

XXIV

Kasumi looked around as she scoured the campus. *I still didn't...get hubby's cell phone number*, she reminded herself. *I should...do that...*

Pouting to herself, Kasumi continued to walk around the campus. *Is hubby...home already?* she thought. *Maybe...I should check...the stables...*

Raizo leaned back on a pile of hay. "I have no idea why you figured this would be any more comfortable than the bench," he said to Satomi, who took a seat beside him.

"Well, it's under a roof for one," she replied, "so if it starts raining we're covered. Mostly."

Raizo sighed, looking up at the small holes in the roof of the stable. "I should repair those at some point," he mumbled absent-mindedly. "I mean, if I'm gonna be living here for the next two years, why the hell not, right?"

"Yeah," Satomi mumbled. "Probably a—wait, hold up! You're seriously planning to live here for two years? I mean, I get that you're lucky since Hikari came to this school a year later than usual so it's not the full three years, but nonetheless two years living in a fucking stable is pretty bad."

"Tell me about it," Raizo laughed. "But hey, whatever. We're not even three full weeks into the school year yet. It's only the third Thursday, so I've got three days left. I've gotta be able to tough it out for at least a month, right?"

"So ten more days? It much be rough, huh?" Satomi giggled, leaning towards him. "I mean, look. In the space of less than three weeks, you've been fighting virtually every day, I shot you a bunch of times before we even properly met, you ended up out of commission thanks to me, and here you are saving my damn sorry ass. I just feel like a burden, y'know? All of these shenanigans are my fault...and I just...I dunno..."

"Listen," Raizo said, "I'm getting involved because I feel like it. I took a bullet for Kasumi because I wanted to protect her. I fought you because I wanted to get a little payback. I beat the shit outta Naoki because he was a fucking jackass. I did everything for my own purposes and my own beliefs. If anything, it's my fault for forcibly dragging myself into your business. I should be apologiz—"

"No!" Satomi cried. "I...I'm happy that you've dragged yourself into my life...because I don't think it would be nearly as wonderful a life if I didn't have you...I...Raizo, you've changed my entire life, you know that? And I...thanks to that I think I finally have a reason to go on...something to look forward to. I...damnit, why is this so difficult?"

"Why...is *what* difficult?" a voice interrupted. "When did you...and hubby get here?"

"Holy crap!" Satomi cried, turning around to see Kasumi standing right behind her, looking down upon her with a confused expression. "U-uhh...how long were you there for?" she asked.

"Umm...around the point when...you said 'here you are...saving my damn...sorry ass.' Why do you ask?" Kasumi inquired.

Satomi sighed. "Shit," she mumbled.

"So? What is...difficult for you?" Kasumi asked.

"N-never mind that," Satomi replied with a laugh. *I can't tell her I was just about to confess to her boyfriend!* she thought.

Kasumi giggled. "Perhaps you...also love my hubby?" she asked casually.

Is she a fucking ESPer? Satomi thought, her expression stiffening in surprise. "U-uhh...well...err...listen, I can explain, just—"

Before she could continue, Kasumi grabbed her by the arms and pushed her down onto a pile of hay. "Now, now," she said, "don't...struggle too much," she said, her fingers tickling Satomi's entire body. "Let's get *ready*, okay?"

"Kasumi, what the hell are you doing?" Raizo asked, raising an eyebrow in bewilderment.

"Hubby...let's all *play* a little together," Kasumi suggested cheerfully. "If Satomi also...likes hubby, then...perhaps we should start...learning to *get along* a little," she said suggestively.

"Wait, WHAT?" Satomi cried. "Y-y-y-you can't be serious, right?" she stammered, her face turning red.

"Do you...not want hubby to hold you?" Kasumi asked, tilting her head in confusion. Turning to Raizo, she quizzically stared him down.

"You—y-you're kidding, right?" Raizo asked.

Kasumi shook her head vigorously.

"That's that I was afraid of," Raizo sighed.