

Kai took a breath when he entered the forest.

Really, there was little need for him to do so. He was unlikely to run into any significant trouble, and if he did, a little more air would not really help. But he took the breath regardless.

The monk was heading into Isawa Mori. He was currently on his way to the western border of Phoenix territory, aiming for the periphery of Dragon lands. The next sign of civilization was probably a few days worth of travel away, but Kai did not mind. He had been accustomed to the travelling life for a long time.

Branches came up overhead. The once-bright world became just a little more shrouded. Light peeked in through the canopy above. He was solidly in Isawa Mori now.

Kai just pulled his cloak together and continued walking.

In a way, it was almost disappointing that he would not be able to make the most use out of this trip as others of his clan might. Isawa Mori was well-known for its rare woods that were critical to the manufacturing of certain spell scrolls, but Kai was a monk, not a shugenja. He could only scarcely hear the kami on the wind. True, he had other mystical talents, but that was one magic that Kai could not touch.

The Espurr's mind slipped from the topic quickly. Really, he was not very upset by it anymore.

Kai maintained a steady pace even as the undergrowth grew thicker around him. The woods became ever more shaded as Kai penetrated deeper into the heart of Isawa Mori. Kai guessed that he was about an hour into the forest, mostly through intuition. It was difficult to judge the time of day by the light, as the canopy was thick. It would likely take at least another day's travel to cross the forest.

The monk kicked a few rocks along the path absentmindedly as he continued his journey. In a way, he thought it would be good to count his blessings. None of the Isawa he had met on the way to the forest had been more cold than they usually were. Typically an Asako entering onto Isawa lands would get at least some form of harassment. Particularly when said Asako was a Henshin. The Fortunes may have smiled upon him, Kai thought.

Night crept up upon the traveler quickly. The foliage only grew more dense the further he traveled into Isawa Mori, and little light penetrated the canopy above. An hour or so after the forest grew particularly dark, Kai decided to start looking for a place to camp. The monk prepared to head off of the dirt trail he had been following for so long, until he noticed something.

Was that a silhouette up ahead?

Kai continued along the road, increasing his pace. The...figure grew more distinct as he approached, albeit only somewhat so. They looked like a traveler of some sort, much like him. They had a cloak on, much like he did. It was somewhat difficult to tell if they were a samurai or a heimin, though that would likely not matter in the end. He could bear a few insults from an Isawa.

It was when the figure grew clear that Kai stopped in his tracks.

The person was tall, a good few feet taller than a typical man was. They were utterly covered by a long,

flowing robe, though they appeared to be bipedal. Though Kai, squinted, he could not make out any flesh beyond the clothing of the being. A plain white mask covered the face. Most importantly, though, there was a presence behind the figure, some numinosity that frightened Kai as much as it awed him. Whoever they were, this person was not mortal.

“Greetings, Asako Kai.” the figure inclined their head forward slightly. This did not reassure Kai.

“I know you are not a man.” Kai said promptly. He held his ground, not letting his face expose any hint of weakness. “How did you know my name?”

The figure shook their head, and Kai got the impression of a laugh, though no sound issued forth from the being.

“Names are not the most difficult of things to know, little traveler.” the being said. “That being said, I can understand why your ability in that area may be hampered at the moment. That is why I will share my name.”

Kai held still for a moment. This could decide a great many things.

“...I am Jurojujin.”

Kai blinked.

The Fortune of Longevity?

Kai froze for several moments. He was not really sure about how to react. Mortals meetings gods tended to have that response. Jurojujin waited patiently for a little while, before the Espurr recovered his composure.

“It...is an honor to make your acquaintance, good Fortune.” Kai immediately dropped to the ground, bowing, the reaction more automatic than anything.

“As it is to meet you, little monk.” Jurojujin bowed his head forward slightly. Kai got the faintest impression of laughter, though he was sure that he heard no sounds.

“...Indeed.” Kai muttered, blinking a little. “Is...is there a service I can render unto you?” the Espurr asked.

“There are precious few services you can really offer me, and I would prefer to keep those to myself.” Jurojujin said. “It is I who seeks to render service.”

“...What?” Kai asked. This question came out rather honestly, actually.

“I have come to see the monk so far along the path to divinity. I seek to offer him a blessing.” Jurojujin spoke wordlessly.

Kai's heart seized for a moment. He, supposed he should have expected it. But for a Fortune to acknowledge the Path of Man...it was something.

Though, why him? Kai thought to himself for a few moments. He had learned the four Riddles, yes, and he could count himself as fairly proficient in the Mysteries, but he certainly did not feel like one of the greatest Henshin out there. Really, he could think of some fellow monks who were far more like kami than he was.

Still, he was being offered a blessing from one of the Fortunes. Kai did not think he could muster up the will to reject it even if he wanted to.

“I...thank you for this honor, good Jurojujin.” Kai simply continued his bow. He could only see the dirt, not the god.

“Very well, then.” Jurojujin spoke with the slightest hint of amusement.

Kai waited. He, he was not really sure how this sort of thing tended to wo-

“It is done.”

What?

Kai looked up, only faintly realizing that he had broken a taboo in doing so. The Fortune was still there, and everything seemed fairly...normal? Kai opened his mouth to ask Jurojujin what had happened, before his voice explained it.

“I...I'm a child?!” Kai exclaimed in utter confusion. Even in the night, Kai could make out the transformation of his body. He looked to be a couple of years old, with short, stubby legs and the proportions of a kitten. His kimono had disappeared, though he felt no colder than he had before. He still had some clothing on though, at least. His unmentionables were obscured by a thick layer of cloth over his loins. It looked like hi-

Wait, no.

There was no way.

That was a diaper!

Kai's gaze shot up toward Jurojujin. The little kitten was on the verge of tears. He mumbled a little, but could emanate no words. His eyes did most of the pleading for him.

“Why are you sad, child?” the Fortune tilted his head slightly. “You have received a blessing from a Fortune. Now, you will live longer than most men will.” Jurojujin explained plainly.

“But, but, but....am...” Kai made out a few words, before he just gestured toward his body. A few tears were coming down now.

Jurojujin's head tilted again, though this time, it did so in a different way. The Fortune lowered to the ground more, as though he had kneeled upon the ground, though Kai could still not tell what rested beneath his robe. He looked down at the little Espurr, and Kai found his breaths stilling. His eyes were...calming.

"I know, I know, child." Jurojujin shook his head, almost somber. "To tell the truth, you are performing a greater service for me than I am for you. I have been wanting to do this to you for quite a while."

"...Me?" Kai asked guardedly after a few moments of sniffing.

"Indeed. To see a Henshin aspire after divinity, it is very inspiring, even if you err more often than not. You remind me of some of those little godlings one rarely sees these days...ah, well." Jurojujin shook his head, almost entirely to himself. "In any case, I only wanted to mess with you for a little while."

Jurojujin began to rise back up, as though standing. Kai looked on at the sight for a moment. For some reason, it looked strange.

"We are no longer in Isawa Mori. I have an estate in this world. Once you find me, I will return you to your normal age." Jurojujin said. "I am eager to see what little adventures you get up to in the meantime..." Jurojujin said, and for a moment, Kai felt a smile.

Silently, the Fortune began to turn around. Jurojujin began to move forward into the dark forest ahead. Within an instant, he had faded from sight.

"W-Wait! Jurojujin-sama!" Kai cried out, running forth as little. After a few steps, he lost his balance, and tumbled forward onto the ground. Kai just held there, crying for a long, long while.

Normally, Kai would not be affected by many of the trials of the world. Even the world of gods was as phenomenal as the world of men, after all. But for a few painful minutes, Kai could not focus on that. He felt alone and little and afraid.

Eventually, Kai managed to look back out at the world. The Espurr began to stand up on unsteady legs, wiping away his tears as best as he could manage. The forest around looked...different. Trees seemed to stand more straight. There was a faint mist, and there was enough light to see by even though it was in the dead of night. Kai knew instinctively that he was in the other world.

Slowly, Kai started to walk. He went along the edge of the dirt path at a glacial pace. Every so often, he would hear a twig snap, or leaves rustle, and he would have to force himself to continue onwards. He forced his legs to keep going because they would stop, otherwise.

What was he going to do?

He was not on Earth anymore. He tread on the hallowed ground of spirits. And most importantly, he was a mortal. Kai figured that it would be trivial for any kami he encountered to discern his true nature. And that would render him easy prey. Really, the fact that he was a toddler now paled in comparison to his mortality alone. There were just so many ways for him to be tricked or trapped or killed or damned-

Kai shook his head. He knew he had to focus.

Kai continued along the path, toddling forward as best as he could manage. His pace had increased slightly, and his eyes scanned the environment constantly. After a few more minutes of travel, Kai noticed a series of lights in the distance. They appeared to be grouped closely together, and they did not appear to be moving. Perhaps it was a fixed structure, Kai thought. The Espurr went still for a few minutes, entering thought. Reaching civilization of some sort was his best bet, he figured. And

Jurojujin had mentioned that he held an estate in this world. Kai would need to figure out where that was located, and communicating with the inhabitants of the realm seemed like one his best options for accomplishing that. And yet Kai was still pensive. If the lights did indicate a structure, he still did not know if the inhabitants would be friendly. Hell, he did not even know how he would question them. Being a child would almost certainly render that task more difficult. Still, though, heading towards the lights would probably be his best bet. Out here, he would be vulnerable to just about any being that came across him. At least with the building he might have a better chance of not meeting entities who were hostile. With trepidation, Kai began to approach the lights in the distance.

It was after a few minutes of walking that Kai was able to get a better look. He could tell now that the lights were coming from a building some sort, though he could not make out much of it beyond a hedge that encircled it. It appeared to be a standard little estate constructed out of wood, and the roof was very much recognizable. Further along the path, Kai could spy a crossroads. Three other paths branched off from the one he was currently travelling on. It looked like the path to the right led to the estate. The Espurr began to toddle along a little more quickly, then, trying to get a better view of the building. After several seconds of effort, Kai was able to obtain that view.

There at the end of a little path ahead of him was a low wooden gate. Beyond it rested a small manor, with paper lanterns dangling by the front door. Kai was about to step toward the gate, when he heard something behind him.

“Who is that?” a deep voice muttered.

Kai froze.

For a few moments, his mind raced.

Then the other voice came.

“Ah, just looks like some kid. Guess he is heading for the house as well.”

Finally, Kai managed to turn his head back. Behind him, he saw a large, hulking figure, along with a more slight and spindly one. The one to the left appeared almost like one of those temple guardians that stood outside some monasteries. The one on the right, on the other hand, looked like a man formed of spindly sticks. He scarcely had a face, per se. His head was just a long, tapered piece of wood. Both of the spirits walked across the crossroads from the road behind Kai, passing by the Espurr on their way to the gate of the estate. Both peered down at Kai as they passed, though their pace remained the same. Kai shrank back, unsure of what to do and more than a little scared.

“Hmm. Strange to see a child out here. Perhaps he is from Tengoku.” the larger spirit mused.

“Maybe.” the stick-man replied. “He certainly looks like he is from there.”

“Hmm.” the larger spirit grunted.

Suddenly, the hulking spirit fixed their gaze upon Kai. The Espurr felt his heart stop, briefly. He looked at him deeply, and yet it did not seem as though his eyes rested upon any of his features in particular. After several long seconds, the spirit spoke.

“Yeah, guessing the whelp is a Tengoku godling who got lost. His aura is a weak little thing.” the spirit shook his head, beginning to turn back toward his partner.

“That seems to happen a lot, does it not?” the stick-man spoke, and a laugh like whistling reeds emanated from him. “And they complain about us...ah, oh well. I suppose it does not really matter what Spirit Realm he comes from. Here, friend, we are almost at the party...”

“Indeed so.” the larger spirit responded.

Without further ado, the two beings continued on their path towards the gate. After a few seconds, they had entered the estate, and after a few more seconds, they had opened the front door of the house and stepped inside. Kai just stood blankly for several seconds. It hit him rather suddenly.

The Riddles, that was it!

He walked the Path of Man, exercising the hidden powers of the soul and striving towards transcendence of the mortal condition. He must have awakened his divine nature enough that he appeared to truly be a spirit! He would not need to fear appearing as a mortal in this world, for he truly was divine!

Kai exulted in the feeling for a little while, before he remembered the other parts.

And, well...he appeared to be a weak child divinity. Apparently, not having finished walking the Path of Man led to one appearing like that, at least under these circumstances. Still, though, Kai was really rather excited.

The little Espurr walked toward the gate, carefully unlatching it and beginning to step inside the estate. The estate appeared much like those held by the samurai-caste. It was large, but not overly so. It looked like the kind of estates that the landed gentry possessed. Around, there appeared to be a small garden, but Kai could not make out much in the darkness. Kai's gaze focused on the house itself, regardless. With unsteady steps, the Espurr began to make his way up the low stairs to the door. Once he had reached it, the monk began to push away at the door, trying to get it to move. After a few seconds of significant effort, the Espurr was able to push the paper screen open enough that he could step inside.

There, in the house, Kai's eyes went wide in amazement.

Before him stood an interior fit for any lord. Before him, a small hall led into a central meeting area, where beings of all stripes sat, spoke, laughed, and drank. A little to the left, a set of stairs led to the second story of the house. To the right and left, side passages led further around the house. Kai could spy rows upon rows of rice-paper doors set aside one another in each of the halls. Throughout the whole place, there was a flurry of activity. Strange entities went to and fro from various halls and chambers. Some were peculiar, like the two spirits Kai had spied before, but others appeared like relatively normal men and women. Few of them took notice of him.

Kai just stood there in shock for a little while, before he managed to close the door and step inside.

Kai went for the central chamber first. It seemed to be his...best bet, he supposed. Granted, he was not quite sure what information he had to base that supposition off of. In either case, he supposed it would be good to get to business quickly.

The Espurr carefully toddled into the central room, taking care to avoid various passersby who did not seem to notice him. It was a bit hard to get a grasp on the room, given how short he was, but Kai was able to spy a low table where various men were talking and laughing with one another. Sake glasses rested on the table, and Kai could get a whiff of alcohol in the air. Kai hesitated for a moment, but eventually, he managed to walk up toward the table. Some of the men looked at him – he could spy a Sableye's gemstone eyes fix tightly onto him – but he addressed the man at the center regardless.

“Hello, sir.” Kai gave a little bow, which was able to actually perform decently. “Are you the owner of this household?” Kai asked. He figured he should go through the pleasantries before actually asking his question.

The man just eyed him curiously for a moment, a faint grin forming on his face. He did respond, though.

“Nope.” the man stated, taking another drink from his cup of sake. “He's off in his room. Few see him. If you are worried about coming here without exchanging greetings with him, you don't need to be, kid.” the man said. A few of his friends looked as though they were suppressing giggles.

“What are you doing here anyway, kid?” the man put down his cup. He began to eye the Espurr a little more intently, now, and Kai felt some trepidation.

“Umm...just looking around.” Kai managed. He fiddled nervously with his paws behind his back.

“Hmph.” the man sank back a bit, his gaze beginning to wander.

“Well you're not my responsibility. Go find someone else if you need something.”

The man turned back toward his friends, who were not even bothering to stifle their laughs now. Kai just sort of quietly walked back, feeling rather embarrassed. The kitten took a look around the room, now feeling significantly more lost than he had before. Who would even be a good person to ask? There were some old guys playing Go at a small table in the corner, and there were some ladies discussing matters behind flickering fans, and there were some folk talking quietly around the household altar and there were just generally a lot of people in here. It, it was a bi-

“Who is that little guy!”

Kai turned around in confusion. And then his eyes widened.

A Braixen in an orange kimono was almost running toward him, the stick set in her tail fully alight. The woman reached Kai after only a few moments, the little Espurr stumbling backwards a little from sheer surprise. Kai did not have much time to react before the woman's voice came back once more.

“I have not seen you around here before, little guy!” the Braixen lady smiled gently down at Kai, beginning to rest upon her knees so as to be closer to the Espurr before her. Despite that measure, she still towered above Kai.

“H-Hello...” Kai mumbled. He was not quite sure what was coming over him, but he suddenly felt very overwhelmed.

The woman looked upon Kai for a moment more, her smile dimming, but not fading.

“Ah, apologies. It is just rare to see baby boys like you around here.” the woman said. “I am Isaki. What is your name?” she looked upon him expectantly. Somehow, Kai found that this look felt better to gaze upon.

“...Kai.” the Espurr nodded his head as he gave his response.

“It is good to meet you, Kai.” Isaki said softly, nodding to herself.

The Braixen's gaze grew more fixed before she asked her next question.

“Are you here with you parents, Kai?” Isaki asked. Kai thought she looked a bit different when she asked this question.

“...No.” Kai answered honestly, shaking his head a little.

“I see.” Isaki's expression dimmed slightly. Her voice returned soon after, however. “Well then, Kai, why are you here?” she asked.

“I am...looking for someone.” Kai said.

“Your mother?” Isaki asked, her head tilting.

“No.” Kai responded, shaking his head. The kitten prepared himself before he spoke once more.

“I am looking for Jurojujin.”

The Braixen stared at him for several seconds. Kai could not quite tell if she was puzzled or not, but her voice did eventually return.

“Well, luckily for you, I just happen to know where exactly he lives!” Isaki spoke.

“You, you do?” the edges of Kai's mouth turned upwards.

“Indeed I do. In fact, I can take you right to where he lives! Right after we take care of some things, first...” Isaki spoke, grinning a little bit to herself.

“...What.” Kai spoke blankly.

“I have to make sure you are all set for the trip, silly! I do not know how long you have been wandering alone, but the wilderness is no place for a child like you...” Isaki tutted a little, though not towards Kai.

Kai yelped a little bit as he was suddenly picked up the Braixen. The Espurr quickly noted that her fur was very warm.

“Don't worry, I am going to take good care of you on the way. Now, I think we should probably get to work right away.” Isaki said.



Kai just sort of held there in Isaki's grasp as she walked toward the stairs. They passed by a few other spirits, but Kai noticed that they thinned out by the time they actually reached the stairs proper.

“Now, have you drank anything recently, Kai-kun?” Isaki asked.

Kai blushed a little at the honorific, but he did manage to respond.

“Well, no.” Kai shook his head.

“I see.” Isaki spoke, beginning to step up the stairs now. “Have you eaten today?”

Well, he supposed he kind of had, technically? Though, he was actually feeling kind of hungry, which he supposed was what she was really asking. Kai simply shook his head.

“Alright, then. I can get you some food before we go.” Isaki smiled at him a little, and Kai could not help but smile back slightly.

Kai felt himself being carried up the stairs for a little bit longer, before Isaki suddenly came to a stop.

“Ah! I almost forgot!” Isaki exclaimed a little to herself. Kai was rather confused at what was going on, until he felt the back waistband of his diaper being lifted up. The Espurr just sort of froze there, unsure of how to even react. It was just like when he was a kitten...

“Looks like you're all clean, Kai-kun!” Isaki chirped.

Kai blushed, though he could not help but smile a little.

Isaki carried the boy up the stairs, the pair entering a small hall. Kai thought he noticed a rather imposing looking door at the end of the hall, but he was not able to look at the environment much before Isaki opened a door on the left side of the hall and swiftly brought him into a little room.

Kai was not able to get much of a look at the room at first, but he was able to gather his bearings properly once Isaki placed him down on the ground. The room itself looked like a side room, where one would eat a light meal or discuss something with others. It was not the formal sort of room. Just a small homely one. The furnishings were sparse, but the craftsmanship of the place was quite fine, Kai had to admit. Then again, he thought he should have expected things like that. He was not dealing with the world of men anymore, after all.

“Now then.” Isaki spoke, shutting the paper door behind her as Kai took in his surroundings. “Let's get you something to eat before we go, shall we?” the Braixen smiled a little as she moved to the central table, where a small, steaming pot and a large ceramic cup rested.

“Um, okay.” Kai nodded, rubbing the back of his head a little. He was kind of famished, but he was not entirely sure how this sort of thing would work out.

Kai walked over toward the table unsteadily, eventually managing to take his place at one of the table's edges. He did not quite sit down fully, instead resting on his knees as much as he could manage. Even with that measure, the table still seemed quite high. Isaki sat down on the opposite end of the table,

beginning to pour a measure of tea from a teapot that rested on the table into a cup. Kai started to reach for the cup once she set it down, but the Braixen gently pushed away his hands.

“That is not for you, silly boy.” Isaki shook her head with a smile. “Tea is much too hot for you.”

Kai shrank back a little, feeling embarrassment rise once more. The little Espurr just waited for a little while, watching as Isaki went to work getting another beverage ready. Kai was typically patient, but he found himself fidgeting with his paws as he waited.

While Kai waited, Isaki reached for the large ceramic cup on the table, setting a small teacup on the table. She poured what was plainly water into the teacup, and carefully pushed it over towards Kai. After that, she brought out two small wooden bowls, placing them by the steaming pot in the center of the table. Kai tilted his head, standing up briefly so as to see what was in the pot.

It was rice!

Kai leaned closer towards the pot as Isaki prepared the bowls, his eyes focused on the food. After a little while, Isaki pushed a bowl over towards him. Kai just stared at the bowl for a little while, until Isaki did something else.

She pushed forward a pair of chopsticks.

“You can eat now, little guy!”

Kai just kneeled there for a little bit. Of course, it was proper to use chopsticks, he thought. Kai picked up the two lacquered pieces of pine with one of his paws, trying to set them up in the proper position while he brought his paw over towards the bowl. He found that a rather difficult task however.

Kai figured he had gotten the chopsticks set up close enough after half a minute. Once he was done, the little Espurr tried to pick at the rice with his chopsticks. He was able to capture a little bit of the rice in his chopsticks, but much of it fell down back into the bowl. Kai quickly brought the chopsticks over towards his mouth, rice grains falling onto the table as he did so. Kai grew disappointed once he put the chopsticks in his mouth. There was only a little bit of rice...

Isaki hid a smile behind her sleeve. The Braixen waited a little while before speaking up.

“Do you need help, Kai-kun?” she asked.

“N-No.” Kai quickly shook his head, blushing a little. The Espurr tried getting some more rice with his chopsticks, but he found it very difficult to use his chopsticks. It felt like he had to expend a great deal of effort just to get small amounts of rice. Eventually, Kai's hunger won over his patience. The kitten started to lean over his bowl, eating away at the rice with his mouth. It tasted very, very good, he thought...

“That is not how you are supposed to eat, Kai-kun.” Isaki said, shaking her head. There was no hostility behind the statement. Kai just sort of looked up in embarrassment, his tongue licking away at some of the rice grains that still coated his face. His face grew a little downcast.

“I...I'm sorry, Isaki-sama...” Kai spoke quietly, his ears turning down. He, he was a little surprised at

how he felt.

“It's okay, child.” Isaki spoke softly, scratching his head a little. Kai was surprised by her action, but quickly found himself purring.

While Kai was lost in a haze, Isaki took a small piece of cloth and gently wiped away the rice grains that coated Kai's face. Once she was done, she picked up the pair of chopsticks that Kai had set down on the table, expertly picking up a large chunk of rice with them.

“I can handle the chopsticks for you, Kai-kun. Alright?” Isaki asked, slowly stopping her scratching of Kai's head. The boy was a little disappointed when she stopped, and he felt his embarrassment redouble once he caught his bearings. And yet, the kitten was still hungry. After a few seconds of thought, he spoke.

“...Okay.” Kai nodded, trying to avoid her gaze.

Isaki just smiled, bringing the first of many scoops of rice to his mouth.

After several minutes, Kai was done. The Espurr only ate a middling amount of rice, all things considered. A small amount of it remained at the bottom of his bowl. Once she had helped Kai with his meal, Isaki began to eat her own rice. Kai was almost mesmerized by the way in which she skillfully picked at the grains with her chopsticks. Only a little while ago, Kai had been as good at the task as her.

Kai sipped a little bit at his cup of water, glad that he retained enough manual dexterity to hold the cup without dropping it. He did spill some of the water, admittedly, but victories were victories.

Kai just sort of held there once he finished eating and drinking. He looked on at Isaki drinking her tea for a little while, but his eyes felt like they were losing focus. The meal had been quite filling, and the kitten was beginning to feel a faint lethargy coming over him.

That was before another feeling came over him.

Suddenly, Kai began to perceive a wetness around his loins. It was warm, and not entirely unwelcome, but it was certainly unusual. It took a few seconds for Kai to come out of his groggy state and realize what was happening. However, he scarcely had time to react before he felt something else.

Kai felt a painful feeling down below. Within the span of a moment, the kitten found himself pooping. He could not even fight back. Lost in a haze of pain, the Espurr's body went on with its automatic functions. A sudden wave of relief came over Kai as he finished eliminating, but the feeling was short lived. Within a second, he came to full awareness of what he had done.

Needless to say, he cried.

“Hmm? What's the matter, Kai-kun?” Isaki asked, but Kai's tears did not stop.

How, how was he even supposed to process this? He had not really wanted to think about his diapered state in general, but he could deal with it. Hell, he thought he could even stand wetting his diaper. But pooping in it? He had not even done that as an adult! And now here he was, sitting in a messy diaper as a toddler. In front of a complete stranger, no less. The Espurr focused on his training, trying to ignore

the situation he was in. He was not successful in stopping his crying, but he did find some solace.

“There there, Kai-kun. Everything is alright.” Isaki spoke quietly, the woman silently moving from her position across the table towards the spot where Kai rested. She gently scooped up the Espurr in her arms, beginning to rock him slightly a few seconds later. Kai thought he should have been annoyed at her presumptuousness, but he had greater issues on his mind.

After a minute of rocking, Kai's crying settled down into intermittent sobbing. Isaki just quietly hummed all the while, continuing her motions with finesse. As awareness of his surroundings returned, Kai could notice that she seemed to be studying him rather intently. A few seconds after he saw this, her voice manifested.

“Ah, that was the problem.” Isaki smiled a little bit, shaking her head. “Let's change your diaper, alright?”

Kai just silently nodded his head, sniffing.

Isaki carefully picked Kai up, taking care to carry him by the back and legs. She then moved to a corner of the room, gently laying Kai upon a tatami mat. Kai sniffled a little more when his butt hit the ground and he felt the mess of his diaper again, but Isaki got to work quickly. The woman quickly unfolded Kai's diaper, acquiring a small rag from a bag she had on hand soon after. Kai just closed his eyes as he got wiped down, very much not wanting to think about the situation at hand. Once she finished wiping Kai down, Isaki obtained a bolt of cloth from her bag. She folded the cloth in a particular manner before gently lifting up Kai's legs and placing the partially-folded diaper underneath him. After that, she finished the folding process. Kai felt the cloth of the diaper press tightly against his skin. It seemed to be really firmly secured. Kai hesitantly opened his eyes, looking up a little bit to see what was going on. He was able to spy Isaki tossing his used diaper into a small wicker basket next to the tatami mat. He blushed a little, but Isaki only smiled.

“All done, Kai-kun!” Isaki spoke. Kai had little time to react before the woman reached out toward him, picking him up by the armpits and helping him to stand up upon the ground. Kai tried to hide his face, but he did speak.

“...Thank you, Isaki-sama.” Kai blushed.

“You have quite the manners for your age.” Isaki mused, giving Kai a vulpine grin. “That is a good trait, though I must say that there is no need for you to be so sheepish. I was just giving you a diaper change, after all.”

Kai's embarrassment redoubled, but the edge of his mouth curled upwards nonetheless. Isaki just smiled, extending out an arm towards one of Kai's own. She grabbed one of his paws before she spoke once more.

“Well then, it looks like you are ready for the trip. Are you ready to meet Jurojujin-sama, Kai?” Isaki asked.

Kai only stared at her with widened eyes for a moment, before he began to nod vigorously.

“Hehe, well okay then, it looks like the little boy is ready! Come along now, Kai-kun...”

Isaki carefully led Kai out of the room and into the hall. The pair quickly moved towards the stairs, Isaki helping Kai down the steps once they reached them. Isaki gripped onto Kai's paw more tightly as the two reached the bottom floor. A variety of spirits were still moving about, and Kai felt some trepidation once more, but Isaki kept the boy close by her. Soon enough, the pair had reached the entrance, and Isaki began to slide open the rice-paper door. After only a little while, the pair were out of the estate, and out on the road.

Kai carefully followed alongside Isaki, his little legs struggling to keep up with her pace at times. It was still night outside, and Kai's thoughts turned once more towards the cerebral. He did not really know much about how the other world worked. He supposed that it had times of day, much as Earth had. And really, he had only been in the other world for a little while, all things considered. He could see how it would still be night at this point in time.

Eventually, the lights of the estate dimmed, and the pair found themselves in deep darkness. There was still enough light to see, as though the moon were shining brightly, but Kai still found it somewhat off-putting. He did not hear many sounds coming from the forest, but he held close to Isaki regardless.

It did not take long for Kai's pace to slow. His legs gave out quickly, as fatigue started to truly settle in to his little frame. Isaki was quick to notice this, and scooped up the Espurr as soon as his pace started to slacken. Kai grumbled a little, but mostly, he was too tired to care. The woman just lightly smiled as she cradled Kai in her arms, her eyes still set on the path ahead. Kai stayed awake for a while, but as the journey went on, he found it more and more difficult to pay attention. Eventually, he closed his eyes, and fell into the embrace of sleep.

Kai woke up slowly, but surely. The first perception that came to his awareness was that of movement. The Espurr languidly opened his eyes, and was assault by the light of morning. The kitten rubbed his eyes a little, then, and that was when Isaki finally took note.

“Ah, you're up just in time.” Isaki spoke softly. From his current vantage point in her arms, Kai could only faintly make out the environment. There appeared to be woods and...bamboo? Both were clearing up relatively fast, though.

“Wha...” Kai blinked, his eyes still adjusting to the light and his mind still coming to full wakefulness.

“We're almost at the house, child. You can just wait.” Isaki spoke once more, this time peeking down at him and giving a smile. Kai was not quite sure whether it was due to his fatigue or her expression, but he actually did find himself following her directions.

The pair finished exiting the woods, keeping to a worn dirt path that clung close to a hillside. Further on, Kai could spy some lighter groupings of trees on a relatively flat plane of grassy land. Further on, he could see something glinting quite strangely. It took him a few seconds to realize that he was looking at a lake. Further along the road, Kai could spy a path that jutted out from the main road. It led to a wonderfully ornate yet small structure that rested on the shore of the lake.

Was, was tha-

“And we're here!” Isaki exclaimed, carrying Kai up the path that led to the manor while the Espurr slowly came to realize the full implications of what she had said.

He, he hadn't really expected he would be here so quickly. Well, granted, he had been asleep for a good portion of the time, but still. That was really something.

Isaki followed the path up to the front entrance of the estate. Kai's eyes focused more on the building. It looked almost like one of those Shinseist temples he had sighted before. The structure seemed to be two or three stories high, with the rooftop matching that of many temples. It appeared to be constructed mostly out of wood, though there was plenty of gilding present. The building itself did not quite seem like a temple, though. From what he could discern, the building looked structured like a normal Rokugani dwelling. Well, a Rokugani dwelling fit for high-ranking kuge, at least.

Isaki set Kai carefully upon the ground. The kitten found his footing quickly, though he still took some time to balance himself. He held still for a few seconds, eyes focusing on the building.

Then, he looked back toward Isaki.

"I...I guess this is where we part ways?" Kai looked up toward the Braixen. She just looked down at him and nodded.

"Indeed. Jurojujin resides in there. I trust he can take care of you far better than I can, anyhow." the woman laughed a little to herself, smiling. Kai noticed then that her expression shaded into something else as she looked off toward the lake. But then he blinked and it was gone.

"Well, thank you for the help, Isaki-sama." Kai bowed a little, though it came out a bit off, for obvious reasons.

"It was no problem." Isaki noted. The woman gave a deep, full bow towards the little traveler. Her eyes hung on him for a short while after she finished, before she turned and began walking down the path, her kimono glittering in the morning's light.

"Goodbye, Kai-kun!" the woman turned back, waving.

Kai gave a little wave of his own, a small smile creeping up onto his face. His eyes followed her along the trail for a fair while, until she was obscured by the trees. Kai then breathed in a little bit, before he turned back toward the estate.

It loomed before him.

Kai breathed once more, and began to climb the steps.

There were only three or so steps, but Kai still found them rather arduous. Once he reached the top of the steps, he walked up toward the front door. He began to walk closer to it, so as to open it, before the rice-paper door suddenly slid open on its own.

Kai simply walked inside.

The interior was actually quite nice, Kai had to admit. There was an entrance chamber of middling size, which had some shoji screens set up and which was adorned in tasteful decorations. There was a hallway to the right and left sides of the room, as well as one that led straight forwards. Kai walked

further into the room a little bit, peeking down each of the side halls. He could spy rows upon rows of doors lining either side. The Espurr then turned his gaze toward the hallway in front of him. A larger door rested there. Kai recognized the structure of it from some of his journeys. It looked like the kind of door that led to an audience chamber. Kai supposed that that was where he was most likely to find a Fortune, and so he began to walk forward.

When Kai approached the door, it opened of its own accord. The Espurr walked through, preparing to bow. It was an audience chamber, indeed, with art pieces set up on the walls and a dais with a throne set up before him. The only problem was that there was no one else in the room.

Kai blinked a little bit.

This was really the one room where he would have expected to find Jurojujin. It would make sense for a mortal to pay his respects to a Fortune, after all. Kai's mind turned then to other thoughts. He briefly considered looking through the rest of the house, but he was not quite sure about the idea. It would likely be inappropriate to look through the personal dwelling place of a Fortune.

Kai stood still for a few moments, confused. What was he supposed to do here?

Just then, Kai felt something.

He remembered this type of feeling. He had felt it when he first became initiated into the Henshin order, and he had felt it while studying at the College of Miracles. But he could not recall feeling it this strongly before.

Before Kai's eyes, the world faded. Except it really did not. His eyes still functioned, of course. It was just that he was not paying attention to them. Kai felt everything come to a standstill. And then, somehow, his perspective shifted. As though he was not looking at the dance of the Elements, but rather at the glory that rested beneath them. Kai knew this feeling well.

This was the Void.

As soon as he came to his realization, another perception came to his mind. Kai saw a small wooden room, one where a hallowed, robed figure rested upon a cushion. It was not the room that Kai was currently in. He viewed this room not with his eyes, but with his soul.

Before he could fully process the events that had happened, another set of images came to Kai's mind. He spied a dark chamber of stone, wherein an aged figure in the robes of a monk stood silently. Another figure stood in front of him, bowing towards him. Kai recognized that figure. That was his sensei.

"Your student has churned the Void in his awakening." the figure spoke. Kai thought the robes looked familiar, but he could not quite recognize them.

The other individual's face visibly shifted, but at first he said nothing. When his voice manifested, it was measured.

"He, he has not learned the last Riddle yet." he spoke.

Wait, the last Riddle? He, he had learned that, had he not?

“Indeed. We have not decided to provide him with the secrets of the Mystery of Fate, yet. Which is what makes it all the more surprising that he has awakened the power of the Void.”

The figure went silent for a moment.

“I trust you understand that this is unprecedented.”

“Of course.” the other individual nodded.

“What, what will happen?” the man asked.

“The Isawa have already perceived him. They will likely try to train him, as they do with all of the others.” the elder responded.

“Yes, but, him?”

“Yes. They will train a Henshin in the arts of the Void.”

Kai thought he heard something more then, but the perceptions drifted away like water.

Kai held still for a few moments.

He knew what to do.

The Espurr walked out of the audience chamber, returning to the entrance room and heading down the hallway on the left. He knew exactly where to go.

It only took Kai a little while to find the right door. It was located past a bend at the end of the hall. Kai walked up toward the door at the very end of the hall. The door did not open, this time, but that did not trouble Kai. He focused, briefly, attempting to return to the state of mind he had previously occupied. After a few moments of concentration, he reached a certain state, and slid open the door with will alone.

Inside rested Jurojujin.

“It is good to see you again, Kai.” the Fortune said simply. Kai felt the numinosity of the Fortune hit, then. There was fathomless mystery.

“Hello, Jurojujin.” Kai bowed. Jurojujin accepted it, and gestured for Kai to sit. The Espurr did soon after.

“You had another reason for bringing me here.” Kai said.

“Indeed I did.” the Fortune responded.

Kai went quiet for a long while, then. After around half a minute, he spoke once more.



“Why did you do it?” he asked simply.

Jurojujin looked upwards a little bit, though Kai could not really tell what he was looking at. His words came soon after.

“It is what anyone would do. To see someone on the precipice of escaping the Celestial Wheel is a beautiful thing.” Jurojujin said.

“Do you really think I will accomplish that in my lifetime?” Kai asked.

“I am not sure. I hope you do.” Jurojujin said.

Kai thought for a little while, then, but he realized that he had nothing more to ask.

“Alright.” Kai nodded, his gaze turning up toward the Fortune. It may have appeared as though he spoke with solemnity, but really, he just spoke with freedom.

“Thank you Jurojujin. I really liked my time here.” Kai said.

Jurojujin said nothing, but Kai got a feeling from the Fortune that he could not describe.

Kai just kept still when the world went blank, and he found himself once more on the ground of Isawi Mori.

The Espurr took some time to examine his state, though he was already sure of what had happened. He was an adult again, wearing his usual kimono and possessing all of the other items he had had before entering the other world. The monk got himself prepared quickly, before he began to continue his trek through the forest. He felt fetterless.

Kai realized quickly into his journey that he was on the other side of Isawa Mori. On the horizon, he spied the end of the forest, and the shift in terrain that marked the western border of Phoenix lands. The monk continued through the forest, thinking to himself all the while.

Grasslands were the first thing to meet Kai beyond the woods. In the distance, he could spy the mountains of Dragon lands, and closer on the horizon rested a small Phoenix village. There was something else that was closer, though.

A small group of shugenja walked toward Kai along the grasslands. They were clearly Isawa. Kai simply bowed as they approached.

“What is your name?” the man at the front asked. He wore a type of robe that Kai had never seen before, but which he thought he would soon grow used to.

“Asako Kai.” the Espurr said simply.

The man looked at him silently for a few moments, the rest of his group doing the same. Then his voice manifested again.

“We have seen you in the Void.” he said. “You will become an ishiken.”

Kai only bowed, and followed behind the men as they led him down another step of a long, long path.