

## PROLOGUE

"I must say," a girl giggled, "you did well at the entrance exam." A grin plastered on her face, she looked to her left.

"Thank you, young miss," the boy beside her replied. He also wore a smile, but it was one that was practiced, almost like he was looking into a mirror and trying his best not to scowl.

The girl brushed her long, blonde hair aside, humming a little tune to herself. "So," she said, "from today on, it seems we'll be enrolled in the Dosia School of Hypermechanics. Might you have anything to say to me about it?"

"Congratulations, young miss," the boy said, his voice mechanical, as if the line was rehearsed dozens of times. Paying no heed to his tone, the girl laughed.

The two walked towards the dormitory. "You know," the girl said, breaking the silence, "I hear that puppets have to share a room with their owners here."

"Is that so?" the boy asked, his voice once again static and practiced.

"Of course," the girl replied, "but I don't think that'll do. I have a *better* idea."

"And what might that be, young miss?" the boy inquired.

"There's a stable not far from the dorm. They keep the horses in there, for those kids who know how to ride one. Of course, an elegant lady such as myself has no need for such trivialities, but to each their own, I suppose," the girl answered. "However, I think we can still make use of the space that I was given. I grant you permission to sleep in the stables. It's better than sleeping outside, is it not?" she asked, closing her eyes and laughing dramatically.

The boy's smile faded momentarily as he glared at the girl beside him. "Y-yes, it is," he managed to choke out, barely masking the frustration in his voice.

"You'll come to my dorm room for meals only, unless instructed otherwise by me *personally*," the girl continued. "You'll eat what is provided, no more and no less. I'm in room 318."

"Understood, young miss," the boy replied, having calmed his voice ever so slightly and replaced the fake grin on his face. "Although I'm worried that you may be lonely up there. I do hope you'll have *some* visitors."

"Oh, of course I will!" the girl laughed, completely oblivious to his insult. "Lots of them! Maybe I'll let you in to serve some tea, if I feel like it."

"It would be an honor and my pleasure," the boy replied with a blatant lie. "However, young miss, it's almost time to go to the opening ceremony. The entrance exams should be more or less done by now, so I'd suggest moving quickly. We wouldn't want *anyone* to have a bad impression of *you*, now would we, young miss? Oh, who am I kidding?" he asked sarcastically. "Nobody could ever think badly of *you*."

"Why, that's a given!" the girl replied, unaware of his mocking. "Now, we should drop the overly-formal talk. I don't want the other girls to think of me as some

stuck-up little princess. After all, I can still swear and joke like any other teenager, can't I?"

"Surely you can," the boy answered. "Can't have people *slandering* your name with *lies* like that, right?" he asked in an exaggerated tone.

"Naturally," the girl replied. "Let's be off," she said, turning and walking in the direction of the school's auditorium. "Come! We'll be late if you don't hurry, Raizo!"

The boy, Raizo, nodded in compliance. "Of course, young miss," he replied, bowing and following suit, noting the arm of clock tower in the distance.