

LVIII

"You're coming with me to go shopping!" Hikari announced to her puppets as she entered her dorm room. "We're gonna go pick out a fancy dress, got it? I hope you've both kept up with recent fashion trends!"

Well, fuck me and my plans for this afternoon, I guess, Raizo thought, putting on a fake smile to hide his frustration and exasperation.

"Uhh...r-right...fine, I guess," Satomi shrugged. "I was gonna run into town and grab a few things anyways."

Raizo nodded. "Fine by me," he said curtly.

"Great!" Hikari laughed. *And now, I have yet another chance to demonstrate my beauty and grace to him!* she thought to herself. "Let's go already!"

With a lazy yawn, Raizo turned and walked out of the room. Stretching and looking around, he mentally made a note of what he wanted to do. *So I guess I'm gonna have to examine the school grounds formally over the weekend...if I'm gonna take up this job as part of the security force, I may as well acquaint myself with the surrounding area. It'll save my life in the long run.*

Satomi followed him. "So...anything you wanna buy in particular? Some microwave dinners, maybe? Or perhaps a good book? Maybe a wedding dress or five? Anything?"

"Uhh...well, actually, I'm thinking of getting some legit pillows and blankets. I've been sleeping under some pretty shitty conditions, and I feel like my spine is gonna end up off-center if I keep this up," Raizo replied. "I may also pick up some rations. They're cheap, but also kinda tricky to conceal. It's probably a better idea for me to make these purchases on my own on a later date."

As they spoke, Hikari burst out of her dorm room, having changed out of her uniform into a neatly organized casual outfit, sporting a knee-length blue skirt, a frilly white shirt and a thin denim crop top jacket. "Alright, I'm done changing! Let's go!" she announced.

"What's with the fancy outfit?" Satomi asked casually.

"Oh, I dunno," Hikari shrugged. "Gotta keep up images. And besides, it just *felt* right, y'know? Although...you've got a point. It's not like we're gonna encounter anyone we know or anything."

"How is it that we encountered someone we know *right away*?" Hikari cried.

"That's *our* line, I'm afraid," Koharu answered.

"For your information," Elizabeth, wearing a frilly white sundress, added, "I'm not exactly *thrilled* to encounter *you* either, but nonetheless, I must ask: how goes your day, my dear sister?"

"Hmm...I've had better days, no thanks to *this*," Hikari answered sarcastically.

"Well, aren't you just *cheery*?" Elizabeth asked with a slight twitch of her eyebrow. "Anywho...I do hope your puppets are doing alright?"

"For sure, Lizzie!" Satomi answered.

"Naturally, Lady Elizabeth," Raizo said with a bow. "Thank you for your concern."

"Oh, come on now, we're virtually family! And besides, if I didn't ask, then I doubt *anyone* would."

"Mistress," Koharu interrupted, "we should get going. If you truly intend on purchasing your dress, we should hurry."

"W-wait, *dress*? You too?" Hikari cried.

"Is there a problem with a lady buying a dress?" Elizabeth snapped.

"Oh, a *lady* can buy a dress, of course, but *you*?" Hikari laughed.

Elizabeth shot her a glare, her cheerful expression disappearing in an instant.

"Why, you arrogant, self-centered little b—" she began.

"Lady Elizabeth," Raizo interrupted, "I'll apologize for her, so please don't be angry. I'm sure the young miss meant that as a bit of humour," he said. "And besides, such a glare doesn't suit your face. It ruins your fine complexion."

"And *there's* the ladykiller line," Satomi muttered to herself with a smirk on her face. "At this point, I can't even tell if it's intentional anymore..."

Elizabeth covered her left cheek with her hand as she blushed uncontrollably.

"W-well...yes, I s-s-suppose I can f-forgive this little indiscretion," she stammered.

"P-perhaps you'll accompany *me* for my little journey, my dear?"

"I must apologize," Raizo replied, "but I'm already obliged to accompany the young miss for this afternoon. Maybe next time?"

"Oh..." Elizabeth sighed in disappointment.

"Mistress, if I may suggest it," Koharu said, "since both Oshiro ladies are going shopping for dresses, we could all move as a group. Having more opinions would be good for choosing an outfit for you, don't you agree?" She leaned over to Elizabeth's ear. "And besides," she whispered, "you *do* want to get *his* opinion, don't you?"

"W-w-w-well, I suppose," Elizabeth replied.

"Uhh...no way!" Hikari protested. "Why should I have to be stuck with you?"

"Koharu makes a good point," Satomi said. "Getting an extra opinion on the outfit you choose would be good."

"W-well, I guess, but..." Hikari muttered. *But I only really care what HE thinks*, she thought. "Ugh, fine! Just don't slow me down!"

"Alright, dear sister," Elizabeth said, biting her lip. *Don't get mad*, she told herself. *He won't like it if I get mad...he won't like me anymore if I'm too selfish...because I'll be like my sister...he won't like me if I'm not a good girl...*

"Let's go, then," Koharu said, turning around and leading the way.