

XXXVIII

"M-MARRY YOU?" Raizo cried in surprise. "I-I mean, I get we *knew* each other and whatnot but, like, with all due respect, miss Tanaka—"

Ayane giggled. "My love, please just call me Ayane."

"Hold up just a minute!" Satomi protested. "You can't just spring a question like that onto somebody!"

"And what might this have to do with you?" Ayane asked, smirking at her.

"You cheeky little—" Satomi began.

"You have no right to insult my mistress," Izumi's voice interrupted. "I command you to shut your mouth immediately."

"Fucking make me," Satomi snapped. "You wanna take this outside, bitch?"

"Gladly, you impudent child!" Izumi cried, leaping out of bed and picking up her gun.

Satomi sighed, slipping on her brass knuckles. "Maybe I should take care of this quickly," she mumbled. Throwing her arm back, she clicked her tongue. "You really get on my nerves, y'know?" she said. "Fucking DIE!" she shouted, swinging her fist forth.

"Damnit, Satomi!" Raizo cried. With a flick on his thumb, he drew his sword. Stepping between the two, he tilted his sword to block Satomi's punch with the blunt face of his sword. With his free hand, he grabbed the barrel of Izumi's gun, forcing it upwards to the ceiling. The impact from Satomi's punch rocked his entire body, sending vibrations through his entire metal skeleton, yet he held firm, a blazing sort of determination visible in his eyes. "Weapons away. Both of you," he ordered sternly.

"But—" Satomi protested.

"Put 'em away, damnit!" Raizo repeated. Satomi retracted her fist reluctantly, slipping the brass knuckles off and putting them away.

Turning to Izumi, Raizo looked her in the eye. "You're an adult. Act like it. Weapon down. NOW."

"What gives you the right to order *me* around?" Izumi demanded.

"Izumi, put it down," Ayane said. "This is still technically a hospital. It's no place to be waving an assault rifle around."

"But mistress," Izumi complained, "this child was the one who started it!"

"You sound like a child yourself, ma'am," Raizo reminded her, letting go of her weapon. He sighed, sheathing his sword. As he did so, he winced in pain. *Shit, Satomi's hit was really damn strong*, he thought. *It may have rocked my skeleton a bit too much...I'll have to ask Mariko to get it checked later.*

"What's the matter, my dearest?" Ayane asked.

"N-nothing," Raizo said, gulping a little. *That really friggin' hurts*, he thought to himself.

"Hey, a-are you actually alright?" Satomi asked, reaching a hand over to his shoulder. "Should we go get you checked ou—"

"Shit!" Raizo cried between grit teeth as she touched his arm. "D-don't worry about it, okay?" he said. "I...I'm fine. I can go get it checked later." Sighing for a moment and breathing deeply to regain his composure, he looked back up. "Well, in any case, *miss Tanaka*, you and your puppet should rest. We'll stop bothering you. You still have classes tomorrow." Saying so, he turned away and headed out of the infirmary, grabbing a reluctant Satomi by the wrist and guiding her out along with him.

Izumi turned to her owner as they disappeared out the door. "Mistress, do you..."

Ayane sighed. "Yes, it is indeed him," she nodded. "I know it is...it *has* to be. All the memories add up. All his actions, his mannerisms...I'm damn sure of it."

"Are you sure you're okay?" Satomi asked.

"I'm fine, I promise," Raizo replied weakly.

"Well, go get it checked anyways," Satomi ordered. "I'll tell Hikari that you went for a quick checkup and that you'll be late for dinner, and if she tries to pull something, I'll keep her here, even if it's by force. Don't worry about it."

"Alright, alright," Raizo chuckled. "I'll take you up on that offer then." Waving to her as she entered her dorm room, he headed off in the direction of Mariko's room. *Nice of her to offer*, he thought, *since I WAS gonna go get a checkup anyways*.

Turning the corner, Raizo found himself face to face with Kasumi, who carried a neatly wrapped bento. "Hubby...I found you!" she cried with delight.

Raizo laughed. "Yeah, I suppose you did," he said. "So what's up?"

"Hubby...had a difficult match today...so I wanted to...make you something...to eat..." Kasumi explained rather enthusiastically. "Did hubby...want to come see me? Is hubby...tired?"

"Well, you could say that," Raizo agreed.

"Then let's...take this into my room...and we can eat...in bed..." Kasumi suggested.

Huh. Well, that's one difficult offer to refuse, Raizo thought. "Alright," he agreed. "Let's go." Thinking to himself, he paused. "But first, I need Mariko to give me a quick checkup. Satomi gave me a pretty good punch earlier, and I'm afraid she may have damaged my skeleton a bit. I don't think that was her intention, but I should be careful. I'm a little sore right now, after all."

Kasumi nodded, pouting a little. "Then hubby better...hold me tight in bed..." she said playfully.

"Deal," Raizo laughed, kissing her gently.

Mariko inspected the scans she took of Raizo's skeleton. She paced dramatically around her office, rubbing her chin thoughtfully. Finally reaching some sort of conclusion, she turned to Raizo, who sat by her desk on a folding chair. Looking around, she noticed that Kasumi wasn't around. "Alright, lemme just say it

then," she mumbled. "Your skeleton's fine, thankfully, but it's certainly been shaken a little. You won't experience anything in the *long run*, but you'll be sore for another day or two. What the hell did Satomi *do* to you?"

"Well, truth is," Raizo explained, "y'know that new girl's puppet, Izumi? Satomi tried to give her a good 'ol punch with her brass knuckles, and Izumi was gonna shoot her, so I blocked Satomi's fist with my sword's blunt face and repositioned Izumi's gun barrel to the ceiling. The whole thing probably meant the impact was just using *me* as a cushion. Newton's third law and all, right?"

"Well shit," Mariko mumbled. "You should be more careful. Don't worry, you're fine for now, but...if anything happens, please don't hesitate to come back and see me. After all," she winked, "I'd be happy to see you *any* time."

"R-right," Raizo laughed. "Thanks, Mariko."

Getting up as Mariko blushed uncontrollably, Raizo casually strolled out of the office and headed towards Kasumi's bedroom. As he opened the door, he was greeted by a sight that left him speechless. A grand banquet, condensed into a four-layered bento, was spread out before him. His girlfriend, lying fully undressed beneath the covers, blew him a kiss. "Welcome home, hubby..." she said seductively. "Would you...like dinner first? Or maybe...a bath? Or would you prefer...to have *me*?"

Wordlessly staring at her, Raizo felt his own jaw drop. "Is there an 'all of the above' option?" he asked, as if in a trance.

"I hubby wants one...I would be happy to accommodate it," Kasumi replied with a little smile.