

## XXXVI

"As it turns out," Marie explained to Raizo, "your little 'jab' hit quite a vital spot, causing Izumi to lose lots of her strength. "Even in her previous life, she wasn't all that...uhh...*sturdy*, so that is likely a factor. That and she expended an unusually large amount of energy trying to defeat you. The combination of her weak physical being and her large and sudden energy expenditure likely explain why she passed out."

"That...makes no sense at all but sure," Raizo sighed, "I'll buy into it."

"Either way though," Marie giggled, "I'm surprised to see you carrying even more girls into the infirmary like this...three in two days, eh? Just wonderful. Do you intend to break even by waiting a day before you carry even more in, or can I expect to see you with a pregnant girlfriend or something tomorrow?"

"Y-you're kidding, right?" Raizo mumbled. *I...should be careful tonight*, he reminded himself. "D-don't even joke like that, Miss Marie."

"You make it sound like it's totally possible," Marie smiled.

"Wh-whatever may you be speaking of?" Raizo asked nervously, spotting a smirking Satomi out of the corner of his eye.

"Well, in any case," Marie laughed, "you should probably get some rest soon. Just stay here and watch over them for a little bit, will you? I seriously need to go grab some documents. Shall I escort your owner home while I'm at it, or will everything be alright?"

"Uhh...please bring the young miss home," Raizo decided.

"B-but—" Hikari began.

"You need your beauty sleep, princess," Satomi joked. "And besides, we'll be back soon enough. I promise."

"Okay," Hikari sighed, "fine." Marie took her by the hand and they walked out of the infirmary room. "I'll be back in a bit," she said, "so don't go having a foursome, you kids!"

"HEY!" Raizo cried.

"She kinda got you there," Satomi giggled, poking him in the arm.

"No, she didn't," Raizo said. "I mean, can you remind me when I slept with *four* women at once?"

"When Mariko almost joined us?" Satomi suggested.

"That doesn't count," Raizo said.

"Wh-what doesn't...count?" a voice asked from behind them.

Turning around, Raizo and Satomi noticed Ayane slowly waking up. Her wound from Raizo's quickdraw was already healing thanks to countless nanobots that Marie had administered, quickly repairing the damaged tissue. Rubbing her sore chest, she smiled. "Did you...carry us here?" she asked curiously.

"Well, *Raizo* carried you two," Satomi admitted. "I got drinks though."

"Yeah, *that helped*," Raizo smirked sarcastically. "You got three and downed 'em all before getting back to us."

"Well, *sorry*," Satomi laughed.

"Speaking of that," Raizo sighed, turning to Ayane, "how are you feeling?"

"Much better, thanks," she said cheerfully. "I honestly didn't expect so much power from you though, Raizo. You were always a lot...y'know...weaker. I supposed the malnutrition had something to do with it."

"The what?" Raizo asked. "Wait, how'd you know my name? Oh, wait, what am I saying? You probably just overheard—wait, that still doesn't make sense! How'd you know about my current nutritional situation then?"

"*Current*? Has your owner not been feeding you properly?" Ayane inquired. "That's certainly a problem, but I'm afraid that's not what I'm talking about. I meant *before*."

"Before?" Raizo asked.

"Do you two...have a *history* together or something?" Satomi laughed.

"Uhhh...honestly, I'm not sure," Raizo replied. "If you're asking me whether or not I've met her before as a *puppet*, the answer's no. I can swear that I've never seen her before in my puppet life. But if you're talking about *before the incident*, like...when I was human...I have no way of answering that. I remember almost nothing about that life, so even if I knew her I wouldn't be able to confirm it."

"S-so it's true, huh?" Ayane suddenly asked, looking away. "You *do* lose all your memories when you die..."

"Well, not *all*, but most of them, yeah," Raizo admitted. "I remember my own death, and a bit of my life on the streets when I was still human. I remember being in some village, and I remember seeing my father off one day...and he never returned. I also have some vague memories of how the other homeless treated my mother...how they *defiled* her...and how I got my payback in blood..."

"Jeez, that's...wow," Satomi mumbled. "Wait, so you...your mother was...assaulted, and then you j-just *killed* those guys?"

"They were a bunch of drunk fucktards wasting away in our world anyways!" Raizo shouted suddenly. "If anything, I was doing us all a damn favor by getting *rid* of them!"

"W-woah there, calm down," Satomi said, placing her arms around him. "Nobody's blaming you..."

"I killed 'em," Raizo said. "Every last one of them, as far as I can recall...whenever I saw one of them hurting my mother I memorized their face...and I'd find them in the dead of night and crack their skulls open with a rock. I was the man of the fucking house...and I intended to make that known. Almost all of my memories are of those kills. And each and every time...it was more satisfying."

"I see...so that explains why you always reeked of blood," Ayane mumbled, shuddering to herself.

"One day, I woke up and my mother was just dead. She froze in the middle of the night. And...well...I don't really remember much after that," Raizo sighed.

"So your memories are heavily gapped," Satomi said. "You remember your father's disappearance, multiple instances of your mother's...misfortune, and your revenge against the perpetrators...and that's about it."

"Yeah. And I remember my own death," Raizo added.

"Why is it that you only remember the traumatic parts of your past?" Satomi asked.

"I dunno," Raizo laughed. "Probably explains why I'm so fucked up in the head now, doesn't it?"

"I wouldn't say that," Satomi sighed. "I mean, I have my reasons for becoming a hitman too, y'know? B-but," she said, glancing briefly at Ayane, "I'd prefer to tell you that story *in private*, so just ask some other time if you're curious, okay?"

"I'll hold you to that," Raizo smirked.

"Of course," Satomi nodded.

"Th-that was quite the tangent," Ayane interrupted.

"Oh, right. Sorry, I didn't mean to make you listen to what remains of my life story," Raizo chuckled.

"It's fine," Ayane said. "It explains a lot of your behaviors from back then, so I'm glad I know why now, at least."

"Okay, how do you even know him?" Satomi demanded suddenly.

"Well, in short," Ayane replied, "we were childhood friends."