

### XLIII

Raizo glided around the lecture hall, his blade moving as if it was attracted by some mysterious force to the necks of his foes. One by one, he cut them down, beheading the humans and shattering the cores of their puppets as he went along, all while wearing a bright smile on his face. The militants desperately tried to repel his onslaught, but their attacks were easily parried by the dozens of shadows—the translucent afterimage-like beings—bursting forth from his being.

His eyes briskly scanning his surroundings, Raizo heard his own voice ringing in his own mind as if it was a timer, virtually singing the kill counts. *Thirty-two people killed. Fifty-seven cores crushed. Eleven more to kill. Go. Go. Now. Kill. Go. Do it. Kill them. Go. Kill them all. FUCKING DO IT. GO*, the voice ordered.

*Alright*, he replied silently to the voice in his mind. *Gotcha*.

Turning directly to his right, he slashed the throats of two of the militants in a single swing. Almost instinctively, he twirled his sword around and thrust it backwards, and the sound of a puppet's core cracking from the impact filled the air. *Eight more*, the voice in his head reminded him.

Running across the room, more clones burst forth for a fraction of a second, killing six more. *Last two*, the voice whispered reassuringly. *Then she'll be alright...she'll be safe*.

*Will she?* he asked himself. *I wasn't able to protect HER before, so what makes her any different?*

Thrusting his hand into the torso of one of the militants, he tore the core out from within and crushed it in his bare hands.

*SHE was hurt because you were too weak. But now you're strong*, the voice in Raizo's head told him. *SHE protected you by sacrificing herself, and you took revenge for HER. Now's your chance to prove that you can protect someone on your own*.

*Yeah*, Raizo thought.

The last militant raised his gun in terror, pulling the trigger. Raizo raised his sword ever so slightly, deflecting the shot. In a flash, he was by the man's side. Slamming his blade into the wall, he grabbed the man by the head. Pressing his other hand onto the trembling man's shoulder, he smirked. "Hey," he muttered, "do you have any loved ones? Anyone you wanna...go home to?"

The man looked up at him in confusion.

"No? Oh, that's too bad," Raizo said sarcastically. Finishing his sentence, he tightened his grip on the man's head and shoulder. With a loud tearing sound, he ripped his victim's head straight off his torso. "That's too bad for you," he mumbled, "because I do."

*She's safe now, perhaps*, the voice in his head told him. *You may not have saved HER—your mother—but you saved...you saved her...Chinatsu Saitou. That's enough for you, right? For now, at least? That makes two*.

*Two? Two people saved?* Raizo asked the voice inaudibly. *What makes you think that's enough? Chinatsu and Satomi...yeah, that's two. But what about all the others who may be in danger because of me? I have to save everyone, even if I have to coat myself in blood to do it...because it'll make me strong, right? And then...then I'll be able to achieve my goal...I'll be strong enough to do so. I know it.*

Sure, the voice answered. *But you're not done saving this one yet, now are you?*

"Chinatsu, are you alright?" Marie asked.

"Yeah, I'm just bleeding out, no big deal," her owner replied apathetically.

"You're...oh, cut the crap," Marie sighed.

"Oh *shit*," Chinatsu laughed weakly, "I got her mad!"

Kasumi tilted her head in confusion. Pulling out her phone, she quickly confirmed that Mariko had answered her text. Acknowledging that her owner knew of their current situation, she sighed.

"Just get the bullets out of my fucking arm!" Chinatsu cried.

"Alright, alright!" Marie answered.

"I see you've committed yourself to being a little more refined, hmm?" Elizabeth inquired, taking a sip of her tea. Opposite to her, Hikari sat nervously, trying to ignore Koharu and Satomi, who were staring intently at the back of her head. "Y-yeah," she mumbled.

As she moved to reach for her own cup, Hikari heard a knocking at the door. Koharu paced over to it, opening it slowly, only for Mariko to burst in. "What the HELL are you two doing?" she cried. "An assault force of a hundred people broke onto school grounds and into the lecture halls, and we didn't even hear about it!"

"W-woah, chill," Hikari sighed. "What's the big deal? Security will get them."

"Security hasn't *reacted* despite the fact that I've told them to move their asses!" Mariko complained. "And besides, I can't wait for them to get their crap together! Kasumi's still in there!"

"So?" Hikari shrugged.

"Oh, did I mention that Raizo's fighting them ON HIS OWN?" Mariko shouted.

"THE FUCK?" Satomi screamed.

"HOLY CRAP!" Hikari yelled.

"WHAT?" Elizabeth cried, leaping to her feet. "That bullsh—err...I mean...ugh, let's go already!"

Koharu shuddered. *Hmm...to make the mistress almost curse...tis' what they call some 'serious shit,'* she thought.

"The bleeding is stopping," Marie sighed with relief.

"Nice," Chinatsu answered. "Too bad removing those bullets hurt like a motherfucker."

"Well, I'm sorry that I didn't have any drugs on me to numb your pain," Marie replied sarcastically. "Would a goth loli outfit help you feel better?"

"Want me to fucking kill you?" Chinatsu asked in response.

"Oh, I'll do the killing, thanks," a voice interrupted. The group turned to see Raizo stumbling over. Though unscathed, his uniform was dyed a deep shade of red. A trail of blood followed behind him, the thick liquid dripping from the edge of his sword.

"Hubby!" Kasumi called.

"Get away from *her*," Raizo ordered coldly.

The group looked at him in confusion.

"Hubby?" Kasumi called, walking slowly over to him. Reaching a hand out towards him, she saw his hand twitch. In a flash, he held his blade to her neck. "I said get away from *her*," he repeated.

"B-but hubby," Kasumi mumbled, backing away slowly.

"Move!" Raizo demanded, the crazed bloodlust still in his eyes as he slashed at her. Kasumi leapt out of the way, narrowly dodging every subsequent slash as he continued to press forwards. "Hubby...I won't...fight you," Kasumi said desperately.

"Too bad then," Raizo replied, thrusting his sword forth. Kasumi, dodging it, was met by a clone's sword. *Crap!* she thought as she realized her mistake. Moving a hand to protect herself, she screamed in pain as the blade slashed through the flash on her arm. Falling to her knees helplessly, she looked up at the man she loved. "Hubby...please..." she whispered.

"I told you to get away from *her*," Raizo repeated again, raising his sword to shoulder level, preparing to deliver a horizontal slash across her neck.

"Hubby...please stop..." Kasumi pleaded.

"Game over," Raizo said emotionlessly.

"Hubby...hubby I...I...I STILL LOVE YOU!" Kasumi cried in desperation, tears flowing from her eyes. "I...I don't CARE how you hurt me...because I trust you...I know you're not yourself right now...and I...I forgive you...I love you so...please..."

Raizo felt his own eye twitch.

*What are you doing?* the voice in his head screeched at him. *I told you that you weren't done saving Chinatsu Saitou!*

*Shut the fuck up,* Raizo told the voice. *I don't care what YOU say. I say I'm done, you got that? Fuck off.*

*Make me,* the voice answered. *You're not strong enough to FINISH THE JOB. This is why they always hurt HER! Your mother would be ashamed!*

*No,* Raizo told the voice. *She'd be ashamed if I went any further. The fuck do you know about my mother? I barely remember her and I know her better than you!*

*You remember what they said to you, right?* the voice demanded. *When you first woke again...THEY said you were a tool! An object made to entertain others! Only I was only your side! I saved you from that fate! Without me, you ARE a tool!*

*Oh, piss the fuck off!* Raizo silently commanded. *YOU're a tool, and I'm your fucking master. You're a weapon, and I'm your wielder. Deal with it.*

*You'll need me EVENTUALLY,* the voice threatened.

*As a tool,* yes, Raizo answered in his thoughts.

As the voice faded away, Raizo's eyes slowly lost their crimson color. He suddenly felt himself being consumed by fatigue. Dropping his weapon, he staggered before falling over, catching glimpses of Kasumi's tearful face and Chinatsu's concerned expression as he lost consciousness.

"HUBBY!" Kasumi cried, reaching her uninjured arm over to catch him, biting her lip to try and ignore the pain from the giant gash in her wounded arm.

"Hubby...wake up, hubby..."

"Holy crap," Chinatsu mumbled.

Marie shook her head. "Come on. I'll get Kasumi temporarily bandaged up. All three of you are going to the infirmary. I can properly disinfect and bandage you when we get there. Let's move."