

## XL

Hearing the bell ring, signaling the end of class, Raizo groaned. "Fuck, that was boring," he mumbled.

"Well, hey, Ms. Saitou *did* spend the whole period ranting about the impracticality of the legal system," Satomi shrugged, "so what did you expect?"

"Can you blame her?" Raizo chuckled. "She worked in security prior to becoming a teacher, didn't she?"

"Yeah," Satomi laughed. "I guess she'd know a lot about the legal system."

"That's only 'cause I need to know who I'm legally allowed to cut down," Chinatsu interrupted, strolling over. "What're you kids up to anyways? Trying to figure out why Raizo's a playboy?"

"What the—I'm not a playboy!" Raizo complained.

"Oh, *really*?" Satomi laughed, poking him in the arm. "You're *such* a playboy, y'know? I'm pretty sure it's not even intentional. You're just...*like that*. It's literally just the way you are."

"Somehow, that doesn't feel like a compliment," Raizo mumbled.

"This spot is getting awfully crowded," Hikari mumbled.

"Is it?" Ayane asked, leaning forth, having shown up at some point. "I think it's pretty nice and cozy when everyone's close."

"Holy fu—where'd you even come from?" Hikari cried in surprise.

"I wonder," Ayane winked.

Raizo sighed. *This is getting too messy*, he thought. *I gotta get out of here...*

Looking over to the side, he noticed Kasumi staring at him intently. *Bingo*, he thought. Getting up, he bid his friends farewell and headed off to meet his girlfriend. Coming over to Kasumi's side, he kissed her gently on the cheek, causing her to blush and smile. "Hubby...I'm sleepy," she muttered.

"Alright, alright," Raizo laughed, picking her up in his arms. "I'll carry you back to your dorm room, okay?"

Kasumi nodded. "I love...when hubby holds me..." she said drowsily.

Mariko sighed, standing up. "Alright, let's head back then," she said. "Raizo, can I talk with you for a little bit later?"

"Certainly," Raizo nodded.

Back over at the table, Ayane watched the group leave. *Who the hell is that girl in his arms?* she asked herself. *Maybe I should follow them...*

Turning around, she signaled to Izumi to follow her. Then, waving goodbye to her classmates, she headed out of the lecture hall behind Raizo.

Tucking Kasumi into bed, Raizo kissed his girlfriend passionately. "I need to head out for now," he said to her. "I'll see you tomorrow, okay?"

Kasumi nodded, closing her eyes. "Good night...hubby..." she murmured as she drifted off to sleep.

Exiting the room and closing the door silently behind him, Raizo turned to face Mariko. "I'm surprised you two didn't go ahead and do...uhh...*that* again," she laughed. "Seems like Kasumi's showing some restraint."

"Is that what you'd call it?" Raizo chuckled. "If so, then I suppose."

"Well, in any case," Mariko giggled, "I wanted to ask you a few questions. I know the joke in *our class* is that you're some sorta *playboy*, but we both know that isn't true. You don't try and get into girl's panties. Or, at least not *intentionally*. There *is*, however, a rumor that we know to be true."

"Lemme guess, the one about me killing that Naoki guy?" Raizo inquired.

"Precisely," Mariko nodded. "Does the nickname 'Blood Prince' sound familiar to you?" she asked.

Raizo stroked his chin. All of a sudden, a memory came flowing back to him. "Y-yeah, actually," he said. "Rings a bell. That guy who tried to confess to Lady Elizabeth mentioned it," he said.

"When you showed your face, I assume?" Mariko asked.

"Yeah, pretty much," Raizo nodded.

"Then you get the implication," Mariko sighed.

"Yeah. It's a nickname *someone* came up with for me," Raizo laughed. "I kinda like it, actually. Sound *fierce*."

"Indeed. It's pretty scary to imagine being butchered alive by a prince who dabbles in...well...*butchering people alive*," Mariko nodded. "The other classes seem to have vastly different opinions of you compared to what *our class* sees. You're the talk of the school at this point, but not in a *good* way. Ms. Saitou was ordered to do an analysis on you, and she came to me for help behind the scenes. With all due respect, we agreed that you have some sort of mental condition, and the school was willing to accept it thanks to the contract you made the guy sign before the match."

"In other words, the current problem isn't with the administration but rather the student body," Raizo commented.

"Correct," Mariko said. "However, it's not as easy as just telling them you're 'safe' or whatever. The administration reached out to me recently and told me to give you two options. You could either reform and become much more peaceful, or do the exact opposite and maintain your reputation as a killer. If you choose the former, the school will release an 'official' analysis of your psyche to prove that it was a one-time killing."

"That'll be fake, won't it?" Raizo asked.

Mariko nodded. "It has to be. If they released the real one, the student body would know you're *actually* a madman," she laughed. "However, if you choose to keep up that persona, then the school will try and help you learn to *control* the madness. It's theoretically possible. It'll act as a 'trump card' of sorts; when you *need* to win no matter what, you can let go of any human inhibitions: fear, weakness, despair, confusion...even *morality*. You'll be able to fight—and *kill*—without mercy, and you'll be able to start and stop these killing sprees at will."

"Does that work?" Raizo inquired. "I mean, like, is there a way to let me know what I'm doing while going completely mad at the same time? That sounds kinda...counter-intuitive."

"I know," Mariko nodded, "but it's possible. I can't tell you how long it'll take, but when it does work, you'll be able to designate priorities. You'll essentially be able to put a powerful 'filter' on the people you do and don't wanna kill, and you'll be able to start and stop the sprees at will without any triggers. I know your madness already lets you designate people into three groups: a few targets, one person to protect and everyone else is collateral. Think of this as an upgraded version that lets you choose the exact number of people for *all* three categories, AND on top of that you can do it at will."

"So controlled madness?" Raizo laughed. "I like that onomatopoeia."

"Likewise," Mariko nodded. "So which'll you choose?"

Raizo smirked. *It's obvious*, he thought. *If I become docile, I'll never complete my goal, whereas if I do the opposite, it'll only benefit me, so...*

Mariko smiled. "Oh, I know what you're gonna say already," she declared.

Raizo nodded. "Good. I'd like to keep the title of 'Blood Prince,' Mariko," he said.

"Very well," Mariko replied, hugging him tightly. "Then let's...begin your treatment, shall we?"