

A bead of cold sweat trickled down the side of my cheek.

Holy shit, was my heart racing. What was I even doing here again? Facing *the* Bishamonten of Kyushu alone? None of the pillars were people you fucked with. But among them, there was one that all of us small fries agreed to stay away from. I gotta be crazy.

"What's the matter?" I asked, cracking a strained smile. "Ya sca— hnngh?!"

Bishamonten had torpedoed right towards me. I barely swung Sacchan out in time to meet her knee. An explosion centered around us rocked the surroundings. Every floating paper lantern in the chamber blew outside. Many of the cherry blossom petals were knocked loose and showered around us.

It was hard to push back against her raw strength. I had both hands on Sacchan, but she blocked my blow from just a raised knee. Her arms were down to the sides, like she couldn't be bothered to use them.

"What are you doing here, Micchi? Ruining the little paradise I have created for myself?" she asked, glaring at me like I had kicked down her sandcastle.

"You got my pals, ya fucking shotacon. Hand them back, and I'll be on my way." I growled.

"I don't think I will." Kaoru kicked me crashing into a tree. I dove away as a foot shattered the trunk into bark and splinters.

There was no getting a read on her. I couldn't tell if she was physically enhancing herself like Anya. She certainly fought like her though.

Every barrier of ice I created, she tore through it like tissue paper. Every hit I tried to land, she blocked with her legs. The longer this fight went on, the more my torn up body was exhausting me. That fucking azure snake venom sure did a number on me if I could barely stand my ground.

"Must be easy to act tough after you sent assassins after us. Can you really even call this a fight?" I asked.

Kaoru crossed her arms. "A path paved in blood is no path at all— it is just a pool of destruction. The road must always have a beginning and an end. Where does your path end, Micchi?"

"Spare me the cliché bullshit. The fuck is that even supposed to mean?" I fired back.

"I was raised to lie, cheat, and steal to get what I want. No trick is too cheap. No bar too low. My father wanted me to lead my family. Instead, I killed him and chose to demolish the Tono Clan. What am I trying to say? I'm telling you that my path has already been paved, and now I will fill an ocean to keep what I've created." Her piercing eyes froze me in place. Or maybe, I was too petrified with fear to move.

Bishamonten walked up to me, leaned in close to my ear and whispered, "Tell me. What are you fighting for now? Are you trying to throw everything away for some petty revenge?"

Whatever kept me from moving was no longer affecting me anymore. I thought I swung Sacchan. But instead of my bat connecting with my opponent's face, I was flying through the air. A dark sky dotted with hundreds of stars and paper lanterns flew past me. The pagoda was getting further and smaller from view.

I crashed in the middle of the street, the impact leaving a crater in the ground. An old man riding pulling on a cart peeked down.

"Ya wanna get out of here..." I warned him.

The geezer's attention was caught by a glint in the sky flying towards me. I quickly got to my feet only to be knocked onto my back again. Bishamonten stood over me and grinded a sandal onto my shoulder.

"Maybe you could have put up a fight if you just let the mutt die," she taunted.

I grabbed her ankle and squeezed as hard as I could. It was probably in vain. There was no strength left. My arms were limp noodles, and my consciousness was slipping.

"Difference between us... I don't let those close to me die," I said.

"Life isn't so fair as to let you decide who lives or dies. It takes from you until there is nothing left." Bishamonten's fists clenched. Her nails dug so hard into her palms they began to bleed. That definitely hit a nerve, but I didn't know if I pissed her off or what. She jumped out of the crater, leaving me lying there hurting like a truck had hit me.

The Kaoru from my world wasn't always called Bishamonten. She got that title sometime in her third year of high school. Everyone knew about the yakuza delinquent. There were even rumors that she lost someone close to her. I wondered if that was why she turned into this monster.

"I get it. You wanted someone I cared about to die just like you, huh? Ya wanted me to feel that same pain. Then what? Become like you? Give me a fucking break." I got to my feet to face her. If I was going down, I'd go down standing and not on my back. Loraine was waiting for me back home. She'd scold me for being late.

"I wasn't the one who called the hit. Though I suspect you will be surprised to know it was Ashura." Her words took the breath right out of me.

"Ashura— That's Chika's title... What's she got to do with this? You telling me she tried to kill Loraine and Kawa?!" I screamed.

"I think it's about time I end this. After you, the Lion is next." Bishamonten raised her unclothed arm to the sky. A bolt of lightning struck the ground next to her and left behind a savage-looking spear that had a blade on both ends. Black flames consumed her entire arm as

she wielded it, changing the color of her burning ribbons as well. "Behold, the Tono Clan's most prized heirloom that came with me to this world— Kamigoroshi. A reminder of what I lost, and what I will gain using it."

Damn. You couldn't leave a girl hanging like that. I gotta know. I fucking missed and hated Chika so much that I'd kill to see her again. But before that...

There was one thing I wasn't going to forgive.

"Beat me to a bloody pulp all you want. I don't care. You lay a finger on Yui, or anyone I know without my permission, I will fuck you up!" I lifted Sacchan and summoned all three elements to empower it.

"Brave, for someone who looks like they could barely take another step," she said.

"Shut your resting bitch-faced trap." I raced out and put all I had into an overhead swing and slammed Sacchan down on her head. She blocked the blow with her spear, but the force created an impression into the ground at her feet.

"Who are you to tell a god to stop talking?" The blade of her spear passed through Sacchan. A chill ran up my spine. I broke away from the deadlock just as she carved the space in front of us.

I looked at Sacchan to see if any damage was done, but it was perfectly fine. Her Kamigoroshi went through my bat like it was a ghost or something. I got a bad feeling if that thing nicked me, a bleeding paper cut was the least of my worries.

How the fuck was I supposed to fight her?

"I came to plaaaaaaayy!"

My ears twitched. A high-pitched screech I couldn't pinpoint was growing louder. Bishamonten heard it, too. She glanced around, keeping her eyes peeled.

The whole street exploded with a thunderous crash, forcing Bishamonten to dash back to avoid the attack. From the dust, Yui somersaulted back to my side and threw her arms around me.

"Hiya, Anego. I missed ya. Sorry I got caught up in some traps." She grinned, haggard and out of breath.

Unable to contain my own smile, I bonked her on the head. "Took ya long enough."

"Whoa!" Yui pointed at Bishamonten like she was reacting to a hyped-up character's entrance from a movie. "What's with that whole cliché villain vibe she got going on? I wanna look that cool when I come into the scene."

"Careful. Her spear can pass through objects. Almost cut me in two," I said.

"The two runts of the litterbox are together at last. Unfortunately, I've played around for too long. Yonnu is waiting for me." Bishamonten changed her stance. The black flames on her body created a projection of the actual god behind her as she reared back to throw her spear.

Yui and I stood our ground, but even we weren't sure if it could be blocked.

"C-Can we dodge that?" Yui asked.

"You can't," Bishamonten answered, then threw the spear, breaking the sound barrier and tearing a trench into the ground as it fired towards us.

I tried to carry us both away, but my legs locked up from the venom, and we were both caught by the blast.