

XII

Satomi slowly opened her eyes. After stretching, and sat up and yawned. "Shit...gotta wake up this early...oh well, all par for the course, I guess," she mumbled good-naturedly. "Guess I'll start with a quick shower...yeah, that'll wake me up!" she declared to nobody in particular. Dragging herself out of bed, she headed towards her washroom. Glancing out the window as she passed however, she paused. "Oh? What's this?" she muttered curiously.

A single figure was dragging a training dummy into the stables.

"He's awake already?" Satomi mumbled, rubbing her eyes. "That Raizo...I wonder if he enjoyed his night with the mistress?" she giggled to herself. "I may just have to go out there and ask...*after* my shower, that is."

Raizo closed his eyes. Slightly loosening the grip he had on his sword, which still had its scabbard on, he blocked out his surroundings. The gentle chill of the morning wind disappeared. The sound of students chatting in the courtyard not too far away grew silent. Even the sound of his own breathing ceased to reach his ears. Instead, he heard a gentle creaking sound.

The training dummy that he had constructed was designed to move. Each and every time he struck it, a mechanism would send a random other limb in his direction, forcing him to listen and determine the direction of his opponent to parry the attack. This allowed him to not only train in basic swordsmanship and reactions, but it also gave him opportunities to practice martial arts.

Ready to begin, he took a deep breath. Taking a step forward, he made his first strike. The sound of his sword's scabbard striking the metal rang through his ears. He heard the movement of the mechanism on the dummy. From his right side, he heard an object pushing aside the wind. Instinctively, he moved an arm out, blocking the blunt arm of the training dummy. He then moved his sword to the left, parrying a bladed arm. Raising a leg, he kicked a blunt limb coming from his left and he ducked beneath a blade aiming near his head.

Letting his instincts take over, he carefully blocked every attack. The sounds in the arena gradually grew louder. His grip on his weapon once again tightened. His movements sped up, as did the movements of the dummy.

Satomi casually walked towards the stables. "I wonder what that boy is up to," she mumbled. Leaning over to look into the room, she raised an eyebrow. "What the hell?" she asked herself. She heard the clashing of metal.

Tiptoeing into the stables, she searched for the source of the sound. Turning to the left, she spotted Raizo with the training dummy, still hard at work in the middle of training.

Silently, Satomi approached. *His eyes are closed? Huh. I wonder if he even knows I'm here*, she thought. *Maybe I could throw a punch and see if he can catch it?* Nodding to herself, she moved behind him and swung a strong punch.

Raizo, hearing the sound of the wind, was confused. *From two directions?* he thought. *Interesting, but not good enough.* Parrying the bladed arm of the training dummy with his sword, he completely dodged Satomi's attack.

"W-wait, so you DID see me?" Satomi cried in surprise.

The confused Raizo jumped at the sound of her voice, stopping the training dummy by catching one of its blunt arms and swinging his sword in her direction, stopping just short of slitting her throat. Opening his eyes and looking around, he glared ever so slightly when he spotted her. "What do you need?" he asked.

"Umm...if I said a 'good morning kiss,' do you think I could get one?" Satomi asked gleefully.

"Not a chance," Raizo answered.

"Awww...really?" Satomi complained, pouting as her shoulders drooped dejectedly.

"Yeah, really," Raizo replied without flinching.

"Then...I'll settle for a hug, how's that?"

"Still no."

"Erm...how about a handshake?"

"That's meaningless, so no."

"Then...how about a footjob?"

"That's going further than kissing."

"So? How about it?"

"Hell no."

Satomi sighed. "You're a difficult man to please, you know that?"

"No, I'm not," Raizo answered. "It's only difficult *or* you."

"Oh?" Satomi laughed. "Right, I forgot. So then...how was she?"

"Uhh...that depends. Who is the 'she' you're referencing?" Raizo inquired.

"Who the hell else?" Satomi replied. "I mean the mistress, Hikari Oshiro!"

"Then my answer to your first question would have to be 'how the actual fuck should I know?' or something like that," Raizo answered.

"How would you *not* know?" Satomi asked. "I mean, I'm not asking you how she was *in bed*, I'm just asking if her sleeping face was cute or anything."

"My answer doesn't change," Raizo said sternly.

"Yeah, right," Satomi said. "Don't you sleep in her room every night?"

"Whoever the hell told you that is misinforming you. In case nobody ever told you, I sleep here in the stables thanks to an order issued by the young miss on the first day of school," Raizo admitted.

"W-wait, you can't be serious, right?" Satomi laughed.

"Why don't you tell me if I'm kidding?" Raizo said sternly.

"Err...damn...wait, actually?" Satomi asked. "The mistress herself told me that you two shared a room. That's why she said I couldn't sleep in her dorm room. I just assumed that she wanted you to herself."

"Yeah, that's a lie," Raizo said. "I sleep in the stables every night. If you don't believe me, go check her room and tell me why none of my belongings are there and are instead here. Then try and explain the hay marks on my neck and why I never get good sleep."

"I...uhh...holy crap..." Satomi mumbled. *Wait, so Hikari Oshiro lied?* she thought. *Why would she lie about sharing a room with Raizo though? Actually, why was she so dodgy when I asked about his income? Huh...this may run a little deeper than what I expected.*

"W-wha—no! We're not like that! He just...he's sharing the room with me, alright? So don't come sneaking in here and into his bed, got that? It'll be too awkward for me!"

"Alright, alright," Satomi laughed. "Which room will I be staying in then?"

"I'll show you the way," Hikari said, taking her by the hand and leading her out the door. *Thank God Satomi's gullible enough to have bought that lie,* Hikari thought to herself as they headed towards the other dorm room. *And Raizo's not getting with little miss commoner's puppet either? Good. After all, I'm not gonna let anyone take my Raizo from me...*