

XXII

"I'm back," Naoki declared, placing his arms around Satomi, who had stepped away from the tree for a moment, from behind her. "Sorry about that little disturbance," he apologized again.

"Oh, I understand," Satomi replied, her face turning red. "I mean, you g-gotta go when you gotta go, right?" she laughed nervously. "W-well, in any case, where should we go next?"

Naoki chuckled. "Y'know, I was thinking about that, and I realized that anywhere would be fine as long as we're together. However...I think I'd prefer to stay here for a *bit* longer, if you don't mind."

"Sure! Why not?" Satomi replied. Naoki slowly sat her down beneath the tree. He placed his left arm around her shoulder, moving his right hand over to her stomach. Giving her a gentle pinch, he ran his fingers along her body. She gulped a little. "U-umm...wait, what're you—"

"Now, Satomi, we're a couple now, right?" Naoki asked, pressing closer to her. "We should be doing this sort of thing together. Come on, lean in closer."

"E-err...I'm not sure," Satomi mumbled. "I mean, we *just* started dating and all—"

"Please?" Naoki begged. "I've been waiting for this for so long...so please come closer. Let's just do it...I love you, after all. Don't you love me?"

"I...I...well..." Satomi muttered.

Naoki smiled. "Think back to before...even when you were all alone, I'd be there, and I will continue to be...come on. Say it. Say that you love me..."

Satomi gulped. *I guess...he does want me...even if it's for something like this, maybe it'll be enough if I feel loved. Maybe this was all I was meant to be after all, she thought. Oh well. I suppose...this is it. Nobody's gonna come for me...he'll just have his way with me. And that's how it'll go...and then...I'll just have to...to...to bear it. But I guess...I guess I'm alright with it. It's not like anyone else would care what he did to me.* Steeling herself, she breathed and spoke. "I—"

"—think you're a piece of shit, for one," a voice interrupted.

Naoki turned around to see Raizo leaning against the tree, sword in hand. "So? How's your little rape-brainwashing session going? *Swimmingly*, I suppose?" he asked sarcastically.

Satomi felt her cheeks becoming flushed. *R-Raizo? Why are you here? And why...why for someone like me? Why do you care? Do you...feel that way towards me? Or is it just your conscience? Is it love? Or friendship? Or desire, just like Naoki?*

"Come on, Satomi. It's dinner time. The young miss is waiting. Let's get going already. I'm not taking no for a damn answer." Finishing his sentence, Raizo walked forth, grabbing Satomi by the arm.

"Hey!" Naoki cried, annoyed at the interruption. As he reached over to stop Raizo, the puppet flicked his hand away. "Legally speaking, you have no authority

over Satomi, but my young miss *does*. She has ordered that Satomi is to return, and I'm afraid that's that."

"Y-you can't just interrupt a date like this!" Naoki shouted at him, throwing a punch.

Raizo caught his fist, shoving him away with a gentle push. "Last time I checked, it was more akin to a rape-plotting session," he said, pulling out his phone and playing the voice recording. "Does this sound familiar to you?"

Naoki's voice was caught in his throat. He stumbled as he heard his own voice in the recording.

"Now, if you check the time, this recording was from only a few minutes ago. I'm sure you know the rest," Raizo said, snickering. "I'm not one to blackmail people, though. No, I don't like to teach my lessons that way."

"Th-then what do you want?" Naoki demanded.

"Simple," Raizo replied. "A game."

"A...game?" Naoki asked.

"Yeah. I just need you to sign a contract and we can start. Tomorrow, that is," Raizo said.

"Alright...so I just need to beat you at the game and you'll delete that recording?" Naoki inquired.

"Well, yes, that and more," Raizo laughed. "However...to gain, you must first give. Our little 'game' will be a match in the arena tomorrow. I'll fight you and your puppet, two on one. No foul play, no third party."

"O-okay?" Naoki replied. "What else?"

"If you win, I'll destroy my phone. Furthermore, my young miss will give Satomi to you legally, free of charge, and even pay for her living costs for a month. And...you can go have me decommissioned," Raizo answered confidently.

"H-heh. Pretty cocky, aren't you? To bet your life?" Naoki asked. "Do you even know who I am?"

"Yeah," Raizo said. "A fucking *insect*," he said, his voice changing from a casual, joking tone to a cold, hateful growl.

"A-alright then," Naoki said, stepping back.

"Anyways," Raizo chuckled, his voice returning to normal, "I've laid down my bet. However...with all it is that I'm gambling, I demand an equally...*delectable* tribute."

"A-and what's that?" Naoki inquired.

"If I win, then I'll take Satomi for myself," Raizo said. "On top of that, I'll take every penny in your bank account. Not that you'll need a bank account after that, though."

"Th-that's it?" Naoki laughed. "Sure!"

"You're certain?" Raizo asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah! Damn certain. Hell, you can even add something on top of that!" Naoki declared confidently.

Raizo smirked. "I've been recording this conversation too," he said.

"Alright, so?" Naoki asked, surprised but unflinching.

"So I think I'll take you up on the offer to add a little something," Raizo laughed.

"Fine. What else do you want?" Naoki inquired. "*If you win, that is.*"

Raizo smiled. "If you win, you get Satomi, the recordings are destroyed, and you'll be rid of me forever. And when *I* win," Raizo said, his face twisting into a sadistic smile, "I'll keep Satomi, take every last asset you own, and I'll fucking KILL you and your petty little puppet!"

Taken aback, Naoki stepped away. "W-wha—"

"Come on, there are two of you! Where'd all that confidence go?" Raizo taunted. "If you're a man who wants to win a woman's heart, then fucking *win* it, dumbass!" he shouted.

"F-fine! It's *your* damn funeral!" Naoki cried. "Where's the contract? I'll sign it! Don't friggin' underestimate me!"

I think I may be OVERestimating you...at least in the intelligence department, Raizo thought, pulling a sheet of paper out of his pocket. Naoki skimmed over the contract. It was already filled, except for his signature. On the bottom left, Raizo's own bet was laid out clearly. To the right of that, what Raizo demanded from Naoki was already there, including the lives of both Naoki and Noa, if they were to lose. Biting his lip, Naoki pulled a pen out of his pocket and signed the contract. "There!" he said, handing it back to Raizo. "I'll see you tomorrow in the ring."

"Oh, I'm sure you will," Raizo replied with a smirk as he watched Naoki storm away. Then taking Satomi by the hand, he dragged her off back towards the dorm. "What were you thinking?" he demanded.

"I could ask you the same thing!" Satomi cried, tears beginning to form in her eyes. "Why'd you do that? Why would you put your life on the line for me? In what way is it worth it for you?" she asked as she started to cry.

Raizo clicked his tongue. "You literally lose 80% of your 'sexy factor' when you're crying, you know that?" he asked jokingly, patting her on the head. "I don't want you to get hurt, Satomi. I care about you, and I'll gladly go as far as to take a few *lives* to keep you safe. I challenged him because I knew he wouldn't do you any good," Raizo said, sighing. "Besides, I also did it because I wanted a way to legally 'clean up' Naoki's little act, so if you're feeling too guilty then tell yourself that I'm actually just being selfish." He smiled.

"S-selfish, huh?" Satomi giggled, breaking into a little smile. "Yeah, damn right! What'll your girlfriend do if you die tomorrow? What'll Hikari go do? Try and think of that first!" she cried, giving him a light punch to the arm. "You're so...unfair," she said, her face slightly red.

"Playing fair doesn't get you anywhere," Raizo sighed. "However, I don't think I'll need to cheat to beat that Naoki guy. Just sit back and watch, alright?"

Satomi nodded, wiping a tear from the corner of her own eye. "S-say...what was with that crazy smile back there?" she inquired. "I've never seen you look so...evil...it's scary..."

Raizo sighed. "Sorry, couldn't control myself. But...I think you don't need to know all about it. It's...personal, and I don't think I'm ready to share that story *just yet*," he said. *Besides*, he added to himself, *I'm not sure if you're ready to hear it either*. He chuckled. *Well, I may as well focus. Tomorrow...I'm going to teach that Naoki a lesson he'll never forget...and hopefully, it'll be enough to keep the rest of Dosia out of my way too...*