

## XI

Hikari marched into the room, smirking to herself. "Well? Let's get going already! You two are *both* coming home with me right this minute!"

"Young miss, please refrain from being so hasty," Raizo said, attempting to hide his annoyed voice. Kasumi turned to face him, her expression visibly disappointed. "Does hubby...have to leave?" she asked, her voice trembling ever so slightly.

"Dunno. We'll see," Raizo mumbled in response.

"C'mon, what're you waiting for?" Hikari cried. "We still have work to do, damnit! My ranking has *dearly* suffered while Raizo was busy snoring away, and I didn't even have access to my *new* puppet either! What a waste!"

"Alright, alright," Satomi mumbled, standing up. "I suppose we'll have to go then." She sighed. "Well? You coming, partner?"

Raizo turned to face Kasumi. Her expression, although upset, conveyed his exact thoughts back to him. *Go*, she seemed to say. *It's alright, I'll wait for you*, her expression told him. Reluctantly, he nodded. "Yeah, right behind you...partner."

Mariko shook her head as she closed the door behind Hikari. "I really can't stand her, you know that?" she asked. "Just what the hell is her problem?"

"That girl is always so...mean to hubby..." Kasumi mumbled to herself.

"Yeah, I've noticed, and it really gets on my nerves," Mariko answered. "Puppets...they were still human, at one point. They deserve the same kindness everyone else receives."

Kasumi nodded. "I don't like...when she's mean to hubby..."

Mariko sighed. "I'm afraid we don't have many options at the moment. We'll simply have to help take care of Raizo in the meantime while I try to either find a way to bring him here...or to at least improve that Hikari's treatment of puppets." She bit her lip gently. "Something tells me that Satomi isn't going to have an easy time either...but hopefully her treatment is a little better so we have less to worry about."

Kasumi nodded, her troubled expression unwavering.

Mariko ruffled her hair gently. "Now, now," she said reassuringly, "I know Raizo will be okay. He's much stronger than you may think..."

"Wow, nice place," Satomi mumbled, scanning her surroundings. She had followed Raizo and Hikari back to the part of the dorm where Hikari was staying.

"Yes, yes, I know," Hikari laughed. "Now, we can discuss living arrangements, but first and foremost, would you care to introduce yourself?"

"Of course, mistress Oshiro," Satomi replied with a slight bow. "I am Satomi, the Puppet of the Third Eye. I'm capable of detecting incoming attacks a second in advance, giving me a *chance* to react since I'm rather slow. I specialize in guns, and I

have a pair of scoped pistols. They're made of jorgandium, and the bullets are a jorgandium-lead alloy."

"I see, I see," Hikari nodded. "Well then, I do hope you'll work hard for me, okay?"

"Of course," Satomi answered. *That is, assuming you don't give me a miniscule amount of pay*, she added to herself.

"Oh, and by the way," Hikari said, "aside from the money I've already agreed to give you, I will also be giving you a monthly allowance. It's not a *lot* of cash, sure, but since all your living expenses are covered I assume it will be sufficient or leisure."

Satomi, grinning, nodded. *Huh. And Raizo said this was a bad deal! I don't see how it can suck that much.* She cleared her throat. "Hey, just out of curiosity, are we getting equal pay here?"

"Hmm? What do you mean by that?" Hikari inquired.

"I mean, I don't wanna be underpaid in comparison to your other puppet. How much does he make? Like, jeez!"

"Err...I can promise you that you're being sufficiently compensated. It's just as much as, if not more than what I'm giving Raizo," she said. "Now, let's move on and discuss housing." Turning to Raizo, she waved him off. "It's time for a little girl talk. Get out," she ordered.

"As you wish, young miss," Raizo replied with a bow, before marching out of the room.

Hikari cleared her throat. "Well, anyways, I paid to have the school give me a second room in the dorm. Therefore, you'll be staying in room 334, got it?"

"R-really?" Satomi asked. "But aren't the dorm rooms for two or more people? I mean, I could share a room with you, mistress. After all, there's no saying what could happen, so it's probably safer for you to have some protection—"

"No, it's fine," Hikari replied, cutting her off.

"U-umm...right. So will I be staying with Raizo?" Satomi laughed. "I wonder what we could get up to before bed..."

"W-what?" Hikari cried.

"Well, I asked, and apparently he's not dating the puppet of that mechanic lady," Satomi announced confidently. "They seem pretty close, but she doesn't seem like she wants to admit her feelings for him, if there are any to begin with, so at the end of the day it's an unexpressed crush at most. That said, since he's technically still single..."

"N-never mind that, alright?" Hikari said. "You're gonna have the room to yourself."

"Oh?" Satomi asked. "That's nice...but where does Raizo sleep then?"

Hikari froze up at the question. "E-erm...he's staying with me, alright? Jeez..."

Satomi's expression lit up. "Ah, I see! So you're trying to claim him as your own, dear mistress? I suppose that's why you didn't need me to guard you at night either, huh? Pretty sweet deal for you, I'm kinda jealous," she admitted.

“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...*