

VI

"In all likelihood, the assailant wasn't using a sniper rifle. If you don't believe me, answer me this: what size was the bullet you retrieved from my body?" Raizo demanded.

"Err...give or take, two centimeters long?" Mariko guessed. "Why do you ask?"

"The American standard issue military pistol uses bullets that are 19 millimeters in length. In comparison, the standard sniper rifle uses munitions that are 51 millimeters in length. Though I'm not saying the assailant used a weapon modeled after a standard American gun, it's likely that they uses some sort of pistol. That would also explain their lack of accuracy," Raizo said.

"W-why do you know all of this?" Mariko asked with a nervous giggle.

"I wonder," Raizo answered with a smirk.

"W-well...that's all I wanted to ask, so moving on," Mariko said, "I should give you a little medical report. You're in dire need of rest. After reviewing your health, I found that you haven't been eating well. In fact, you're severely malnourished. As a puppet, that won't ever kill you, but that doesn't mean it won't reduce your performance. Furthermore, the water you've drinking is not even close to clean. And on top of that, there are signs that you've been lacking sleep for close to two weeks now. Do you have insomnia, by any chance?"

Raizo sighed. "Well, no, I don't. I just haven't been sleeping well."

"And what about the food and water?" Mariko inquired.

"I eat and drink what's provided to me."

"By that Hikari girl."

"Correct."

"That little bit—err...yeah, she shouldn't be doing that..." Mariko said, her voice trailing off as she seemed to fall deep into thought.

"Agreed," Raizo said, "but whatever. I could still function, so that's all that matters."

"Not true," Mariko scolded. "You may be much more resilient now, but you're still mortal. Never forget that." She shook her head. "Another thing: due to your conditions regarding food, water and rest, you were *severely* hindered during our match. That said...just how strong are you?"

"What do you mean by that?" Raizo inquired.

"I'll be frank about it," Mariko answered. "I admit that, if not for those gunshots, it's clear that Kasumi's shield wouldn't have held for as long as it did, and I assume it's entirely possible that we could have lost the match. In other words, you would have defeated us despite having a crippling handicap."

"And your point?" Raizo asked, confused.

"Your power is incomprehensible. It's almost guaranteed that you were made as a puppet with the sole purpose of combat, but even with that in consideration, it's hard to understand how you have so much strength and resilience," Mariko said. "I

don't intend on doing any weird tests on you, but I *do* want to see what you know about it."

"Well, I just train every day," Raizo answered. "I got used to the crappy conditions the young miss would prepare, and I adapted as needed. If I couldn't, that would be my problem. That's how it's always been, both in this life and the last."

"W-what do you mean by the last?" Mariko asked.

Raizo winced. *Shit*, he thought, *I said too much*.

"Y-you don't have to tell me if you're not comfortable with it," Mariko said. "However, if you ever feel the need to talk about it, I'd be happy to listen."

"Th-thanks," Raizo said.

Mariko nodded. "Now, Kasumi, take good care of him, okay? I'll go make breakfast," she declared, turning and marching briskly out of the room.

"W-wait—" Raizo began.

Kasumi put her arms around his waist, her bare breasts pressing against his back. "Hubby..." she whispered.

"Err...y-yes?" Raizo replied nervously.

"Don't...hubby shouldn't...chase after...other girls...anymore..." Kasumi mumbled, kissing his neck gently.

Oh, crap, Raizo thought, shooting a glance towards his waist. *I'm pretty sure THAT part of me is still fully human...*