

No Regrets

It had been a week since the incident in the market, and the atmosphere in Jutengai has changed drastically over those days. With Iozen hospitalised and Kumatetsu with an injured arm, the citizens of the city held in their hearts a lingering dread of the terrifying demon escaping his bonds from deep within the Lord's palace. Even now, the great rabbit (who I've only just found out is called Soshi) stood on the outlook of said-palace, gently stroking his beard with a dour expression on his face. "What a mess this has been; and when it was going so well too" he said to himself, deep in thought.

He really, truly thought that Kumatetsu had been making headway with Byakko, who in turn, could have been making headway with him back. But as it's gone, perhaps there wasn't much hope for a redemption after all. "This has gone on long enough" he decided, turning about to one of his guards. "Find someone to send a message to Kumatetsu, would you? Let him know that I require his presence here as soon as possible" he requested.

One of the guards (an elephant bakemono) saluted and went to find a messenger. Nodding, Soshi turned back to his beloved city, and stroked his beard again. "This negative feeling must expire, one way, or another" he said quietly to himself. *"I just wonder if perhaps I put too much faith into Kumatetsu, Byakko, and Iozen...."*

The bear, meanwhile, was sleeping comfortably into the afternoon. His shoulder was still draped in bandages, though he could swear he could still see the bastard's teeth marks through them. He simply couldn't get the feeling of those crushing jaws out of his mind. It wasn't some kind of playful or even desperate bite; it was an action meant to break something in two. To crush. Kumatetsu shuddered in his sleep, rolling onto his side "GAH!" he squealed, lurching upwards with a stabbing pain in his shoulder.

Huffing in shock, the bakemono placed a hand to his stinging shoulder, hoping for it to calm down. "Damn him" he growled, falling back onto his couch/bed.

Fifty times a damn day! Was he ever going to ever get a decent sleep? Well, he was up now so whatever! Flinging his feet to the floor, the bear hunched over himself, a cheek resting on

his hand. "Damn him" he repeated, gritting his injured hand and ignoring the pain in his shoulder.

Why didn't he stop it? Why did he think Fatass was going to be good, even damn once? Now everything's in the shit because he thought lozen wasn't going to be a total jackass either. Why did he let either of those dumbasses fight? Now one's locked up, and the other is on his ass recovering from life-threatening injuries. It wasn't supposed to be Fatass who was meant to kick his ass! "Kumatetsu, are you up?" Hyakushubo called from the front door.

"Yeah" the bear grunted, rubbing at his shoulder.

"You need to stop touching it, or the stitches will come loose" the pig warned as he came in with a small bag of groceries.

"Probably already done that from rolling about in my sleep" Kumatetsu grumbled.

"Oh! I see Kumatetsu's mood has improved" Tatara chirped, his head poking through a door.

"It'll get better when I get these damn bandages off so I can start training again. I got a lot of lost time to catch back up on" the bear complained.

"I'd just enjoy the time off for once," the monkey commented, "though not too much. You'd probably end up looking like Byakko if you slack off too much" he snickered.

His smirk was wiped off as Kumatetsu bore his teeth. "Tatara, help me with the shopping" the monk sternly ordered.

"Well look, can't we joke about it yet? I mean that jerk lozen did kinda get what was coming to him. I mean seriously, did you see him gore Byakko? I didn't even know he could do that to anyone!" the monkey exclaimed.

"Shut up Tatara" Hyakushubo and Kumatetsu said.

“Fine” the simian bakemono said with a shrug.

“Honestly,” the bear spoke up, “I agree. I didn’t think straight-laced, by-the-books, goodie two shoes lozen could even hurt someone like that.”

“Do you blame yourself for what happened?” Hyakushubo asked.

“Should I?” the ursine bakemono questioned.

“Absolutely” the pig answered. “Byakko was your responsibility and you should have stopped the situation from escalating” he chided.

“What the hell was I supposed to do?!” Kumatetsu snarled. “Fatass had only just insulted lozen to his face in front of everyone. And while I would loooove to see the bastard taken down a peg, I’m the minority there. I couldn’t stop either of them even if I wanted too!”

“And that’s the problem! You didn’t! You should have stopped him from chasing after the boys in the first place” Hyakushubo elaborated.

Gritting his teeth, the bear childishly said nothing and laid down on his couch-bed. “Look, something is seriously wrong with him. You’ve probably seen it. He’s freaking crazy!” he pointed out.

“He went crazy ever since he humiliated himself by getting hit by the pot he threw” Tatara pointed out.

“After accusing me of blinding him on purpose. But he was going ballistic even before that! Know what I think? Demons are just freaking crazy!” Kumatetsu decided.

Knock knock knock!

"Come in" Hyakushubu called.

The door opened, and a deer bakemono in messenger's regalia entered. "Kumatetsu! The Lord has requested your presence at the palace" they declared.

"Can it wait? My arm still freaking hurts" the ursine bakemono complained.

"He uhh, hold on a minute" the messenger mumbled, grabbing a scroll and reading it. "He said uhh, let's see here. The Lord says that "If your mouth functions enough to complain, then you can clearly function enough to come to the palace"" they recited.

"Jeez, he's being sarcastic at me? Wasn't Fatass doing it enough punishment?" Kumatetsu whined and got up, grabbing his only shirt.

"Do you need to us to come with you?" Hyakushubo asked.

"The Lord has not requested your presence. Only Kumatetsu's" the deer bakemono reported.

"Fine, I'm coming damn it" the bear sighed as he followed the messenger out.

The pig watched him go, and a worried crease appeared on his brow. "This is going to get much worse; I can feel it."

The walk was long and arduous, made worse by the jackass messenger springing about on those stupid deer legs of his. Regardless, he made it to the palace and was brought to the Lord's cosy little meeting room. Resting his butt on a cushion, all it took was for Kumatetsu to blink, and the rabbit was sitting comfortably opposite him. "Thank you for coming at such short notice, Kumatetsu" Soshi politely said.

“You didn’t give me much choice Lord. I was still resting after the surgery” the bear retorted with a mix of petulance and respect.

“Yes, quite the operation, I heard. Izen himself has only just been discharged back home, though he is still bedridden” the rabbit informed.

“Well getting your chest cut up will do that” Kumatetsu rudely pointed out.

“Byakko meanwhile.... Well, his resilience is staggering. Truly there is much to know about demons” the rabbit mused.

“He’s okay? Didn’t Izen cut his stomach open?” the bear asked, trying not to sound too interested.

“Superficial damage to his abdominal region, but still a deep cut nonetheless. He is, of course, the reason you are here. He’s refused to speak to anyone, but I felt he may speak to you” Soshi explained.

“And why do you need him to talk?”

“There is something I need to hear from him, and only him. So if you would, Kumatetsu?” the rabbit asked, already waiting by the door.

“How the heck does he even do that?” the bear wondered under his breath.

The dungeon was something that has gone unused for a very, very long time. It was dank, and barely illuminated by dying torches lining the walls. There were many cells along one side of the wall, all of them in some state of disarray and destruction, save for the big one, at the very end. Kumatetsu’s shoulder started to ache more the closer he got, a cold feeling in his belly sending chills through him. Was he... afraid? “Here we are” the Lord declared cheerfully, unaffected by the gloom as he and the bear stopped before a cell he never wanted to return to.

It was the same cell Byakko had been kept in when he arrived, albeit with even more chains this time around. It was like a spider's web of metal, all intertwining with countless shackles binding the demon to one spot. He didn't even react as they approached, though his hair started to bristle as he smelled the moron's presence. Kumatetsu naturally didn't pick on this, as in the gloom he noticed one thing: "How the hell have you lost so much weight?!" he exclaimed.

No longer the literal mountain of fat he was before, Byakko was now far trimmer, albeit still a bit on the porky side with a barrel-like belly resting on his knees. "You've been feeding him yeah?" crimson bakemono whispered.

"We have, yes; truly he is such a medical marvel to have healed in such a short amount of time. The wound practically closed overnight" Soshi marvelled, noting the scar spread across the tiger's portly middle.

"You're using him to get to me?" the demon asked in a dry, husky voice.

"So you've remembered your tongue have you?" the rabbit inquired sternly.

"Why are you here moron? To mock me?" Byakko demanded of the bear.

"He is here because I felt he may draw out your better nature, Byakko" the Lord explained.

"What better nature?" Kumatetsu snorted, only to get bopped on the head for it. "Ouch!"

"It won't work. I know why you're here. But you won't get fealty or subservience from me. So the answer to your question is "no"" the demon declared.

"Is that your final answer Byakko?" Soshi asked, sounding hurt. "Surely you must feel some remorse?"

"I don't, nor will I ever feel remorse old man. "No", will be the only answer I have. So get it over with" Byakko growled.

"Very well. I agree that this has proceeded for long enough. Thank you for your assistance Kumatetsu, but you may leave now" the rabbit said.

"Wait, what's going on here?" the bear demanded.

"I said you may leave, Kumatetsu" Soshi repeated sternly.

"Sir, I have always obeyed you, but not this time. What's happening? I know there's some deal going on between you two, but what is he talking about? What is he saying no too?" the crimson bakemono demanded.

The old rabbit stared into Kumatetsu's eyes, his countless years expressed across the wrinkles marring what had once been a young face. This old face sighed. "There were conditions to our arrangement, Kumatetsu. The arrangement... that staved off Byakko's execution" he answered.

The bear took a few steps back, a chill running down him as he stared into Soshi's cold expression. "That was a thing?" he gasped.

"It was considered the moment he arrived here" the lapin bakemono answered, with a sad aside glance to the demon. "I thought, however, that even a demon could be redeemed. That he too could learn things like friendship, love, and remorse. Part of our deal was that he would be executed if he could not feel remorse for harming a member of this city. With his maiming of Iozen, and him now refusing to apologize for it, the arrangement is now null and void."

"Wh... why didn't you tell me?" Kumatetsu demanded. "I thought if he messed up he'd go back to a cell or something!"

"Because I felt with that sort of lingering threat you'd do something foolish, like try to force his growth. I understand you have some emotional connection to him Kumatetsu, but this decision is final and immutable" Soshi declared.

“Immutawha? Look sir, how about I ask him? Hey Fatass?! You sorry for hurting Pork Roast?” the crimson bakemono chuckled anxiously.

Byakko kept his head lowered, and said nothing. “ANSWER ME FATASS!” Kumatetsu screamed, rattling on the bars as he did so.

“ENOUGH!” A wave blasted at the bear’s fur, putting it on ends as the rabbit regained his composure. “You may leave now Kumatetsu. What happens next is of no concern to you” he stated.

“Fine” the ursine bakemono said petulantly, and left.

Soshi sighed in disappointment as he stood with his side to the cell. “Truly, I had hoped you could be different Byakko. That there was something inside you besides anger and fear. It disappoints me to know I was wrong” he regretfully said to the silent tiger. “Your execution will be in a few days. I am not using this as a threat, but perhaps you can use the time to re-evaluate what it is you want, Byakko.”

The demon said nothing as the rabbit left, taking a silent march down the empty hallway until he reached the end, the door being opened by a guard and then slammed shut behind him. And with the coast clear, Kumatetsu snuck out from under the only intact bed found in any of the cells. Rolling out, he stormed right back to the cell door and got as close as he could. “What the hell Fatass?” he growled.

The tiger looked up just enough that the yellows of his eyes could be seen beyond his bangs. “What the hell do you want?” he snarled.

“I’m asking the damn questions here! And I’m asking you what the hell you’re doing?! You can get a free ride out of here and you choose to die instead?!” the bakemono yelled, his fists banging on the cell door.

“What the hell do you even care?” the tiger asked, his head lowering back down.

“What do I- WHAT THE HELL DO I CARE?!?! Oh, I don’t know, maybe because you’ve been with me for months now?! Staying at my house? Eating my damn food? Drinking my damn sake?!”

“The house, food, and sake you were ordered to share in order to qualify as a candidate for lordship?” the tiger pointed out.

“THAT’S BESIDES THE DAMN POINT! I thought that, maybe after everything we went through, you’d stop being such a DAMN! SELFISH! BABY!” Kumatetsu shrieked, banging his fists on the cell.

“None of that mattered, *ever*. Whatever you think we had meant NOTHING TO ME!” Byakko roared. “THERE IS NOTHING BETWEEN US! NOTHING!”

The bear’s fur bristled, and he did everything he could to hold back tearing that damn door off and throttling that moron. “BULLSHIT! You’re just doing this because you’re so fucking scared of not being a fucking asshole for once in your damn miserable life!” he snarled. “YOU KEEP RANTING ABOUT “BeInG a DeMoN” BECAUSE YOU’RE TOO DAMN SCARED TO ADMIT YOU MIGHT LIKE IT HERE!”

He didn’t even see him move, but in an instant Byakko had gotten up and charged forwards, breaking some chains but being held back by others. And it wasn’t just the movement but his monstrous roar that caused Kumatetsu to jump back, a hand instantly going to his shoulder. The demon, huffing furiously, stared at the bear. And the bear stared at the demon, and then to his shoulder which he hastily removed his hand from. “Coward. Just like the rest of your detestable race. One bite and you’re terrified for your life as well. Get out of my sight” Byakko said with unnatural calm, and then went back to sitting.

“FINE!” Kumatetsu bellowed. “DIE THEN! SEE WHAT I CARE!”

Storming off, the bear was finding it harder and harder to control his breath. The rapid and constant expansion of his chest was pulling at his bandages, but he didn’t care at all. That stupid damn moron. That stupid SELFISH moron. “AAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!!!!”

BANG!

Masonry fell from the roof, bouncing off the bakemono's head as he stood there with his fist centred in a massive crater in the wall. Bits of rock and dirt fell as he pulled his bloodied hand free, and stormed off out of the door, not giving a damn about the guards. And once he had left, Soshi walked slowly out of one of the cells. Stroking his beard, he regarded where Kumatetsu had gone, and where he had been. "I wonder..." he said quietly. "Did I maybe push them too hard...?"