

Raizo dodged each and every one of his teacher's strikes, the mighty halberd missing his physical being by inches at a time. His thumb still calmly pressed against his sword's grip, he remained ready to draw at any time, and yet seemed to be waiting, not out of hesitation but rather because he didn't find it necessary.

"I'm waiting for you to fight back, kid," Chinatsu said. "It'd be a mighty shame for you to lose without landing a strike, don't you think?"

"I'd agree," Raizo answered, "so I'd hurry up and land a hit if I were you," he joked.

"Why, aren't you a cheeky bastard?" Chinatsu muttered. "In any case though, if you insist, then I suppose I'll have to deliver!" Speeding up the pace of her attacks, she swung her blade around, twirling it with superhuman speed. Her weapon, ironically much larger than she was, was wielded with incredible expertise; something that seemed totally out of proportion for someone of her stature to be using, and yet she held it with deadly precision. "How do ya feel now, kid?" she demanded.

"It's finally starting to get interesting," Raizo answered. "And here I was, thinking you were just gonna go easy on me all day!" With a flick of his thumb, his sword shot out of its sheath into his right hand. The draw itself sent ripples of power flowing through the air, forcing Chinatsu to pause and parry them. In the blink of an eye, they were face-to-face, their lips only millimeters apart. "Hey there," Raizo chuckled, flicking her nose gently before taking a swing with his sword.

Chinatsu parried the blow and matched him move for move as the two clashed, their weapons flying back and forth in what resembled a twisted dance of blades. A few more attacks came and went, and the two combatants found themselves at opposite ends of the gymnasium, neither with a single scratch on their bodies. "Are you holding back, kid?" Chinatsu found herself demanding.

"Sorry, I just didn't wanna ruin that pretty face of yours," Raizo replied with a smirk.

"Is hubby...flirting with the teacher?" Kasumi asked off to the side.

"I...I think so," Mariko answered.

"Y-you can't be serious, right?" Elizabeth groaned.

"Mistress, I'm afraid 'tis likely the case," Koharu shrugged.

"You're all reading too much into it," Hikari said, waving her hand dismissively.

"Uhhh...well, ignorance is bliss, I suppose," Satomi shrugged.

As the combatants increased the speed of their attacks, sparks seemed to fill the air. The heat from the clashing of their weapons had begun to radiate through the area as a testament to their match.

Time and time again, each swung their weapon mercilessly, having forgotten all about sheathing the blades for safety.

Neither seemed to care.

In their eyes, there was a burning determination, virtually crying out towards the other as both a threat and a challenge. And so, both tirelessly continued, making every hit count as they swung away, a noticeable mad fury in each of their spirits.

"This is bad, they're getting way too into it," Marie said. "At this rate, someone's going to get hurt. *Badly.*"

"Th-then what do we do?" Ayane cried. "I can't let my beloved get hurt like that!"

"Since when was he *your* beloved?" Marie mumbled under her breath, confused. "W-well, regardless," she sighed, "I'm going to try and stop them. That said, I'm not gonna run in there, I'll get killed if I try. I'm gonna grab something that can get their attention safely. Just make sure nothing goes wrong while I'm gone. I'll be in the office right by the gym, so just scream and I'll come running."

"Alright," Ayane nodded.

"To be fully honest, I'm *really* starting to have fun," Chinatsu laughed as the match continued. "It's been years since I've had a real duel like this!"

"Likewise," Raizo answered.

"We're both *really* getting worn out here though," Chinatsu mumbled.

"Then let's end this properly," Raizo said, "and we can pick it up again later. You have a class to teach, after all."

"Alright, alright," Chinatsu said. "Then this'll be the finisher!" she declared, rushing forward with her weapon in hand. Raizo angled his blade carefully, closing his eyes and letting pure animal instinct take over. *If I time this just right*, he told himself, *then this'll end here...I'll have overcome the biggest challenge I've faced thus far...my own teacher...my dear Chinatsu...*

In a flash, the two exchanged blows.

Standing virtually back to back, both held their weapons firmly. Slowly, blood began to ooze from the countless fresh wounds that opened almost simultaneously on both their weakened bodies, and the two desperate fighters struggled to stay on their feet.

A loud 'thunk' suddenly filled the air.

Looking down, Chinatsu noticed that the head of her halberd had fallen, cut cleanly off from the rest of the weapon, leaving her with nothing but a metal pole in her hands. Opening her mouth to try and speak, she instead spat out a mouthful of blood. Looking down at the pool of red before her, she reluctantly accepted her defeat, allowing her own muscles to relax as she collapsed to her knees. Raizo walked over to her side, desperately trying to ignore the prevailing scent of fresh blood, and ruffled her hair affectionately, causing her to smile. "You're the first one to

beat me in a duel in quite a few years, y'know?" Chinatsu muttered. "Nine years, more or less. So uhh...be *proud* of that, kid."

"That, I will do," Raizo answered casually, trying to ignore the stinging pain from his own injuries.

"I woulda liked to continue," Chinatsu said, "but this really isn't the time or the place, and I'll admit that when it came to a finisher like *that*, you've got me beat, period. But...next time, I wanna go all out with you, be it against you or...or with you," she said weakly, a bright smile on her face. "I love you," she whispered into his ear.

"I love you too...Chinatsu," Raizo whispered back.

"Oh, you're no fair," Chinatsu pouted.

"I'm back!" Marie cried, running into the room with a whistle. "Now—holy crap!"

"So, care to take us to the infirmary or something?" Chinatsu laughed.