

LVII

"Where were you yesterday?" Hikari demanded, grabbing her puppets by their ears. "Neither of you showed up for dinner, and I ended up waiting an extra hour! Couldn't you morons have answered the phone or something?"

But my phone was off, Satomi thought. And hell, why not? Why would I be waiting for your phone call LAST NIGHT of all times?

No way in HELL I'd hear my phone over all that moaning yesterday, Raizo sighed. In the end, we shifted out of the infirmary and ended up in Chinatsu's room, and we ended up going until morning...which is terrible since today's only Tuesday so we have class...I swear, if two months of this is already killing my sleep schedule then I don't wanna know what two YEARS will do to me...

"Either way, why do you two look like you had no sleep?" Hikari continued.

"N-never mind that," Satomi laughed. "We just stayed up for some extra training, but lost track of the time."

"I see, I see," Hikari nodded to herself. "Good! That can supplement our bank accounts next month!" she declared. *Now, if I can just have Raizo come with me later today, we can discuss which dress I should buy with that extra 125,000 yen! I'm sure he'll love to pick an outfit for me, and he'd probably enjoy seeing me in it even more!* She giggled cheerfully to herself.

Raizo bit his own lip gently, forcing himself to wake up a little. "Let's go already," he said impatiently. "Class will start soon."

"Oh? Is *that* why you wanna go? Or do you have some ulterior motives?" Satomi laughed.

"I sure do wonder," Raizo replied sarcastically. As he turned to walk to the classroom, however, he feels a buzz in his pocket. Pulling his phone out, he noticed an enigmatic message sent from the principal. Opening it, he read it over.

'Subject: New Transfer'

'A new student has been transferred into Chinatsu Saitou's class. His name is Katashi Asai. Blue eyes, blue hair, 16 years old, 174cm tall. Ranged fighter with a shotgun. He brings his puppet, Sho. Brown eyes, red hair, 17 years old, puppet age of 1 year, 179cm tall, fire based powers. Melee fighter with bare fists and battleaxe. They are notorious delinquents and you are hereby to observe them. If they cause any trouble whatsoever, you are authorized to suppress them with force. If they attempt any sort of physical assault or sexual harassment, you are authorized to use lethal force. Mariko Nakano has also been informed. She will assist in the operation should it become necessary. It will be up to your judgement.'

"I see," Raizo mumbled to himself. "Putting some guy's life in *my* hands, eh? Big mistake," he chuckled quietly to himself. "Come on!" he called to Satomi and Hikari. "I have a feeling today's going to be interesting..."

"What gives?" Hikari asked.

"Don't worry about it," Raizo replied, "for no matter what happens, I will protect you, young miss."

"Hey, bitch! Tell 'em to get out of my seat!" Raizo heard a voice shout as he opened the door to the lecture hall. Entering the room, he spotted the aforementioned blue-haired delinquent with his fists on Chinatsu's desk. The teacher, despite her short stature, was unfazed. In fact, she seemed irritated as if someone had just kicked her puppy.

Gazing to the side, Raizo noticed Mariko shooting glared toward the back of the boy's head. Kasumi sat beside her owner wordlessly, reading a book. Closer to his own seat, he spotted a red-haired boy approaching Ayane. *So there's the puppet*, he thought, placing his left thumb gently against the guard of his sword.

Izumi yawned and looked up from her phone, only to see her owner nervously staring back at a red-haired individual. "So then, beautiful," he said to Ayane, "how about you come with me for a bit? I promise to make it worth your while."

"I-I'd rather not," Ayane replied. "Class is gonna start."

"Oh, come *on*," the boy pressed, "just a bit..."

"I said no," Ayane sighed.

"Yeah, and *I* insist," the boy replied, grabbing her chest. "Wow, nice volume you've got here," he laughed.

"Hey! Unhand her!" Izumi demanded.

"Oh, be quiet," the boy replied, his free hand lighting on fire, "unless you want me to put her *down*."

Izumi bit her lip. "Damnit, he fights dirty," she muttered under her breath.

"Now, you'll never get *laid* if you're so nasty to men," the boy continued, pulling Ayane out of her seat with one of his hands still tightly on her breast. "Now hold still unless you want me to burn this pretty little face of hers."

"That means you too, teach," the boy at the front of the room said. "We'll be back later...probably."

"Yeah, right," Chinatsu grumbled. "You're staying right here. Let go of that girl. Now."

"Oh, sure, *make us*," the boy replied, grabbing Chinatsu's arm and pulling her closer, pinching her modest chest.

"H-hey! Damnit!" Chinatsu cried, throwing a punch right into his stomach and causing him to reel back.

"Oh, you've done it *now*, bitch!" the boy shouted, unslinging a shotgun from his back.

"Oh, what a bother," Raizo groaned. Yes, *a bother indeed*, he heard his own voice say. *Let's fix that*. With a flick of his thumb, he drew his sword. In a flash, he was beside the boy at the front of the room. With a swift cut, he sliced the barrel of the shotgun in half. "How're you doing, jackass?" he asked sarcastically.

"What the—who *are* you?" the boy demanded.

"Let me guess. You're Katashi Asai. Age 16. Main weapon is a shotgun," Raizo said. "It's *NOT* very nice to meet you. They call me the Puppet of Infinite Planes—but I'm pretty sure you're more familiar with the name 'Blood Prince.' You're being a serious pain in the ass, so how about you sit the fuck down before I castrate you?"

"Shut up, asshole! I ain't afraid of you!" Katashi shouted. "And besides, we have a hostage!"

"Oh? If you think *that's* enough incentive to stop me, then that'll be the last mistake you'll ever live to make," Raizo laughed.

"Is that so?" the red-haired boy asked.

"R-Raizo! What're you doing!" Hikari cried, stepping forth.

"That's your owner?" Katashi asked. "She's pretty hot."

"Err...on second thought, *that right there* may be the last mistake you ever make," Raizo muttered.

"Don't worry about *us*, partner!" Satomi called, grabbing Hikari by the arm. "You just focus on beating some sense into the assholes!"

"Raizo! You must save my mistress! Please!" Izumi shouted. "She...please, I'll do anything, just...help her," she pleaded, tears beginning to form in her eyes.

"Oh, quit bawling! You're an adult, aren't you?" Raizo cried. "If *anyone*, YOU should know I can take these guys to hell on my own," he said.

How obnoxious, he heard the voice in his head say.

Shut up, he told it.

With a snap of his fingers, Raizo virtually dashed to the red-haired boy's side. "You're Sho, a puppet with fire-based powers. You specialize in hand to hand combat and possess a battleaxe, correct?"

"Wha—" Sho began.

With a swift slash, Raizo made a deep incision on his arm. As the puppet lost focus for a moment, Raizo grabbed Ayane away from him and leapt back to Izumi's side. *That 'Sho'...a pathetic weakling*, Raizo heard the voice in his head say. Handing Ayane off to her puppet, he chuckled. "Now that the 'hostage' situation is taken care of, how about we fight this out for real?"

"Bring it!" Katashi cried.

"You're gonna *pay* for interrupting us!" Sho agreed, running forth to challenge his opponent.

This guy's slow, Raizo thought, *and his owner needs a proper weapon. If I can deal with him, we'll be good to go*. Sheathing his sword, he took a defensive stance. Then, as Sho approached and took a swing with a fist, Raizo's shadows burst forth, making the fist pass harmlessly through.

Fight back, Raizo heard his own voice order.

I know, he thought. In response to the attack, he gave Sho a swift jab in the stomach, causing the puppet to double over in pain. Raizo followed his attack up with a swift kick to the gash that he had left in his foe's arm. Then, with another flick of his left thumb, he redrew his sword and sliced Sho's left arm clearly off. The puppet screamed in agony as he stared at the stump when his arm originally was.

"Pathetic," Raizo laughed as he kicked the bloody stump. "You're a joke and nothing more."

"SHUT UP!" Sho cried, his right arm lighting ablaze as he threw another punch. Raizo once again dodged it, a clone shifting out of the way of the attack, causing it to pass through what looked like his physical body harmlessly. *Hmm...so he's even slower when he lights up, eh?* Raizo thought. *I could feel an intense amount of strength this time, meaning he's much stronger, but he's even easier to dodge. This is good.*

Raizo easily blocked the puppet's punches with the sharp blade of his sword, causing his opponent's remaining arm to quickly become covered in cuts. Then, with a swift kick, Raizo sent his foe flying to the front of the room. *How pathetic!* he heard the voice say.

"Crap! Here, take this and go teach him a lesson!" Katashi cried, unslinging a metal rod from his back. Sho, taking the item from his owner, gave the pole a twist and it extended like clockwork before a blade, likely made of plasma, sprouted forth.

You're not done yet, Raizo heard his own voice in his head again.

"Yeah, I know," he said aloud. "There's the battleaxe," he mumbled, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. *Kill him, kill him, KILL HIM*, Raizo heard his voice say. *Alright, I get it*, he told it silently.

Leaping from the student's seats, he landed mere inches away from Sho, and in a single slice he split his foe's weapon in half. "That was a fine weapon...and now, it's dead, just like you," he said cheerfully, opening his eyes to reveal his pupils—no longer grey, but a crimson red with the iris of a reptile—and laughing maniacally. "Nighty-night, mortal!" he cried, stabbing his sword into the puppet. *You're gonna die!* he thought. *Are you happy now? I'm gonna kill him!*

Yes...KILL, the voice ordered.

"Kill," Raizo muttered quietly, a wicked smile spreading across his face.

"No!" Katashi shouted. Before he could respond, however, an arrow shot cleanly through his arm, causing him to cry out in pain. "Sit down if you wanna live," Mariko said, walking over as she strung up another arrow. "That's not a request. It's an order." She giggled a little to herself. "I've always wanted to say that."

Raizo stabbed his foe repeatedly, causing a pool of crimson blood to form on the lecture hall's floor. Chinatsu apathetically shrugged. "Well, I guess we're cleaning this place again," she said casually. She glanced over at Sho, who was covered in dozens of incisions. She then turned towards a cowering Katashi, with Mariko's arrow drawn. With a smirk, she raised her thumb.

"Y-yeah! Let me live! I'll be good from now on!" Katashi cried.

Chinatsu smiled at him calmly. Then, without a word, she turned her thumb downwards.

"A thumbs down signals execution," Mariko said, "and so be it." She let her arrow fly, and it whizzed through the air for only a moment before finding a permanent home in Katashi's skull, killing him. "I really don't see why you're going *this* far, but an order is an order, I suppose." She sighed. "I'm afraid I'm not really one for *disobeying* them."

"Oh, I didn't do that for *your* sake," Chinatsu admitted. "If I didn't let him finish this, Raizo would be upset with me," she laughed, turning to the puppet.

Raizo was coated in blood, his uniform dyed a dark red color. His foe lay on the floor, having long been sliced into tiny pieces. Raising his foot, Raizo brought his foot down upon the core of the defeated puppet, crushing it effortlessly and ending his foe's life. "They better pay me well for this," he muttered to himself, his eyes still glowing red with bloodlust.

"Now, now," Chinatsu whispered as she finally stood up and walked to his side. Giving him a tight hug, she smiled. "You did great, now get some rest."

Yeah, rest, Raizo thought.

No! No! Kill more! Keep killing! the voice in his head demanded. Ayane Tanaka is not safe...only you can protect her! Finish this! Keep her safe!

Now listen here you bastard, Raizo told it, I OWN YOU, so shut up...I say we're done, and we're done! I know Ayane's safe, so our job is done.

You know? Fine then, the voice conceded. You can stop...but when you prove to be wrong you'll disappoint HER.

I doubt that, Raizo thought. We're done here. They're safe. SHE'd be proud of me. My mother would be proud of me. I know it.

Do you? the voice demanded. What do you remember? What do you KNOW about HER?

I know HER a million times better than you do, Raizo told it. Now shut the fuck up and piss off.

The voice reluctantly fell silent.

"Well, this is getting easier, isn't it?" Raizo asked, rubbing the back of his head. As he blinked, his eyes returned to normal.

"You're getting more used to controlling it," Chinatsu said, not letting go. "You became this way because you had something to protect, and it was taken away. But now that you're facing your past, bit by bit, and because you have so many people to protect now...your power is being tamed. This IS our treatment, you see? When those you love are in danger, you unconsciously activate this psychotic mode, and now that everyone's safe, you're forcibly suppressing it. It may only be the first step, but you're on your way to getting better. I'm proud of you, babe," she whispered.

"W-wait, did you just—" Raizo began.

"Now, off you go. Class is cancelled for today," Chinatsu announced, cutting him off. "Get out, you stupid kids!"

"Yes, ma'am!" everyone replied, packing up their things to leave.

As they headed out the door, Satomi nudged Raizo's arm. "So, does this whole thing have to do with your new job?" she asked quietly.

Raizo nodded wordlessly.

"Sweet!" Satomi laughed.

"What're you talking about now?" Hikari demanded.

"Don't worry...about that too much," Kasumi interrupted as she approached.

"Hubby did great," she said, turning to Raizo and hugging him tightly.

"Gotta admit, that was pretty damn cool," Mariko agreed.

"Y-yeah," Raizo laughed. "I guess so."

"He finished the job," Juri said flatly to the principal. "What now, Oki?"

"Well, we expected such a success from the start, of course," the principal answered. "You should send the extra commission money to him and that Nakano girl. I'm personally just glad we got rid of such a blemish on our school's reputation, and in such a dramatic fashion too!"

"Principal, are you *doing alright*?" Juri asked. "You sure you're not drunk or something?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," the principal answered. "Promise."

"Hmm...alright," Juri said. *These kids...they really are something else*, she thought. *It's kinda scary though...it makes me wonder what secrets they all have to hide...but oh well, it's not my place to interject...*