender and caring tone. Satomi's head twitched in a nodding motion as she held him tighter. Raizo continued to comfort her.

Hikari sighed. "Damn it...this guy has *no* tact at all," she mumbled to herself. *Wait, why should he have tact? He's mine! He doesn't need to be THAT careful because he doesn't need to attract other girls!* she told herself. Nodding firmly, she turned back to her puppets with a satisfied smile on her face. "Alright, shall we head back to the dorms together?" she suggested.

"Oh, I'd love to, miss," a voice said from behind her.

Hikari jumped at the sound, turning around immediately and clumsily staggering away from its source. Raizo caught her by the arm as she tripped and began to fall, straightening her posture. Hikari, having recovered, looked to see Naoki standing where she just was, a casual smile on his face.

Hikari leaned over to Raizo, who still held Satomi in his arms. "Hey, is it just me or do you *also* wanna punch that asshole in his jaw?" she whispered.

"Hmm...you and me both, I'd say," Raizo answered.

"Well? Shall we get going then?" Naoki asked, extending his hand towards Hikari.

"Here's my reverse ask," Hikari replied, annoyed. "Why the *hell* would I EVER go anywhere with a creep like *you*?"

"Oh? Was that invitation not for me?" he inquired, seemingly genuinely surprised. "I thought we could have a little *fun* later in the day—"

"Piss off," Raizo ordered, his voice as frigid as ice. "If you know what's good for you, then you should move on. If not, I'd be glad to cut a groove into your brain to help you remember," he said, still holding on to Satomi. Moving one hand away from her, he placed his thumb against the guard of his sword, ready to unsheath it at any given moment.

"Nice one," Hikari laughed.

"Thanks. I've been saving it," Raizo joked, a smirk on his face.

"I'd appreciate it if you refrained from cutting a hole in my master's head," a voice called. Opposite to Naoki, a woman approached. Hikari bit her lip. "Damn, it's his puppet," she mumbled quietly.

"Good timing, Noa," Naoki laughed.

"Yeah? Let's see her fucking stop me then," Raizo snapped at her, annoyed.

Noa bit her lip gently. "Fine then," she said, winding up a punch.

Too easy, Raizo thought.

Right before she swung her fist, she winked at Raizo. His eye twitched. *What the hell was that?* he thought. *Friggin' chills up my spine...*

Effortlessly, he moved his head and dodged her slow swing and retaliated with a swift kick to her gut, causing her to double over. "That's enough," he said. "Be glad I didn't decide to kill you right here."

"Y-you...are you not interested in women or something?" Noa cried, straightening her back.

"I assure you that I'm heterosexual if that's what you're asking," Raizo replied. *I mean, for God's sake, I have a girlfriend!* he added to himself. "It's just that I'm not into older women. Especially when you can *tell* they're older."

"Y-you—" Noa began.

"N-now, now," Naoki interrupted. "Don't go picking *dangerous* fights," he said.

At that, Satomi suddenly stiffened her body. *He always used to say stuff like that...he always told me not to do dangerous things...to be careful...that people would miss me...I...I...*

Pulling away from Raizo, she turned to look Naoki in the eye.

"W-wow, Satomi?" he cried. "So it was you! Err...your name *is* Satomi, right? I hope I'm not mistaking you for someone else. I used to know this one girl, and she was so damn pretty! Heard she passed away in an accident though. And I told her to be careful about that sorta thing too," he mumbled nostalgically.

Satomi couldn't respond. She only watched in silence as Naoki rambled on. Hikari and Raizo grew silent as they watched him, stunned. Noa raised an eyebrow curiously.

"...but anyways, what I'm trying to say is..." Naoki concluded.

"Will you go out with me?" Satomi asked just as Naoki said the same words. Both fell silent for a moment and looked at each other. "W-well, isn't that nice?" Naoki said. "I suppose we have each other's answers then."

Hikari's jaw virtually hit the ground. "Holy crap!" she cried. *Well, at least she won't be trying to take my Raizo away, she thought, but that jerk better not try to take my puppet!*

What...the actual fuck was that? Raizo thought. She's...hmm...there's something wrong here. Something tells me she's not thinking straight...we'll see though. Note to self: keep an eye on this Naoki kid...or maybe I'm jealous? No, not exactly, I have a girlfriend already. He sighed. I probably just don't trust this asshole yet...and Satomi is still my friend, so I should be careful...if I catch him doing anything shady, I'll deal with it accordingly. And if not...I'll just wish for her happiness, and maybe even for my own...

Noa shrugged. "Well then," she mumbled. "That's...huh..."

Satomi smiled. *I finally...said it! I confessed!* she thought. *But I...was that the right move? Should I have just moved on? And Raizo...no, I'm sure he's happier with that Kasumi girl anyways...maybe this is for the best...maybe this is what was meant to happen...to someone like me. To a stupid girl that nobody else could ever love...even if it's with this new, more selfish Naoki...maybe I'll be loved for who I am...finally...*