

## Family Dinner

It was a sluggish afternoon, but Kumatetsu was still hellbent on training. Sadly, he felt as slow as the day was, and pretty bloated too. He couldn't really figure out why, but he felt fatter than ever these days. His folds hung over his fundoshi, whose bands were slowly sinking into his lardy hips. It was especially chafing around his large butt, wherein it was close to gone between his cheeks. He grumbled loudly as he pulled it out of his ass, only for it to sink right back in afterwards. Giving up on the wedgie, he got into a neutral stance to begin training, but that was a pain too. With every step he made, he was pulled two more by the swaying of his gut. His balance was all off, and the constant jiggling of his belly was getting on his nerves. Honestly, he should just give up for today. "Well, isn't this a sight for sore eyes HA HA HAA!"

The bear sighed slowly, and he slung his sword over his shoulder as a familiar monkey hopped up the steps two at a time. "Where the hell have you been Tatara?" Kumatetsu grumped for all of one second before grinning.

"Busy and around" the simian responded, a big smile on his face as well. "I see you're living large enough for both of us" he added, giving the bear's gut a few taps. "Are you planning to beat lozen by making your stomach big enough that you can eat him?"

"Oh yeah right, don't you start about eating people. I get enough of that from Fatass" Kumatetsu snorted as he tried to get his jiggling gut under wraps.

"Speaking of.... He's not... around, right now, is he?" Tatara asked nervously.

"He's sleeping in his room right now. You'll be fine" the bear said dismissively while sitting his vast rump on the outside bench. "Where's Hyakushubo?"

"He's been busy doing monk things. They tend to help the impoverished during the colder months" the simian bakemono replied as he huddled in his own warmer clothing. "He might come round later, if he's got the stomach for it."

"Pfft, that's nice of you two: Leaving me alone with Fatass as my only company" Kumatetsu scowled.

Tatara acted as if to speak, but then he looked around cautiously. Drawing closer to the chubby bear, he gave a serious look. "People have started gossiping, Kumatetsu" he explained.

"They always gossip about me. Remember that rumour from years ago where some people thought I secretly meditated naked to give me ungodly power?" the bear pointed out.

"I'm serious here. People are starting to worry that it's possible that you might end up being corrupted and turn into a demon yourself. Some folks already suspected you could be one, but the longer you're with... *Him*, the more of a liability he is for you" Tatara warned.

"People keep saying stupid stuff all the time because they're scared. Fatass is a threat to no one, and he knows it. The second he steps outta line, there'll be at least twenty swords to his throat, and he knows it. And why is everyone worrying about corruption all the time anyways?" Kumatetsu complained.

The monkey sighed as he reclined on the bench, his fingers resting on his cheek and chin. "It's probably because of lozen" he figured.

The bear's body tensed up, an ugly scowl on his face as he dug his fingers into his knees. "Yeah? And what is that pompous prick spreading this time? I tell ya, he's had it out for me ever since I was chosen to look after Fatass instead of him. Do you know he came over here to try and take him off me?" the crimson bakemono complained.

"Everyone heard. I heard him talking after he left, actually" Tatara recalled.

"What did he say?" Kumatetsu pressed.

"Well, I didn't hear everything he said, but he was talking about how Darkness spreads in humans" the monkey explained, his brow tense as he tried to grab any scrap of memory of he could recall.

"Does it?"

"I think so. I caught half of it, before he started worrying about it being possible that a demon could infect a bakemono with Darkness. I think he figured the demon could ruin a bakemono's purity, and make them vulnerable to corruption" Tatara concluded.

The bear's face twisted into a furious expression, his teeth grinding together and his fists tightening. "I knew that bastard wouldn't leave this be. Complaining about me behind my back like that" he snarled. "He always thinks he's so good and pure because he "follows the right path" and "practises restraint". I tell ya Tatara, if Fatass can corrupt people, he'd turn Izoen's values inside-out faster than he could mine."

"You don't even have values Kumatetsu" the monkey laughed.

"HEY!" the bear snapped, his fur flaring up. "When I make a promise, I stick to it no matter what. I'd say that's a pretty damn good value!" he argued.

"I guess, if you consider being unreasonably stubborn a good thing" Tatara sighed, swinging his feet a few good feet from his friend. "But, I'm not exactly the sort to worry about hypothetical Darkness issues, but I really don't wanna be eaten" he sighed.

"He won't eat you. If he did everything he threatened to do I wouldn't be here telling you not to worry about his empty threats" Kumatetsu pointed out.

"Maybe. It's either that he won't for fear of being executed, or he's just... taken a liking... to... you? I think that's the right way to put it" the monkey frowned.

"A liking?"

"Yeah. He always gives other people evil looks, but never you. He only ever seems to look at you angrily, like he really hates you yet wants you alive so he can keep hating you. That's a lot different from how he looked at me and Hyakushubo, as if he had already decided how he wants to eat us" Tatara shuddered.

“That’s because if he tries to eat me, he knows I’d beat his massive ass into next week” Kumatetsu asserted while cracking his knuckles.

“Right now the two of you would probably have to fight like sumos. You know the club on the other side of Jutengai is looking for new members for the stable?” the simian bakemono teased.

“Hey, enough with the fat cracks” the bear complained.

“Like what’s on your backside?” Tatara joked, his legs wheeling as he howled with laughter.

The crimson bakemono grumbled as a small, very small, quite miniscule part of him was already regretting all the fat jokes made at Byakko’s expense. “Enough already. I’m already working on getting back to my normal weight” he snapped as he drummed his ample middle. “And once I do that I’m going to double down on my training to make sure I beat lozen for all the crap he’s spreading about me.”

“In his own way, I think he’s just worried. There’s never been a demon in Jutengai, or in the entire Bakemono World. And with how puritanical he is, he’s probably worried about his family’s safety..., and everyone else’s. He’s even worried about yours too Kumatetsu” the monkey pointed out.

“Like I need his worry. Fatass is no threat to anyone, and you know what? I’ll prove it!” Kumatetsu decided, getting off the bench with a lurch and a jostle.

“How?” Tatara asked dubiously, relaxing a leg on where the bear had been sitting.

“I’ll get some takeout, and you, me, Hyakushubo, and Fatass can have dinner together” the crimson bakemono announced, a proud smile on his face.

“You want us to have dinner... with... the demon?” the simian bakemono asked in disbelief.

“Why not? I miss having you two around. And if you guys and Fatass get to know each other, then you won’t be scared of him anymore” Kumatetsu explained excitedly.

“Or it goes horribly and we’re even more scared of the demon” the monkey countered.

“I’ll make sure he’s dressed and on his best behaviour. And I know you’ll be there Tatara, cause there’s no way you’re going to pass up free food” the bear surmised.

“That is true” the simian bakemono nodded, scratching his cheek. “I do like free food.”

“And if you’re there, Hyakushubo will feel a lot safer too” Kumatetsu added.

“How’s that?”

“Because you’ll be between him and Fatass” the bear joked.

Tatara’s face blanched. “Yo-you’re kidding right?” he shivered.

“Relax. You’re faster than Fatass’ arms, and there’ll be food between you. That should keep him distracted enough” the crimson bakemono said dismissively.

Tatara heaved a deep sigh of relief. “I swear I’m either going to die or go prematurely bald around you Kumatetsu” he grumbled.

“I’ll make sure he behaves himself. I’ve kept him in-line so far haven’t I?”

“Well, he did steal a lot of meat from the market that day you fought Izen” the monkey pointed out.

The bear flashed an angry look, before composing himself. “And he hasn’t done it again, has he?” he irritably contended.” And that fight got him talking to me, so I call that a win” Kumatetsu decided.

“Even though you lost to lozen” Tatara said under his breath.

“Exactly. So you go tell Hyakushubo to come here around seven, and we’ll eat together, like old times” the bear decided.

“I’ll let him know, but I don’t think he’ll come. He says he’s been getting really bad feelings from the demon” the monkey explained.

“You should call him Byakko. Calling him that makes him less angry” Kumatetsu corrected.

“Then why do you call him Fatass?”

“Because it’s funny seeing him react when I do it” the bear laughed loudly, his belly slapping his lap.

“Alright. Well, I’ll see you tonight then” Tatara declared, leaving the veranda suspiciously fast.

“YOU BETTER!” Kumatetsu called after his friend.

Relaxing on the bench, the bear wondered to himself what would be the hardest part about tonight. The one thing that will be the greatest roadblock in his plans. *“Where the hell am I going to find enough food for all of us on a budget?”*

Shaking his head, the porky bakemono hobbled back into his house. “Do you wish to tell me something?” Byakko demanded, already waiting for him.

“Yeah. My friends are coming round tonight, and *YOU* are going to be on your best behaviour” Kumatetsu retorted.

The tiger snorted, his nostrils flaring to show his disdain. “And how do you plan on doing that huh? I care nothing for your friends, and I care nothing for them being around. So perhaps I’ll decide to be my worst? As I recall they were pretty intimidated by my intense

stature and predatory nature” he boasted while flexing his chest. “So how are you going to keep me in order without me scaring them, huh?” he taunted.

An intense, oppressive force filled the air between them as the dark horse and the demon stared each other down. “I won’t buy any more sake if you do” Kumatetsu answered.

Byakko’s brows rose, and he seemed actually hesitant. “What?” he said hesitantly.

“You heard me. I’ll go cold turkey, and knowing you, you won’t last a day without the stuff. I can survive it, done so all my life. How about you mister scary? Think you can last long without booze?” the bear taunted.

The tiger’s shoulders hunched, his head tipped far enough for his messy hair to obscure his eyes. “You would not. You’re too weak to go without it. Far weaker than me” he asserted, raising his head defiantly.

“Try me lardo! You got everything to lose by messing with my friends in front of me” the bakemono warned.

The oppressive feeling between them intensified, threatening to bring everything down as this war was going to be bloody and laden with countless lost lives. “Fine” Byakko begrudgingly relented. “Tch, trust you to hold something like that over me” he grumbled.

“You’re so tall and fat I’d need scaffolding” the bear joked.

The demon trembled with buried rage, his claws digging into his palms as he clenched his fists. “I refuse to get to know them, or have any kind of rapport. I will tolerate them. That is all!”

“Fine. But, it’d really help me if you tried to get along with people. I’m getting rumours now because of you, and they were bad enough when they were just about me. And some people get crazy ideas too. One of these day’s people will think we’re doing it or something” Kumatetsu grumbled.

Byakko's face hardened, his jaws suddenly feeling like they didn't look together properly. He rolled his lower jaw while trying to ignore the thumping in his chest. "Fine. I still remain adamant that you bakemono aren't worth being around, but... I will try my best to tolerate the ones I **am** forced to be around" he conceded. "I'm done with you now. Don't bother me for the rest of the day" he added, storming off in a huff.

*"What the hell was that about? That damn demon gets so many mood swings I swear there's more than one guy in that head of his"* the bakemono thought, shaking his head. *"Anyways, I gotta get ready and make this place look... decent"* he thought grimly, noting the excess of empty bottles and old newspapers around the place.

The thought occurred to him to make use of Fatass, but it was pretty obvious that he wasn't going to help out. *"What the hell is up with him? He's been weird ever since our night at the inn. Ugh, screw him, he's not worth thinking about!"*

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In what time he had, and despite a rather flabby impediment, Kumatetsu had managed to get some of the trash out of the way. Not a lot, just enough for a clear space for everyone to sit around his small table. "Hey Fatass, it's almost time! You got clothes on?!" the bear demanded.

He himself, of course, had put on something far more suited to his girth. Though, it was unmistakable that his gut poked out the underside of his dress shirt. "Must I?" came the disgruntled reply.

"I told you to put something on didn't I? SO PUT SOMETHING ON!" Kumatetsu snapped. There was a lot of annoyed grumbling in a language the bakemono didn't understand, but by some miracle Byakko left his room after five minutes wearing the largest robe he had. It fit him quite well, though the same could have been said if a tarp had been draped over him. The bear looked him up and down approvingly. "Not bad" he complimented.

"I wasn't asking for your approval" Byakko snarled.

"And I wasn't giving it lardass" the bakemono snapped back. "Just, sit down and stop being such a big blubbery baby" he chided.



The tiger snorted as he sat on the farthest end of the table, his arms testily folded as he maintained a livid-looking scowl. *"Big blubbery baby? Whose playdate is this again?"* he complained to himself.

With Fatass dealt with, Kumatetsu waited patiently, thinking things over. "They better come" he said aloud. Byakko said nothing as he continued to petulantly scowl. "I said *they better come*" the bakemono repeated.

"Who are you telling here? Me, or you?" the tiger questioned.

"Shut up" Kumatetsu snapped. As hard as he wanted to grump, he was relieved to find Tatara suddenly poking his head through the window. "About time!" the bear chuckled as he hid his relief.

"I was held up meeting Hyakushubo" the monkey explained, his happy expression evaporating as he caught Byakko glaring intensely at him. "He-hey th-there de-duh-duh-duh" he stammered, but then caught himself. "By-Byakko" he corrected.

"Monkey" the tiger curtly responded.

"His name is Tatara" Kumatetsu scolded, making sure to position himself between the two.

The door then opened, with Hyakushubo letting himself in. "It's good to see you after so long Kumatetsu" the pig said warmly.

"And it's about damn time I saw you again" the bear laughed.

Hyakushubo's expression went icy as he eyed Byakko. "Hello... Byakko" he stiffly greeted.

"Pig" the tiger grunted.

"Hyakushubo to you. He used your name, you can use his too" the crimson bakemono chided.

Byakko rolled his eyes and snorted, saying nothing as he sat there. Kumatetsu and the others, meanwhile, took a seat on his couch/bed. Though there didn't seem to be a lot of room given the wideness of one of the occupants. "It appears winter has been rough to you this year Kumatetsu" the monk observed.

"Yeah, rough is a way to put it" Tatara scoffed as he was pinned to the bear's side. Annoyed, he sat on the armrest of the chair. "So when's the food getting here?"

"I've ordered earlier today, telling them to get food here at seven. The courier should be here soon enough" Kumatetsu answered.

"Patience is a virtue Tatara" Hyakushubo added calmly, though, he kept a wary eye to the elephant in the room.

"Exactly" the bear nodded thoughtfully.

"How have you been doing Kumatetsu? I know it's been a while since we've spoken" the pig said with noticeable guilt.

"We've been doing fine, me and him. No doubt you heard about me and Fatass over there going to the fanciest inn in Jutengai?" the crimson bakemono boasted.

"At the Lord's expense" the simian snorted.

"And? Bet you haven't been there" the bear countered.

"What was it like?" the pig spoke up, keeping the conversation rolling.

"I don't really remember much, but it was pretty boring. The onsen was nice, but after that is just a haze" Kumatetsu recounted. "Fatass, you remember what happened right?" he said, drawing attention to the sweating demon.

Byakko took their stares, and a mild sense of panic began to overtake him. Explaining himself to prey wasn't exactly in his list of skills. "O-of course I remember! Only a drunken idiot wouldn't" he asserted testily.

"Hey! More remembering and less insulting tubbo" the bear growled.

"It's hard to do so without insulting you. You got so drunk you can't even remember what happened that night, and made a complete moron of yourself. More than you usually do" the tiger grinned.

"I heard there was some damage to the floor. Were you two playing rough?" Tatara teased from behind three hundred pounds of bear.

"The idiot tripped me while he was staggering about. Not my fault your pathetic floors can't handle a demon of my calibre" the demon lied.

"I don't believe that" Kumatetsu declared. "Not to mention most floors can't handle your "calibre"."

Byakko seethed testily, but managed to push the rage below surface level. "You only have my memory to go on, and if I *wanted* to humiliate you, I'd create an even more embarrassing story than you tripping me" he countered.

"That is fair" the porcine monk nodded. "I have warned you before about overindulging on drink" he chided.

"I needed all I could to deal with his attitude" the bear whined.

"Only because your dumb game wasn't working" the tiger sneered.

"What ga- Oooohhhh, right, that question and answer game" Kumatetsu recalled. "I remember that now" he grinned. "You got really angry over it!"

"I DID NOT!" Byakko bellowed.

"You did so! You kept complaining about it all the time because you didn't like my questions" the bear retorted.

"BECAUSE THEY WERE STUPID!"

"THEY WERE NOT STUPID! SOMETHING'S NOT STUPID JUST CAUSE YOU DON'T LIKE IT!"

Any further arguments were lost to screaming as Hyakushubo sidled over to Tatara, the two staring silently as the big fat babies argued. "They completely forgot we're here" the monkey pointed out.

"It's in his nature when he gets frustrated. I can see why he's had his hands full with Byakko" the pig nodded with supreme understanding.

"Look at them go, getting angry over a game" Tatara scoffed.

"You tend to be very upset when you come home with empty pockets after your parlour games" the monk judgementally reminded him.

"Hey, that's different. That's just gambling, not whatever these two have. If they keep this up, people will mistake them for an old married couple" the simian bakemono commented, and then realised it had gotten quiet.

Kumatetsu and Byakko stared daggers at him, their faces going red. "WE ARE NOT MARRIED!" they shouted together, before turning their glares on each other.

"Ooooh, don't even start Fatass! You'd be grateful to be married to someone like me!" the bear snapped.

"The only person I'd ever marry would be someone I'd deem superior to me! So you'd never be considered a candidate in a million years!" the tiger roared back.

“And now they’re arguing about who would marry who. Y’know, I’m starting to think there’d be less carnage if Kumatetsu had just gotten an apprentice” Tatara said in disbelief.

“Somehow I feel like there’d be far more bloodshed involved if he had” the monk commented, before getting up. “Kumatetsu! This argument is a bit ridiculous, isn’t it?” he sternly decreed.

“What, how is it ridiculous? Fatass here should be grateful he’d even be considered marrying me” the crimson bakemono asserted, before hearing his own words. “What the hell am I saying? Like hell I’d marry you!” he roared.

“Like I’d want to marry you!” Byakko shot back.

“Let’s change the subject, before something ends up broken” Hyakushubo diplomatically declared.

“Fine. How is your monk training going Hyakushubo?” Kumatetsu begrudgingly asked.

“It is going well. I am learning so much from the elder monks” the pig answered, only to be disturbed by a loud scoff. “You find something questionable, Byakko?” he tentatively inquired.

“Monk training? What utter rubbish” the demon snorted derisively.

“It’s been proven to be quite useful for building a stronger soul, and working towards inner peace” the monk asserted.

“Please. Mortals try so hard for crap like “inner peace” and “enlightenment”. And it’s garbage! You waste your short lives looking for something that isn’t there! Any “greater knowledge” is discovered in death by becoming a loser working for the Spirit World, or if you ascend to demonhood” the tiger explained.

“You can become a demon after you die?” Tatara interjected.

“Don’t get too excited monkey. Only certain types become demons, and I don’t think you bakemono can become one” Byakko stated.

“Perhaps. Perhaps not” Hyakushubo mused.

“What do you mean?” Kumatetsu asked.

“Well, as you recall bakemono lords can eventually ascend to godhood when their time is up. This is our potential as bakemono” the monk explained.

“Bakemono can become gods? I refuse to believe that” the tiger snorted.

“It’s true Byakko. Of course, what kind of person you are will determine the calibre of god you become after the ritual” Hyakushubo exposted.

“Which is why Kumatetsu will end up as something weak, like a weapon spirit” Tatara teased.

“Hey!” Kumatetsu snapped.

“But, if we can ascend to gods, doesn’t that mean that there could be a bakemono so impure in spirit that they could fall and become a demon through the ritual?” the pig theorised.

Something cold hung over the household, though that may just be the winter weather. “HA! HA HA HA HAAAAA! I like that Hykashoku. I like that very much” Byakko boomed. “How about it moron? Don’t wish to be a weapon spirit? Then how about I help corrupt you so much that when the time comes, you will become a demon far surpassing your meagre existence?” he offered with sickening glee.

The bear shivered, an uncomfortable lump in his stomach. “No, I think I’d rather be a sword” he decided.

“Come now, why not let your worst attributes out? Just imagine what kind of demon you could become! You may even surpass my powers upon ascension” the tiger depravedly insisted.

“I regret even conceiving the idea” Hyakushubo lamented.

“Don’t sell yourself short Hyagushogi; such wicked thoughts can grant you great praise among certain demonic circles” Byakko explained.

“I feel unclean” Tatara shuddered.

“That’s the problems with you mortals: Your minds are always so small, and bound tightly by empty morality. You make it sound like becoming a demon is the worst thing in the world, when I doubt I could ever feel as free being mortal” the tiger snorted.

“I think you might be a bit biased there Fatass” Kumatetsu grunted.

“Believe what you will, but when death comes for you, you’ll wish you could become demons and live on doing whatever you wanted” the demon insisted.

“I mean, maybe it wouldn’t be too bad” Tatara admitted, only to be elbowed by Hyakushubo. “Hey!”

“It’s best not to think that way. Someone like... *him*, should not be idolised” the pig chided.

Byakko narrowed his eyes, his lips pulling back to reveal his teeth. “And why is that piggy? You’re the one who brought this up in the first place” he pointed out.

“Forgive me. I... misspoke” the monk hastily replied.

"I'll bet you did. You'd fit in with the dickheads of the Spirit World. A bunch of uptight, jumped-up bureaucrats who did everything they could to prevent us demons from claiming what is ours" Byakko snarled.

"And what was yours? A better diet plan?" the bear joked.

"All the souls of the human world" the tiger answered darkly.

Silence filled the room, and for some odd reason, everyone began to feel massively uncomfortable in their own skin. "Why?"

Hyakushubo and Tatara stared in horror at Kumatetsu, who seemed eager to start something. "Why do you feel you demons had the rights to human souls?" he demanded.

"Some wanted their souls, but personally? I wanted to slack my thirst for blood and prey. To hunt them down and devour their bodies as they screamed for a mercy I would not give. To feast upon as many of them as I could" the tiger said with great relish. "Humans are weak creatures, and we demons simply wanted to assert where in our food chain they sat."

"Big talk coming from someone who, right now, sits right among the rest of us bakemono. But with how fat you are, I'd say you've feasted enough" the crimson bakemono taunted.

"Like you can talk. I eat because my hunger is vaster than yours. But unlike you I have been denied the pleasures I have that pertain to exercise. If I were to hunt, I'd be the one insulting your weight, not the other way around" Byakko countered.

"Then I guess, deep down, you're just a massive lazy lardo, aren't you?" Kumatetsu scowled.

If the demon had any retorts, they were distracted by a knocking on the door. "Finally" Tatara sighed as the bear answered it.



A horse was waiting outside, carrying several bags full of containers. "You have no idea how long it took me to get all this to you Kumatetsu. Is winter really treating you that roughly?" the questioned.

"Cut the jokes lori, I have my friends over. Oh, and Fatass too. He's waving at you" the bear explained.

The stallion glanced past Kumatetsu's shoulder, and blanched at the hungry look Byakko was sporting. "We-well! You're foods all here" he nervously explained, handing off the bags as fast as he could. "So see ya!" he declared, taking off once the last bag was taken.

"Look at him flee. What a bunch of cowards you bakemono are" the demon said critically.

"We're not all that yellow" the monkey countered.

"When was the last time I saw you monkey? A few months ago? I believe it involved you leaving before you wet yourself in utter terror" Byakko recalled with a toothy grin.

"It's true" Kumatetsu nodded.

"I... well..." he simian stammered.

"He is right Tatara. We have not been as present as we could be. Though, for our sake we have had good reason" Hyakushubo spoke up, cautiously eying Byakko.

"Cowards" the demon seethed.

"Well maybe if you stopped trying to scare everyone, maybe they would've come round more. Now would one of you help me with the food?" the bear grumpily demanded while trying to manage all the food.

The tiger remained firmly seated on his enormous arse, while Hyakushubo aided Kumatetsu in spreading all the food on the small table. Steam rolled off many of the foods, especially

the large pile of white rice. The monkey and the pig sat together opposite Byakko, who naturally dominated one side by himself. Kumatetsu sat on his left, clearly unconcerned being so close to the brute. "This looks good, Kumatetsu" Hyakushubo politely declared, taking some of the more modest foods.

"It will do" Byakko snorted as he filled up an enormous bowl with fish, noodles, and fried foods.

"Make sure to leave some for everyone" the bear chided.

"I should say the same to you" the tiger countered, noting Kumatetsu's bowl also getting rather full.

"With both of you at the table, you'd clear out most places by yourself" Tatara joked, going for some vegetables. "Like one of those all you can eat buffets I hear some western human countries have."

"If they were offering the staff as well, perhaps I'd be satisfied" Byakko mused.

"Are people truly that necessary to your umm, diet?" the monk inquired.

"Don't be stupid. It's not for dietary reasons I eat people. It's the feeling of power, the taste of blood, and the pride in being a predator" the demon explained between mouthfuls of fried shrimp.

"But if you eat humans, isn't that simply too easy?" Hyakushubo inquired.

"No. Wild animals are stupid creatures, but they're stupid in a way different to humans. They don't understand that they're afraid, it's just their instincts telling them that they are, so they run. But humans, despite their inferior nature, can think, and they can understand, and they can know. They understand fear, and they know terror as you hunt them down and slaughter them! Devouring them after is simply my own gratification for showing them their place in the world" Byakko answered.

“Knock it off you two! We’re supposed to be eating here” Kumatetsu grumbled, his cheeks full of food.

“Sorry Kumatetsu” the pig apologised.

The demon said nothing, he merely made some rather gross eating sounds as he filled his fat face with food. “So what have you two been up to, since you haven’t been coming round at all” the crimson bakemono inquired.

“I have been busy with my training. Practising prayers and rituals” Hyakushubo politely answered.

“I’ve just been around. Doing some stuff” Tatara flippantly responded.

“Gambling” his two friends said at once.

The simian bakemono scoffed loudly, and quietly kept to his food. “And what of you Kumatetsu? How have you been?” the pig inquired.

“I’ve been training and looking after this big baby next to me. But I can’t wait to shake the hibernation funk to get back in shape” Kumatetsu answered.

The monk glanced to the demon, who stared at him intensely as he continued eating. So naturally he chose to leave that particular beehive alone. And with that, they just ate in the gloom of dead conversations. “You got a problem pig?” Byakko scowled once enough time had passed. “Don’t feel like asking me anything?”

“I felt it may have been best not to bother you” Hyakushubo replied sheepishly.

“Leave him alone Fatass. And don’t worry about him Hyakushubo. This fat baby would have complained if you had asked him something” Kumatetsu pointed out.

“I would not” the tiger scowled.

“And what have you been doing, Byakko?” the monk inquired.

The demon stared; genuinely stunned by the question. “Reading” he answered.

“What about?”

“Whatever the idiot brings me. My first book had history on this boring city, and I’ve been reading books of human wars. It surprises me that idiots like them have only managed to have two world wars, and no countries were obliterated during them” Byakko uttered with heaped disappointment.

“I-I see” the pig bakemono said with a slight sweat. “Anything less... bloody and violent?”

“Very little. I don’t care for fantasy, and if you even think for a second I’d indulge in romance, I’ll devour you whole” the tiger warned.

“It’s true. I’ve just been finding whatever books I can about fighting and death, and he just wastes his time going through them. He still has a pile of ones he hasn’t read yet. At least it keeps him busy and whining less” Kumatetsu sighed while rubbing his belly.

“Better than hearing you whine about how cold it is all the time” the demon snorted as he continued eating.

“The wind has been quite bitter this past month” Hyakushubo conceded as he put down his utensils.

“You just need to put on more coats” Tatara muttered, idly chewing on some fried shrimp.  
“And find a nice fire, or a kotatsu.”

“I told this idiot to get one, but he didn’t listen” Byakko scowled.

“And where would I put it? There’s not a lot of space in here for a hot table” the bear argued.

The pig and the monkey looked around, noting the large number of bottles and other rubbish around. “I feel inclined to side with Kumatetsu here, but not for the same reasoning he has” Hyakushubo admitted.

“Besides, you provide all the warmth I need anyways” the crimson bakemono let slip.

“What?” the simian bakemono gasped.

“What do you mean, Kumatetsu?” the monk inquired.

“Yes, what do you mean moron?” Byakko chuckled.

“I mean I... sometimes go into his room. Fatass here radiates warmth like a fire, so he helps keep me warm” Kumatetsu explained as he realised he was suddenly surrounded by landmines.

“Is that what that is?” the tiger smirked.

“Kumatetsu.... Have... have you been... *lying*, with Byakko?” Hyakushubo asked in disbelief.

“It’s not like that” the bear insisted, waving his arms in criss-cross. “I get tired a lot, and, well, he’s warm. There’s nothing weird about it” he insisted, treading on a landmine.

“A looooooot of people are gonna talk if they hear about this” Tatara mused.

“And... they have been acting as if they are married” the pig surmised.

“There’s nothing going on between us. Right Fatass?” Kumatetsu demanded, turning to the tiger.

Byakko seemed lost in silent contemplation, only for him to grin broadly. "I'm not sure, actually" he declared. "You have been incredibly insistent on getting close to me this entire, miserable season" he recalled. "And I can't even tell how many times I've woken up to find you spooning my side" he added maliciously.

The bear's jaw hung as he felt the judgemental stares of his friends. "I-it's not like that" he repeated helplessly in the wake of knowing smirks.

"Just as well we've given you your privacy, I suppose" the pig asserted.

"It is only polite to leave newlyweds alone after their honeymoon" the monkey added.

Kumatetsu was at such a loss for words, he actively looked towards Byakko for any kind of support. The demon naturally was smiling in such a way that said "Don't look at me. I'm enjoying this as much as they are". "With that said, I believe that maybe we should leave the happy couple to their evening snuggle time" Tatara joked.

"And I do have some evening rituals to complete. Thank you for the meal Kumatetsu, and it was good seeing you again. And Byakko? It was uhh, interesting, getting to know you as well" Hyakushubo said with a grim expression.

The tiger snorted dismissively at the comment, and so he said nothing. "Yeah, see you guys" the bear bakemono said with a half-hearted wave. Once they were gone, he leaned onto the floor and groaned loudly. "Thanks for your help fatass" he grumbled.

"It was foolish of you to rely on me when humiliating you was far more rewarding" Byakko grinned.

"It was humiliating for you too fatass!" Kumatetsu pointed out.

"Perhaps, but it wasn't as humiliating for me as it was for you" the demon chuckled evilly.

"I hate you so much" the bakemono sighed as he stared up at the hill that was his gut. He rubbed it slowly, feeling it shake and shimmy. "Ugh, I'm still hungry" he complained, his stomach **rumbling** in agreement.

"There's still plenty here" Byakko said as he picked up a fried shrimp. "But not for long if you leave me alone with it" he warned.

"Oi! I bought it all, so you better leave me, grff, some!" the bakemono groaned as he struggled back up. His gut rested comfortably in his thick lap as he noticed that, yeah, there was still a lot of food left. "I don't even remember ordering half this stuff" he uttered.

"It's not bad. I prefer fresh, raw meat, but this at least suffices" the tiger said as he grabbed some grilled chicken on a skewer and ate it all in a single bite. "But there's so little it would take it all to satisfy me."

"Not if it satisfies me first" Kumatetsu declared as he piled up his bowl with food.

"Are you challenging me?" Byakko glowered, his fur spiking.

"Yeah, why not? I'm gonna pay you back for embarrassing me like that" the bear heatedly decided as he began cramming food into his mouth.

The demon reached for a plate, when a thought struck him. Leaving it alone, he patiently waited while the bakemono continued to stuff himself. Kumatetsu caught onto this, and he gave the fatty next to him a dubious look as he swallowed. "Why aren't you eating?" he demanded.

"I figured I may as well give you the chance to take the lead. You eat in such small bites it'd be far more humiliating for you if I begin later than you do" the tiger smirked.

The bakemono's face radiated intensely, his teeth grit together. "FINE! Then how about I eat it all and leave you none?! You won't be laughing then" he snarled and started shovelling faster.

Byakko hid the utter delight he was feeling knowing the bait had been taken so easily. He could just sit back as Kumatetsu stuffed his face with the leftover food. Honestly, he was a little impressed by the tenacity in which he ate; though that may as well could have just been his raw stubbornness. Either way, it amused the demon greatly to see more of the bear's belly poke out of his shirt. Little by little, the hem rode up the bakemono's creamy gut as he stuffed it with food. Byakko couldn't help but lick his teeth as, in real time, his prey was stuffing itself for him. And Kumatetsu didn't even notice it as his own middle was filling up his lap, the sides softly curving over the other side of his crossed legs. "Heh" the demon let slip.

"Whaf?" the bakemono demanded, three fried shrimp poking from his mouth.

"You're still eating so slowly. I'm about to start and I'll only need two minutes to beat you" the demon teased.

Steam practically billowed out of Kumatetsu's nostrils, and he swallowed hard. "I'll show you" he grunted as he consumed even faster than before.

Byakko had such a shit-eating grin as the bear's gut grew round and stiff, his insides **groaning** from the obscene amount of food it was being forced to process. And yet the dumbass bakemono kept going, driven by little more than the desire to prove that asshole demon wrong. But it was getting harder, as Kumatetsu's stomach kept stretching to accommodate all the food. It really was starting to hurt a little now, and the constant **grrblrrrggr** noise from his tummy really wasn't helping. He was legitimately puffing as he sampled some grilled fish, but he could barely keep it down before groaning loudly. His arm trembled, his slacken jaw finding it hard to catch onto the shaking fish. "Urrfff" he groaned, and collapsed.

Kumatetsu moaned loudly, the morsel forgotten as his cheeks bulged, and he let loose a loud, gassy, greasy belch. His stomach made another **bbrrrgggllrrrr** noise, and he rubbed his tightly packed, practically spherical gut. "HA HA HAAA! I can't believe that worked" Byakko laughed.

"What... did?" the bakemono grimaced as he tried to avoid hurling.

"Tricking you into overindulging like that. Your ego really is that fragile, isn't it idiot?" the demon teased.



"I... hate... you..." Kumatetsu groaned as his belly continued to ache.

Sliding across the floor, he gingerly reached out and grabbed Byakko's paw. "Rub it... wouldja?" he requested.

"Rub your belly? Are you an infant?" the tiger demanded in disbelief.

"Just rub it fatass. It's your, **UUUUURRRRRPPPPP!!!** It's your fault this happened" Kumatetsu pointed out.

Byakko rolled his eyes as he, for some reason, obliged the idiot. And true to his own expectations, it was quite solid. Protruding at least a foot from the bear's torso, it was a monster of a gut filled up with more than enough food to last him the winter. "You're such a child" the tiger grumbled.

"Pfft! Says the guy who decided making me overeat was his idea of revenge" the bakemono groaned as his belly **RUMBLER** angrily. "We could've just eaten together, but you had to be a big blubbery baby about it" he said accusingly.

"I wonder," Byakko began, "that if I clawed you hard enough, would you burst like a balloon" he wondered.

"Don't even.... Don't even.... Ugh, just don't" Kumatetsu sighed.

The tiger snorted loudly as he continued to rub the idiot's swollen belly. *"We really are some boring married couple, aren't we?"* he lamented. *"This truly is even more humiliating than my banishment. Rubbing the belly of some moron who can be goaded into overeating. Just as well there aren't any other demons around. I could never live down the humiliation."*

"Uggghhh, for this... you're helping me work off the weight. Tomorrow we... we're training!"

Byakko snorted derisively. "Forget it!"

“Then no sake!”

“STOP HOLDING THAT OVER ME!”

“Then we train!”

“FINE!”