

Menu 1141

Chapter 1141: Another Fusion! (2)

Blood and flesh flew again and again.

Dragon shadows shattered repeatedly.

Hundreds of attempts, yet no change.

Sigh!

Jason took a deep breath.

The unique traits of the [Great Majestic Heavenly Dragon Technique] and the current level and properties of [War Rune: Puce Griffin Shadow Stealth Body Refinement Technique] made Jason realize this would be a grueling process.

But Jason had not expected it to be this difficult.

A hundred attempts!

And not a single shred of change!

Yet, Jason remained unwavering.

If a hundred attempts fail,

Then two hundred!

If two hundred don't succeed,

Then three hundred!

Jason's diamond-like will was not only his thinking—it was his action.

For the next hour, Jason drifted entirely between life and death.

At first, he kept count of his deaths.

Later, he stopped paying attention.

He immersed himself wholly in the fusion of [Great Majestic Heavenly Dragon Technique] and [War Rune: Puce Griffin Shadow Stealth Body Refinement Technique].

Boom!

Yet another explosion of the body.

Yet another death.

But this time, something was different.

As Jason resurrected, he saw that field again—

Under moonlight, the griffin galloped across the expanse.

Its speed grew faster and faster.

When it spread its wings, it soared into the sky.

Breaking through the moonlight's veil, it entered the radiance of the sun.

The griffin instantly landed, transforming into a running giant.

Bathed in sunlight, the giant sprinted furiously, each step mobilizing all the muscles in its body, each step synchronized with the rhythm of breathing with the sun.

Step, inhale.

Step, exhale.

With the cycle of breathing, the giant's running speed accelerated even more.

When the speed reached its peak,

The being launched into a sprint.

Buzz!

It felt like breaking through an invisible barrier as the giant surged back into the moonlight.

Once more, it transformed back into...

The dark golden griffin.

This majestic griffin seemed slightly puzzled, lowering its head to inspect itself, then instinctively spreading its wings to soar high into the sky.

Like before.

When its speed reached extreme heights, the dark golden griffin changed back into the giant.

Much like the griffin, the giant displayed a distinct pause.

It too lowered its head, examining its own body.

But appeared to discover nothing.

Afterward, it resumed its running—

Each transformation was a change.

Each shift marked the passing of day and night.

Daylight, nighttime alternated.

Giant, griffin transformed.

At first, there was still some stiffness in the process.

Eventually, everything flowed as effortlessly as water.

And the dark golden griffin and radiant giant grew larger and faster.

Sigh!

The dark golden griffin spread its wings, summoning a rolling gale.

With a wingspan of 50 meters, it appeared even more imposing and robust.

The changes of the radiant giant were even more noticeable.

Its original 50-meter frame began to swell as though inflated.

60, 70, 80...

It only stopped when it reached 100 meters.

It felt its transformation, flexing its enormous body.

And came to a pause again.

This time, however, it didn't lower its head to observe itself. Instead, it raised its eyes skyward.

As the giant morphed back into the griffin, the dark golden griffin followed suit.

It too stared upwards.

Jason's vision was involuntarily drawn to the sky.

He raised his head, staring at the heavens.

What could be there?

There were sunlight and moonlight.

There was... breathing?

Breathing?!

Jason froze.

Instinctively, he focused even more intently on that point.

Then, his eyes widened with disbelief.

He saw an ethereal shadow.

Though intangible, it seemed boundless.

Only the sound of rhythmic breathing accompanied it.

And its opening and closing eyes.

When its eyes opened, heavenly light erupted.

When its eyes closed, darkness engulfed everything.

That was...

A dragon!

A Divine Dragon occupying the skies.

It gazed down upon all existence.

And it locked eyes with Jason...

Boom!

A deafening explosion roared in Jason's mind.

Jason's consciousness went blank.

By the time he recovered his senses, he was already sitting in his room.

Before his eyes, text flowed out like a waterfall—

[Dragon. War Rune: Pruce Griffin Shadow Stealth Body Refinement Technique (Peerless): The Divine Dragon gazes upon the world; when its eyes close, night and dawn converge; when its eyes open, it ushers in sunrise! Under your command, it can remain subdued and silent or blaze with resplendent light. As a master who has fused multiple body refinement techniques, you have already transcended ordinary limits. You are now gripping the threshold of transcendence—not with fingertips, but with firm grasp! Effects: Strength +4.9, Agility +4.2, Constitution +4.8, Spirit +3.7, Perception +3.7 (Base, Entry, Proficient, Mastery, Expert +0.1; Master all attributes +0.3; Peerless all attributes +0.4; Pruce strength, constitution extra +0.7 (Master +0.2 extra, Peerless +0.3); War Rune all attributes +1.2 (Master extra +0.3, Peerless extra +0.4); Shadow Stealth strength, agility +0.5, spirit, perception +0.4 (Master +0.1 extra, Peerless +0.2 extra); Dragon all attributes +1.5; Physical stamina recovery rate +90%, mental stamina recovery rate +90%, injury recovery rate +90%, entire body endowed with defenses outmatching war machines (excluding fragile points like eyes and unable to nullify fatal weaknesses); Strength, agility, constitution +1.0 during unarmed (or blade-held) combat; Strength, agility check +1.5 during jumps; Breath holding duration in water extended by 240 minutes, Stealth, Shadow concealment level +7 (even in radiant environments, analogous correction effects apply)].

(Note: Its unique training method assures its distinctiveness and elevates its extraordinary traits. [War Rune: Pruce Griffin Shadow Stealth Body Refinement Technique] cannot exceed the level of [Protection Against Evil].)

[Judgment reached Peerless level; innate talent upgraded!]

[Daytime Hunt: Basic Form: The unique talent of the War Rune Breathing Technique has fused with your soul. Upon reaching Peerless level, while in daytime or sunlight environments, you gain an all-attribute +0.8 effect, along with physical strength, mental stamina, and injury recovery rate +60%.]

[Daytime Hunt: Form One: You can unleash a ferocious and heroic assault at your enemy; effect: proportionally consume 10%-100% stamina to execute a high-speed attack with an agility check +0.1-3.0; upon completing a 2-second charge in stationary state, the first attack receives strength and agility +0.5 bonus.]

[Daytime Hunt: Form Two: Launching Daytime Hunt at maximum stamina consumption and executing the 'Thrust' skill will stack agility boosts for subsequent five attacks, each gaining +0.3 agility bonus.]

[Daytime Hunt: Form Three: A heroic attack deserves to be paired with a war cry; when you launch the assault and shout loudly, there is a significant chance to dispel fear, confusion, despair, and other negative states while gaining a 3% overall combat power boost.]

...

[Embrace of the Night: Basic Form: This is the earliest mutation resulting from the fusion of Night Watcher and Griffin Body Refinement Technique. Its uniqueness is beyond question, and your talent steadily propels it toward some extreme pinnacle—it's becoming transcendent, as are you. While in nighttime, darkness, or shadow environments, you gain Stealth, Shadow concealment level +5 and stamina, energy, injury recovery rate +30%.]

[Embrace of the Night: Form One: Against shadows and negative energy invasion, you gain defensive level +5. Upon completing a 2-second charge in stationary state, an extra defensive level +3 is applied against shadows and negative energy.]

[Embrace of the Night: Form Two: If cumulative shadow and negative energy damage reaches blade-level, you can return such attacks to the assailant, with the maximum tolerance equating to full-body defense level. If pushed beyond personal limits, the ability ceases to function.]

...

[Chen Xi Sword: A treasure hidden in the annals of history's shadows. You not only rediscovered it but experienced its power by chance. That memory has enhanced it, and as you continue to strengthen yourself, it has grown even more powerful. At dawn, you can charge for 3 seconds to produce a 40-meter-long Chen Xi Sword for a 'strong-level' slash, which consumes significant physical stamina; upon completing a 2-second charge in stationary state, the sword length increases by an extra 10 meters.]

...

[Dragon: Through the extraordinary fusion resonance between mysterious secret techniques and peculiar souls, you can activate this state by charging for 30 seconds, yet each second subjects you to the ordeal of death.]

...

Jason stared at the text before him.

An all-encompassing enhancement.

Everything had undergone changes.

Especially the final trait!

He muttered under his breath—

"Dragon!"

Chapter 1142: The Self-Obsessed Jason

Jason muttered softly, and in his mind, the image of the Divine Dragon occupying the entire sky involuntarily surfaced.

That posture overlooking all things of time.

Those eyes.

That sound of breathing.

Eyes open for day, eyes closed for night.

The cycle of time shifts with each breath.

"What would such a dragon look like?"

Jason muttered to himself again.

Firstly, he truly hadn't seen the full appearance of the Divine Dragon just now.

Though there was an outline, roughly.

It was very vague.

So vague that it was just the boundary of a 'shape'.

As for the rest?

Don't even mention facial features; he hadn't even glimpsed any scales.

Secondly, the skill's description.

It was the first time that Jason had seen such a vague and unclear introduction.

"Is it due to some kind of restriction?"

"Or has it surpassed some kind of boundary?"

"Or maybe..."

"Both at once?"

Jason pondered.

Right now, he was absolutely itching to find an isolated place to test the transformation brought by [Dragon].

Undoubtedly, [Dragon] would be one of his trump cards.

However, any trump card must be understood in its utility before it can truly act as a trump card.

Otherwise, it would just be a joke.

As for the form and appearance of 'Dragon'?

Jason already had some guesses.

According to past experience, as long as [Dragon]'s level was upgraded.

The rest, he would naturally be able to see clearly.

Almost instinctively, Jason glanced at the upgrade requirements for [Dragon – Battle Runes – Pruse – Griffin – Shadow Forge Body Forging Technique (Peerless)].

Fullness: 500

Excitement of Feast: 100

Jason: !!!

Three enormous exclamation marks appeared in Jason's mind.

While he had guessed that the [Body Forging Technique], which had gone through four fusions, would reach an incredibly terrifying level when upgraded, he had never imagined it would be to this extent.

Disregarding fullness.

What does 100 points of Excitement of Feast even mean?

Despite his recent streak of good luck, he had only accumulated 15 points of Excitement of Feast.

With such fortune, it happens just once.

To encounter it again?

That'd probably need another lifetime.

"Indeed, compared to my 'talent,' all these upgrade points and level-up matters are like drifting clouds."

"What I rely on is my talent!"

"As long as I die a few more times and adapt, there's no need for such complications!"

Jason quietly reassured himself.

His tone was resolute, his gaze steadfast.

This wasn't self-hypnosis.

It was real!

This was how he had come through his journey!

Therefore, Jason firmly believed that he could achieve it!

Yet, in the next moment, Jason suddenly shuddered, frozen in place—

Fullness: 421

Excitement of Feast: 15

...

Jason wiped his eyes in disbelief.

If he remembered correctly, his fullness just earlier had been 3421 points.

How was it now down to just 421 points?

The 3000 points that were missing?

Were they consumed?

Huff, huff.

Even with Jason's composure, at this moment, he couldn't help but breathe heavily.

3000 points of fullness!

Not 30 points.

Not 300 points.

But 3000 points!

For Jason, 3000 points of fullness was undoubtedly a tremendous figure.

More importantly, with fullness plummeting sharply, the sense of insecurity in Jason's heart was once again climbing swiftly. He glanced around, and although [Kaya Seal] and [Silence Technique] remained intact, untouched, Jason still felt unsafe. He still felt as if someone was watching this place.

It took several seconds for Jason to return to normal.

"Indeed, it's easy to transition from thrift to extravagance, but hard to go back from extravagance to thrift!"

Jason remarked bitterly with a sigh.

At first, having fewer than three lives made him uneasy.

Then, it became thirty lives.

Then one hundred lives.

Now?

Having fewer than one thousand lives made him restless.

"Do I have paranoia?"

"No, it's not me!"

"It's not me who's wrong but this world!"

"It's too dangerous!"

"That's what's depriving me of my sense of security!"

Jason shook his head, denying that it was his problem.

This wasn't the first time Jason had done such reasoning.

Facing swordsmanship talent.

Facing the condition of being born human.

These were his persistence, his obsessions.

Now, he added one more—security.

People.

While alive, they always need a bit of conviction.

Otherwise, what's the difference from being a walking corpse?

"A man like me, with unparalleled swordsmanship talent, having 1000 lives, isn't that perfectly reasonable?"

Jason took a deep breath, his gaze once again becoming steadfast.

The fullness was depleted, so be it.

He could just hunt again.

With 3000 points of fullness gone, more 3000 points would come.

As for the current dungeon world?

It definitely didn't lack sources of fullness.

And it could even make the situation more advantageous to him.

Thinking this, he reached into his backpack and pulled out 'Uesugi's' business card, picking up the phone next to him to dial—

"Hey, Uesugi?"

"Hmm, it's me, Jason."

"Is Hui Lijing still with you?"

"I need her to return as soon as possible."

"Alright, I'll wait for her."

Then, Jason hung up the phone and quietly sat on the sofa waiting.

Of course, Jason wasn't just waiting idly; he was also thinking.

Thinking about the recent occurrences, wondering if there were coincidences.

Thinking through his plans, looking for flaws.

Time ticked by.

Onodera wiped the sweat off his forehead.

He was a little nervous.

Even though he had joined a new power and gained a new patron, he still felt a bit anxious facing the unknown dangers—even though he knew his new patron wouldn't let him die this easily.

Because he needed to demonstrate value.

He, along with Ryosuke, were both part of 'Zero Division.'

And both had joined 'Blossom Cherry.'

It was quite evident that their 'positions' overlapped.

Chapter 1143: The Self-Obsessed Jason (2)

Moreover, one thing was clear: Ryosuke obviously had a closer relationship with Jason.

This made Onodera realize he had to demonstrate his 'value' even better.

He had to show his usefulness.

Otherwise, sooner or later, he would be replaced.

He definitely didn't want to go through something like that.

Because once you give up, there's a high chance you'll die.

So, at this moment, he was a little nervous.

Even though he had done countless psychological preparation exercises in his heart, he was still just as tense.

Who isn't afraid of death?

He was.

Ryosuke was too.

And presumably Jason would feel the same, wouldn't he?

After all, you only get one life!

Gulp, gulp.

Onodera tugged at his tie, grabbed the water cup next to him, downed the warm water inside in one gulp, and then picked up the phone to start dialing.

He knew he couldn't wait any longer.

If he waited any longer, he feared he'd never have the courage to make the call.

He might even try to run.

If he truly could escape, Onodera wouldn't mind.

But how was that possible?

He had already boarded the ship.

He had already been marked by Jason.

If he ran away, Jason wouldn't even need to deal with him personally. That young Onmyoji from the Hanakaiin Family would certainly be more than happy to step in. By then, his fate would be worse than death.

One choice meant there was a possibility to live.

One choice meant death.

One choice meant a fate worse than death.

Pick one of the three — no deliberation needed.

Beep, beep, beep.

Three rings later, the call connected.

"Hello."

A woman's voice, not loud nor soft, came through, sounding indifferent.

"It's me. You left me a note earlier."

Onodera introduced himself.

"The guy from this morning?"

The woman asked.

"If you didn't leave notes for anyone else around then, I guess I must be that guy."

Onodera said with a smile.

His tone was light-hearted, with a hint of flattery.

There's always a type of person like this.

Initially, they're extremely anxious.

But when the moment comes, they suddenly become indifferent.

Such people all have a 'big heart.'

Onodera was one of them.

Before picking up the phone, Onodera had still been a bit nervous.

After picking up the phone, his nervousness completely vanished, replaced by calm and ease as he slipped into character.

Not only had he calmed down, he could now analyze: this woman who answered the phone probably hadn't left her number just for him.

Was she casting a wide net?

Onodera speculated inwardly.

Targeted investment undoubtedly has the highest cost-effectiveness.

But casting a wide net isn't without its merits.

In fact, casting a wide net can be considered a prerequisite for targeted investment. Only after multiple rounds of screening can you focus on specific targets.

Onodera understood this perfectly.

But...

How big was this net?

If it was a small net, he could still stand out.

If it was a large net, his value would plummet.

Thinking of this, Onodera felt like crying.

To survive, I not only have to prove my worth to Jason, but also to this unknown person or group?

Life is too hard!

But maybe there's a silver lining!

If I perform well, could I potentially earn double 'paychecks'?

No, not double!

Fourfold!

'Zero Division,' 'Blossom Cherry,' the unknown organization, and Jason's domain!

As his thoughts spiraled, Onodera suddenly felt elated.

Turns out I've been working four jobs at once!

Some of them even have promising prospects.

Keep it up, corporate slave!

Quickly, Onodera shook off his frustration and began to look forward eagerly.

"Yep."

"You're the first to finalize your decision."

"Let's meet and discuss this in detail."

With that, the woman hung up.

The decisiveness and directness didn't surprise Onodera.

In fact, this was what he had expected.

Because he had already followed Jason's advice and conducted 'background checks' on them in advance.

Of course, those checks seemed very discreet.

But in reality?

They were all within the scope of permissions accessible to him.

Simply put, they were designed to give the impression that he was acting covertly, yet was actually fully exposed to the other party's 'line of sight.'

As long as the other party was alert.

These actions would surely be detected.

Therefore, it was easy for the other party to locate him.

Onodera was fairly confident that he was being monitored by them.

Not the kind of 'microscopic' surveillance.

But broader in scope.

And that was what he wanted.

It was what he hoped for.

Onodera stood up and walked over to the water dispenser again.

After refilling his water, he sat back down on the sofa, sipping and silently counting the time.

1 minute.

2 minutes.

3 minutes.

...

Finally, five minutes later, someone knocked on the door—

Knock, knock knock!

"It's me."

The familiar female voice came again.

Onodera's mouth curled into a smile.

As expected, they were monitoring me at close range!

Onodera quickly walked toward the door. By the time his hand was on the doorknob, the knowing smile on his face had vanished, replaced by a rigorously formal expression.

The door opened.

A tall, black-clad woman stood in the doorway.

The moment Onodera saw her, his pupils contracted sharply.

He recognized this woman.

In fact, to some extent, he was quite familiar with her.

Because she was...

Hui Lixiang!

A female fighter who rose to fame in recent years.

Not only had she participated in the earlier 'King of Fighters Tournament,' but she had also recently staged a '100-Man Challenge,' taking on the 'Kyokugen Style' dojo.

A figure who could crush him hundreds of times over with just one hand.

But what truly shook Onodera's mind was the revelation that she was Hui Lijing's sister.

The one who had crossed paths with him a few times, seemed somewhat simple-minded, and — if you rounded it up — had kind of saved him once. Hui Lijing's sister!

The assistant working under Jason was Hui Lijing's sister.

How could this be?

Did Hui Lijing know about this?

More importantly, did Jason know about this?

Onodera's mind spun into chaos.

If no one knew, then everything was just a coincidence.

If they did know, and Jason still made him do this...

It could only mean one thing—

Murder and silencing!

At this thought, Onodera felt his entire back grow cold.

His legs even began to tremble.

Onodera's abnormal state naturally didn't escape Hui Lixiang's notice.

The female fighter glanced at Onodera briefly and asked directly.

"You recognize me?"

"I-I do."

Onodera admitted without hesitation. He knew his odd behavior wouldn't go unnoticed by a fighter; lying now would only be digging his own grave.

Rather than conceal it.

It was better to come clean.

Of course, to cover better, Onodera thought up a 'reason.'

"I know Ms. Hui Lijing."

Onodera said this.

Both as an excuse and as a test.

He hoped to discern something.

Or, at least, disrupt her state of mind.

If she really was here to silence him, it might increase his chances of escaping.

But the expression he saw on Hui Lixiang was rather strange.

Frowning — that's normal, within expectations.

But what does that sense of resignation mean?

Onodera was puzzled.

Hui Lixiang, on the other hand, looked as if she wanted to punch the door next to her.

Why was it that, no matter what she did, she couldn't escape Hui Lijing?

It had been the same since school!

Every time she wanted to do something, obstacles cropped up everywhere, but eventually, someone connected to Hui Lijing would appear, smooth out the trouble, and incidentally make her look like she was slacking off.

Every single time!

She'd thought that joining the 'Inside World' would put an end to this.

But after a brief calm, the situation had escalated even further.

What was going on?

Hui Lixiang took deep breaths.

Once, twice, thrice.

Onodera grew increasingly baffled.

Resignation, followed by deep breaths?

It seemed like she was suppressing something?

Anger?

Unlikely.

More like... frustration?

As he arrived at this conclusion, Onodera began to question himself, wondering if he had misinterpreted her, even heard incorrectly.

Then, Hui Lixiang spoke.

"You've passed. It'll be you."

Onodera blinked several times.

The expression in his eyes entirely captured what he felt at the moment.

To summarize in two words—

This... seriously?

Chapter 1144: Who Will it Be?

Onodera's suspicion was obvious to Hui Lixiang.

"We just need a 'pawn' to cooperate with us."

"Whether it's you, or someone else, it's all the same."

"To put it simply, the moment I came to find you, you had already passed."

Hui Lixiang explained.

But such an explanation only made Onodera feel incredibly nervous.

"Anyone could do?"

Onodera asked the crucial point.

If anyone would suffice, it implied his value was negligible.

Or worse, his life wasn't guaranteed and he could be discarded at any moment.

This was something Onodera absolutely didn't want to face.

"Of course not."

Hui Lixiang's answer brought Onodera a moment of relief, but her next words made his heart tighten again.

"We do have criteria in our selection. At the very least, it must be someone who has the potential to approach the upper echelons of the 'Blossom Cherry' organization."

The upper echelons?

What are they targeting the upper echelons of 'Blossom Cherry' for?

In an instant, images of Miyamoto and Sato's corpses flashed through Onodera's mind.

Unconsciously, Onodera's throat bobbed up and down.

He swallowed hard.

His throat felt unbearably dry.

"Was it you who killed Miyamoto and Sato?"

Onodera asked in a slightly hoarse voice.

"Yes."

Hui Lixiang didn't deny it.

Faced with such an admission, Onodera was stunned.

He thought Hui Lixiang would quibble or deflect, but such straightforward honesty was the last thing he anticipated.

After all, he was just a newly 'recruited' rookie.

Moreover, 'Blossom Cherry' wasn't some flimsy entity that could be toyed with at will.

Unless...

They didn't care!

The Hui Lixiang in front of him simply didn't care about these things.

Because she had the confidence to ignore them entirely.

Hiss!

Realizing this, Onodera sucked in a sharp breath of cold air.

Things seemed even more complicated than he had imagined.

Not just Hui Lixiang's attitude.

But also Hui Lixiang's identity.

A female fighter!

One participating in this year's 'King of Fighters Tournament.'

Aiming at 'Blossom Cherry' while joining the 'King of Fighters Tournament,' and then, 'Blossom Cherry' seemed to be scheming, preparing to use the 'King of Fighters' tournament for something...

And then—

The Hanakaiin Family!

The Hanakaiin Family was also involved in this 'King of Fighters Tournament.'

And under the guise of a trial to let the branch family inherit the main family's authority.

One by one, the clues began connecting rapidly in Onodera's mind.

Immediately, an answer surfaced in Onodera's thoughts.

He looked up, shocked, at Hui Lixiang standing before him.

"Just as you're thinking."

"Blossom Cherry's reach is too long."

"It has to be cut off!"

Hui Lixiang responded definitively.

Onodera broke into a cold sweat.

He needed to inform Jason immediately!

Otherwise, there would be big trouble!

With this thought, he looked up again at Hui Lixiang.

"May I make a phone call?"

Onodera asked tentatively.

"Of course."

Hui Lixiang nodded.

She was fully aware of what Onodera intended to do.

But it was precisely because she understood that she allowed it.

After all, one of the main reasons she targeted Onodera was to establish that cooperation.

...

Hanakaiin Haru sat with his eyes closed, waiting quietly.

Scenes of recent events replayed in his mind.

From the initial attack on him, to the preliminaries of the 'King of Fighters Tournament.'

Then to the death of that bastard from the Hanakaiin main family.

Next came the news he received from Jason.

'Blossom Cherry' had been subjected to cryptic assassinations.

Whew!

"What an enormous ambition."

"I just don't know who it is."

Hanakaiin Haru sighed softly and then partially opened his eyes.

Before him was his room; on the long desk sat a single oil lamp.

Despite the annex being fully equipped with modern electrical facilities, Hanakaiin Haru still preferred oil lamps.

Not just for sentimental reasons either.

The oil lamp offered various other uses as well.

Whew!

Taking another deep breath, Hanakaiin Haru picked up a calligraphy brush and began writing intensely.

A few minutes later, the young Onmyoji flicked the sheet of paper.

After waiting for the ink to dry, he placed it inside an envelope.

Jingle.

He shook the small bell at his side.

"Young Master Haru."

A servant quickly entered the room.

"Deliver this letter to Tōru."

The young Onmyoji gave the instruction.

"Understood."

The servant bowed before swiftly leaving the room.

Hanakaiin Haru watched the servant's retreating figure and patiently waited.

Outwardly calm, but deep down, his mind was turbulent.

Could it be you?

Could it be you?

Could it be you?

This question echoed endlessly in Hanakaiin Haru's mind.

The current clues were clear: someone within the Hanakaiin Family had engaged in deep collaboration with the increasingly precarious 'Blossom Cherry.' Of course, such collaboration wasn't just about helping 'Blossom Cherry' weather its crisis—it also aimed to absorb 'Blossom Cherry's' entire power structure, and this was merely the beginning!

Undoubtedly, the other party's ambitions extended beyond just 'Blossom Cherry.'

Nor did they stop at the Hanakaiin Family.

Their sights were set on the entirety of the 'Inside World.'

In Hanakaiin Haru's eyes, among the Hanakaiin Family, only two and a half people possessed the capability and audacity for such a thing.

The first was Hanakaiin Tōru.

The second was Hanakaiin Itsuki.

The remaining half was Hanakaiin Kokorozashi, who had clearly tied himself to the main family and taken his spot in the 'King of Fighters Tournament.'

Hanakaiin Itsuki was notorious for his ruthlessness and exceptional ability.

For him to harbor such ambition was hardly surprising.

As for Hanakaiin Kokorozashi, he usually kept a low profile, yet his fatal move at a critical moment nearly ruined everything. If not for sheer luck, Hanakaiin Haru would have already lost everything by now.

Chapter 1145: Who Will it Be? (2)

Therefore, the other person was counted as half by Hanakaiin Haru.

But this one and a half, compared to Hanakaiin Tōru, was nothing.

In terms of talent and ability, this one and a half, including himself, was nowhere near comparable to Hanakaiin Tōru.

'If Tōru would be willing to take on the role of Family Head, I would gladly step aside.'

This was the shared sentiment of all the branch families.

Simply put, as long as Hanakaiin Tōru was willing, he was the next Family Head of the Hanakaiin Family.

In this regard, Hanakaiin Haru had no objections either.

But Hanakaiin Tōru did not want to.

He seemed far more content staying in his small courtyard, reading or playing chess.

If not for the appearance of this string of unexpected events, Hanakaiin Haru would have believed that Hanakaiin Tōru had no ambition.

But with these unexpected events unfolding, Hanakaiin Haru began to think.

Was all of this a disguise by Hanakaiin Tōru?

Naturally, Hanakaiin Tōru held no interest in the Hanakaiin Family.

Because Hanakaiin Tōru was scheming for the entire Inside World!

Once such suspicions arose, they began to completely dominate Hanakaiin Haru's mind.

He couldn't help but believe these doubts.

Because, deep down, he had never truly believed that anyone could completely ignore the entirety of the Hanakaiin Family.

Of course, it wasn't just Hanakaiin Haru feeling this way.

Hanakaiin Itsuki felt the same.

And so did Hanakaiin Ra.

But unlike Hanakaiin Haru and Hanakaiin Itsuki, who quietly acknowledged these doubts.

Hanakaiin Ra refused to admit them.

He didn't believe Hanakaiin Tōru was like that.

Hanakaiin Ra's steps moved swiftly, his lightweight black tracksuit minimizing resistance as he advanced.

As the youngest of the five branch family representatives, Hanakaiin Ra was the most cheerful in demeanor on ordinary days.

But now, Hanakaiin Ra's face was solemn.

"Could it be Tōru?"

"Impossible, right?"

"Certainly impossible!"

Hanakaiin Ra thought to himself as he hastened toward Hanakaiin Tōru's courtyard.

Unlike the false pretenses among other branch family brothers.

Hanakaiin Ra shared a genuine bond with Hanakaiin Tōru.

Since childhood, he had followed Hanakaiin Tōru closely.

In fact, most of his foundational education had come from Hanakaiin Tōru.

And his ability to become a branch family representative was largely thanks to Hanakaiin Tōru's teaching.

As such, in Hanakaiin Ra's heart, Hanakaiin Tōru was a true elder brother.

An elder brother worth fighting for.

So, no matter how much evidence appeared, Hanakaiin Ra was unwilling to believe it.

He needed to ask Hanakaiin Tōru directly.

Until Hanakaiin Tōru spoke the answer himself.

He would believe nothing else.

"Hm?"

Just as Hanakaiin Ra was speeding toward Hanakaiin Tōru's courtyard, he spotted Hanakaiin Itsuki.

The other person was hurrying as well.

Judging by the direction, he was heading toward Hanakaiin Tōru's courtyard too.

Instinctively, Hanakaiin Ra quickened his pace, darting forward to block Hanakaiin Itsuki's path.

Hanakaiin Itsuki raised an eyebrow as he looked at Hanakaiin Ra.

"Move aside."

Hanakaiin Itsuki said coldly.

"Where are you going?"

Hanakaiin Ra asked directly, while his nose twitched uncontrollably.

Sweet scent!

He detected a sweet aroma emanating from Hanakaiin Itsuki.

It seemed like... milk tea?

How could someone's body smell so strongly of milk tea?

It's not like he had been brewing hundreds of cups of milk tea.

It must be a new perfume, right?

Still, that scent was truly peculiar.

For Hanakaiin Itsuki to choose such a fragrance?

It was even more unconventional.

In Hanakaiin Ra's mind, Hanakaiin Itsuki was unconventional.

Just as Hanakaiin Tōru was universally acknowledged to be the strongest of the younger generation within the Hanakaiin Family, Hanakaiin Itsuki's immense power was also undeniable, but what stood out most was Hanakaiin Itsuki's bloodthirstiness.

A bloodlust far beyond that of an ordinary Onmyoji.

It was as if he were a demon haunting the battlefield.

As a result, most of the Hanakaiin Family simultaneously disliked and feared Hanakaiin Itsuki.

Hanakaiin Ra was no exception,

If it weren't necessary, he would never have clashed with Hanakaiin Itsuki.

But since this was about Hanakaiin Tōru, he had no choice but to step forward.

"Are you blind?"

"Where else could this path lead?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki replied impatiently.

He was in a hurry!

He needed to check whether Hanakaiin Tōru was connected to the recent series of events.

Then, he planned to inform Jason.

And after that?

Of course, he would discuss milk tea with Jason.

Previously, he hadn't understood the meaning of 'sharing with friends brings joy.'

Now he understood.

After Jason drank four hundred and sixteen cups of his carefully prepared milk tea, he felt an unparalleled happiness.

Especially Jason's attitude toward milk tea.

It made him feel like he had found a true kindred spirit.

And since Jason was facing trouble, as one of his friends, it was naturally his duty to help.

When he brought the good news to Jason and drank milk tea together, surely the milk tea would taste even sweeter?

This thought made Hanakaiin Itsuki increasingly impatient.

Without waiting for Hanakaiin Ra's response, he strode forward.

"Stop right there!"

Hanakaiin Ra shouted coldly.

At the same time, a Talisman Paper appeared in his hand.

Immediately, Hanakaiin Itsuki's expression grew utterly grim.

"You're courting death!"

Hanakaiin Itsuki said coldly, vanishing completely from Hanakaiin Ra's sight.

Hm?!

On full alert, Hanakaiin Ra was shocked and instinctively retreated while throwing the Talisman Paper forward.

Whoosh!

A basketball-sized Flame ignited out of thin air.

It neither moved forward nor fell.

The Flame split into more than a dozen fist-sized sparks, circling around Hanakaiin Ra and shielding him completely.

But—

It was useless!

Bam!

A muffled impact.

Hanakaiin Ra felt a sharp pain in his abdomen, his body instinctively curling up like a shrimp, and undigested food surged from his stomach along with acidic bile.

Urgh!

Accompanied by retching sounds, Hanakaiin Ra's vision darkened, stars danced before his eyes.

But Hanakaiin Ra didn't care about any of that.

He only wanted to lift his head and see the person before him.

He needed to confirm whether the person in front of him was indeed Hanakaiin Itsuki.

How could it be so fast?

How could it be so strong?

He didn't even have time to react before being struck down?

How was this possible?

The disbelief in his heart drove Hanakaiin Ra to struggle to lift his head.

But then, a much greater force pressed down on his neck.

Bam!

Hanakaiin Ra's face was slammed into the vomit-covered ground.

"Don't waste food!"

"If you've eaten it, digest it properly!"

"Anything you spit out, swallow it back down!"

Hanakaiin Itsuki said coldly, letting go of his grip and walking toward Hanakaiin Tōru's courtyard.

He was here for Hanakaiin Tōru, not to play around with a brat like Hanakaiin Ra.

Stepping onto the stairs, pushing open the door.

Hanakaiin Itsuki knew that Hanakaiin Tōru's courtyard hardly ever had servants.

Aside from meal delivery three times a day, this place was solely Hanakaiin Tōru's residence.

Creeaaak.

The hinges of the doorframe emitted a series of dense, creaky noises in the middle of the night.

It was somewhat grating.

Especially when the man playing chess under the distant lantern furrowed his brow and looked up, adding a trace of dissonance to the original tranquility, as though the entire picture had been torn apart.

And this dissonance seemed to spread toward Hanakaiin Itsuki.

Making him deeply uncomfortable.

It felt as though he himself had become part of the painting, destined to be torn apart.

"Hmph."

Hanakaiin Itsuki let out a cold snort.

The strange sensation disappeared.

But alongside it, so did the person beneath the tree.

Hanakaiin Itsuki froze.

Soon enough, he heard a sound behind him.

Instinctively, Hanakaiin Itsuki turned to look behind him.

And then—

"Hm?"

Chapter 1146: The answer is obvious

Hanakaiin Ra was lying there face down.

Most of his face was surrounded by undigested food.

These were supposed to be delicious meals, yet at this moment, they were unbearably sour and foul-smelling. Thanks to Hanakaiin Itsuki's brute force pressing down just now, a good amount of vomit had directly filled half of Hanakaiin Ra's mouth.

Disgusting, nauseating.

Waves of discomfort began to spread throughout Ra's chest.

No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't suppress it.

He wanted to get up right away, but the force of Itsuki's heavy strike still lingered in his body, making it almost impossible for him to move.

Only after three to five seconds did Ra finally lift his head.

And then—

Blegh!

Once again, Hanakaiin Ra vomited.

The first time was due to Itsuki's blow.

This time, it was his body's natural response.

Moreover, compared to the first time, this time Ra emptied his stomach completely.

The young man even expelled stomach acid.

Immediately, he stood up to wipe his face quickly, but halfway through, he sank despondently back to the ground.

A wave of stronger emotions surged within him.

It was the feeling of defeat!

An unparalleled sense of failure.

Hanakaiin Ra was proud.

In fact, apart from Hanakaiin Tōru, Ra considered himself the strongest among the younger generation of the Hanakaiin Family.

Even the widely praised Hanakaiin Itsuki couldn't compare to him.

Or, at least, he fell slightly short.

But in reality?

The gap in strength between them was astronomical.

Though that was his perspective toward Itsuki, not Itsuki's view regarding him!

He had never imagined that there would be such a huge disparity between himself and Itsuki.

A disparity so vast, it made resistance futile.

"How could this happen?"

Hanakaiin Ra muttered softly.

Right now, the young man was deeply shaken, utterly lost in doubts about his own existence, completely oblivious to a shadowy figure inching closer to him.

5 meters.

3 meters.

1 meter.

The shadowy figure finally stood behind the young man and slowly drove a paper-thin dagger toward Ra's back.

The approach was silent, but once it reached its range, the dagger suddenly accelerated.

Whish!

The sound of a sharp weapon cutting through air reached Ra's ears, snapping him out of his daze.

Instinctively, he tried to dodge.

But just then, an invisible binding force appeared around his body.

Immediately, Hanakaiin Ra froze, unable to move an inch.

"Damn it!"

Ra cried out in panic, his face turning pale, his eyes flashing with despair.

A trap!

He didn't know who had set the trap, but it was clearly aimed at him!

This time...

He was sure he would die!

Hanakaiin Ra closed his eyes, preparing to meet his end.

But the expected pain never arrived.

What came instead was a soft sigh.

"Ra, I've told you countless times before—not to act impulsively, and never underestimate your opponent."

A familiar voice came from nearby.

Ra opened his eyes and saw the calm, ethereal figure standing before him.

"Tōru-nii!"

Ra immediately scrambled to his feet.

The binding force that had restrained him had vanished at some point.

Tōru smiled as he observed Ra standing up.

Facing that gentle smile, Ra lowered his head in shame.

"Tōru-nii, I'm sorry. I failed you."

Ra said, his face growing red, his eyes brimming with tears.

He looked just like a child who, after being wronged, had found comfort in a parent.

He felt both aggrieved and unwilling to accept his defeat.

"Disappointment isn't the word."

"You did well enough."

"Itsuki... He's certainly intriguing."

Tōru chuckled and shook his head.

"Itsuki?"

"Was he behind all this?"

Ra's fists clenched tightly at the mention of Hanakaiin Itsuki.

"Of course not!"

"Itsuki doesn't use such trickery. He's straightforward."

"Besides, his aura is completely absent from this."

Tōru said while handing Ra the paper-thin dagger.

The dagger was made of metal.

But the craftsmanship was exquisite; not only was it lightweight, it was razor sharp.

Clearly, such a knife wasn't meant for humans.

But for Evil Spirits capable of wielding lightweight objects, it was an ideal weapon.

And as for the binding force just now...

That seemed to be a similar trick, typical of an Evil Spirit.

Analytical thoughts raced through Ra's mind as he pieced together the events of moments ago. Gradually, clarity emerged in his thoughts, but at that very moment—

"Hmph!"

A cold snort rang out, and Hanakaiin Itsuki stepped out from the courtyard in the distance.

Moments earlier, he had sensed something was amiss upon hearing the sound of a blade slicing through the air.

Then, Tōru had dispersed the image of the Evil Spirit with a single strike, followed by their ensuing conversation, which Itsuki had overheard clearly.

Toward Hanakaiin Tōru, Itsuki maintained a guarded attitude.

It was the vigilance toward a formidable opponent.

One might even call it respect.

However, Itsuki wouldn't phrase it that way.

That's because he didn't know whether Tōru liked milk tea.

If he did, then respect would be appropriate.

If he didn't, Itsuki would continue to keep his guard up.

As for Hanakaiin Ra?

He was nothing more than a defeated mutt!

Beyond his barking, he served no purpose.

Thus, Itsuki sneered aloud.

Such a disdainful attitude made Ra feel enraged.

"You!"

The young man glared, his anger sparking a surge of battle intent within him.

Though he had just experienced defeat, he still chose to fight once more at this very moment.

Chapter 1147: The Answer is Obvious (2)

However, before they could truly get into a combat stance, Hanakaiin Tōru lightly patted the young man on the shoulder.

"Tōru-nii?"

Hanakaiin Ra looked at Hanakaiin Tōru in confusion.

He knew very well that when it came to combat, Hanakaiin Tōru would never stop him.

Respect every battle.

Whether it was someone else's or his own.

This was what Hanakaiin Tōru had said.

Hanakaiin Ra believed that Hanakaiin Tōru would never break his word.

Then?

"Look at the dagger in your hand."

Without waiting for Hanakaiin Tōru to speak, Hanakaiin Itsuki spoke first.

The young man, notorious for his behavior, spoke in an increasingly disdainful tone.

Hanakaiin Itsuki blushed again.

What's wrong?

What's happening?

Is it because of the earlier failure?

Am I losing my composure?

After glaring at Hanakaiin Itsuki, Hanakaiin Ra quickly began forming hand seals.

For an Onmyoji, identifying the mastermind through a dagger held by an Evil Spirit was not a difficult task.

Especially for someone like Hanakaiin Ra, who could be called an exceptional Onmyoji—it was even easier.

"Sorry."

Hanakaiin Tōru slightly bowed to Hanakaiin Itsuki as an apology.

This made Hanakaiin Itsuki, who was about to once again reprimand Hanakaiin Ra, stop abruptly.

He furrowed his brow and snorted disdainfully.

A battle that hadn't started was now over.

Hanakaiin Itsuki didn't care.

He wasn't a battle maniac anyway.

What he cared more about was helping Jason.

And the appearance of that Evil Spirit just moments ago made him realize that the target he suspected was most likely not Hanakaiin Tōru, but someone else—and that person must be inside this villa.

Who could it be?

Hanakaiin Haru?

Hanakaiin Kokorozashi?

Hopefully, it's Hanakaiin Haru—how could someone who doesn't even understand the appeal of milk tea possess Jason's friendship?

But the truth was disappointing.

The Onmyodo pointed toward the courtyard where Hanakaiin Kokorozashi resided.

"We'll find this bastard right now!"

Hanakaiin Ra shouted at Hanakaiin Tōru.

As for Hanakaiin Itsuki?

Hanakaiin Ra temporarily chose to ignore him.

But in his heart, he'd already made up his mind—once this incident was resolved, he was going to devote himself to training, and then seek revenge.

Hanakaiin Ra walked ahead.

Hanakaiin Tōru and Hanakaiin Itsuki followed behind.

Soon, they arrived in front of Hanakaiin Kokorozashi's courtyard.

"Please wait, young masters. I will notify Kokorozashi-sama."

The servant responded respectfully.

Unlike the solitary Hanakaiin Tōru, Kokorozashi's residence had many servants—even more than those in the courtyards of Hanakaiin Itsuki and Hanakaiin Ra combined.

"Decadent and excessive."

Hanakaiin Ra curled his lips.

And yet, his eyes betrayed a hint of envy.

Clearly, the young man carried a peculiar thought in his mind.

Hanakaiin Tōru remained exceedingly calm; aside from the necessary courtesies, he spent most of his time daydreaming.

Hanakaiin Itsuki paced back and forth where he stood.

His instincts told him that something was amiss.

And at that moment—

"Ahhhhh!"

A scream erupted from inside the courtyard.

The moment the scream sounded, Hanakaiin Ra rushed in.

Hanakaiin Itsuki followed shortly after.

Hanakaiin Tōru did not act immediately; instead, he hesitated for a brief moment. Then, he followed them inside.

Hanakaiin Kokorozashi was dead.

The one who had replaced Hanakaiin Haru as the 'branch family heir' lay dead in his own living room.

Seated cross-legged, back against the wall, his eyes were wide open, staring at the mortal wound in his chest.

It was the mark of a dagger.

Thin as paper.

Upon seeing the wound, Hanakaiin Itsuki instantly came to his senses.

He turned to look at Hanakaiin Ra.

"It wasn't me!"

The young man instinctively said.

"Obviously."

"This is a trap!"

Hanakaiin Itsuki snapped irritably, and then turned his gaze to Hanakaiin Tōru.

"Did you, this guy, already notice something earlier?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki asked.

Hanakaiin Tōru's pause in movement earlier hadn't escaped his notice.

"Yes."

"The main family members have already arrived."

Hanakaiin Tōru said faintly before sitting down cross-legged.

"What?!"

"Then, then!"

Hanakaiin Ra panicked. He glanced at Hanakaiin Kokorozashi's corpse, then at the specialized dagger in his hand, completely at a loss.

When the main family arrived, he would be the prime suspect.

No!

He might even be directly accused of being the murderer!

The real culprit, having plotted all this, would certainly leave plenty of evidence against him on Hanakaiin Kokorozashi's corpse—or even in the entire room.

These clues would 'point' to him as the killer.

Should he make a run for it now?

Fully aware of the ruthless methods of the main family, the idea was the first thing that came to Hanakaiin Ra's mind.

However, upon seeing Hanakaiin Tōru sitting calmly, Hanakaiin Ra suddenly felt reassured.

If Tōru-nii hadn't said anything or taken any action.

Then there must still be a chance to turn things around.

With that reassurance, Hanakaiin Ra sat down beside Hanakaiin Tōru.

Having already sat down seconds earlier, Hanakaiin Itsuki glanced at Hanakaiin Ra and smirked.

"Not completely stupid."

"If you really ran."

"That would confirm your title as the murderer. And I'm willing to bet, before you can even leave the villa, you'd be dead."

Hanakaiin Itsuki said as his gaze shifted toward the courtyard's perimeter.

Silhouettes began to appear.

No fewer than thirty people gathered outside the courtyard.

Each radiated malice.

Or more precisely, murderous intent.

No internal fighting!

This was one of the rules of the Hanakaiin Family.

And now, someone had broken it!

This wasn't just disrespect to the ancestors—it was also a blatant challenge to the current head of the family.

Chapter 1148: The Answer is Obvious (3)

The middle-aged man leading the group entered the room with two others, while the remaining individuals kept a distant but unwavering watch on Hanakaiin Tōru, Hanakaiin Itsuki, and Hanakaiin Ra. Their posture unmistakably conveyed that any sudden movement from the trio would summon an immediate swarm upon them.

What happened next unfolded seamlessly.

Clues found on Hanakaiin Kokorozashi's corpse and in the house.

All pointed to Hanakaiin Ra.

Of course, Hanakaiin Tōru and Hanakaiin Itsuki were implicated as well.

"Do you have anything to say?"

The middle-aged man glared at the trio.

"I didn't kill him!"

Hanakaiin Ra stiffened his neck as he spoke.

Hanakaiin Tōru and Hanakaiin Itsuki remained silent.

"Not you?"

"What, are you trying to say he staged everything and killed himself to frame you?"

"Don't be ridiculous!"

The middle-aged man snapped in anger and, without giving Hanakaiin Ra another chance, waved his hand.

Immediately, a barrier emerged.

It swiftly enveloped the three of them.

Leaving behind a team to guard them, the rest of the group headed towards the trio's residence.

The middle-aged man was convinced there would be stronger, more direct evidence there.

The large group departed.

The courtyard fell into sudden silence.

Through the barrier, Hanakaiin Ra could clearly see Hanakaiin Kokorozashi's corpse, his eyes wide open in death.

He felt as though he was beginning to understand something, but the more he thought, the less certain he became.

"Tōru-aniki?"

Hanakaiin Ra instinctively turned to Hanakaiin Tōru for guidance.

"He was a partner."

"Silenced to cover it up."

Hanakaiin Tōru replied simply.

"What?!"

Hanakaiin Ra exclaimed in shock.

"Such a naive kid."

"Didn't you notice the marks on his palm?—With this type of special dagger, because it's so thin, gripping it tightly leaves what looks like a cut. And, to make it look more convincing as though you or we had attacked him, he must have held it firmly.

"But he didn't anticipate that, as he prepared to wound himself to the perfect degree, his partner would seize the opportunity to push his wrist—causing the blade to veer and pierce his heart instead."

Hanakaiin Itsuki sneered coldly as he spoke.

"Palm wounds?"

"I don't see them!"

"Healing! Onmyōjutsu healing!"

Upon closer inspection, Hanakaiin Ra spotted faint white scars and gasped in realization.

"That man just now couldn't have missed that!"

"Could he... have done it intentionally?"

Hanakaiin Ra's expression shifted again.

"Of course."

"What did you expect?"

"The main family wouldn't pass up this opportunity."

Hanakaiin Itsuki said while standing up and stretching his limbs.

"What are you doing?"

Hanakaiin Ra asked in surprise.

"Running!"

"You think we'll stay here and wait to die?"

"I don't care about carrying the Hanakaiin name."

Hanakaiin Itsuki declared as he prepared to act.

But he was stopped by Hanakaiin Tōru, who raised his hand.

"Why?"

"You're stopping me?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki grinned, baring his pale teeth.

"Hold on a bit."

"Trust that there will be a turning point."

Hanakaiin Tōru said calmly.

"A turning point?"

"Tōru-aniki, did you set this up in advance?"

Hanakaiin Ra asked, looking at Hanakaiin Tōru with excitement and admiration.

Trust?

Hanakaiin Itsuki paused.

Then, the young and disreputable Onmyoji sat down as well.

He chose to trust.

But not trust Hanakaiin Tōru.

Rather, he trusted his companion.

Seeing Hanakaiin Itsuki sit down too, Hanakaiin Ra continued asking.

"Tōru-aniki, who's the killer?"

As soon as the question left his mouth, Hanakaiin Ra realized Hanakaiin Itsuki was looking at him as if he were a fool.

Even the always composed Hanakaiin Tōru had a trace of helplessness on his face.

Stunned, Hanakaiin Ra blinked and whispered in the lowest voice—

"Am I the only one who doesn't know?"

Chapter 1149: The Fog Rolls In!

Hanakaiin Haru sat in his room, waiting patiently.

But the one who arrived wasn't Hanakaiin Tōru — instead, it was a group of people from the Master House.

The one leading them, Hanakaiin Haru recognized.

It was the Steward responsible for overseeing the Split House in this trial.

Of course, only nominally.

In reality?

The role leaned much more toward surveillance, similar in nature to the person who had died inside the lighthouse on the beach.

Faced with the ominous demeanor of the visitor, Hanakaiin Haru remained calm, standing up steadily and composed.

"Hello, Steward."

Hanakaiin Haru gave a slight bow.

Before he could fully rise, a chain was already looped over his body.

"Haru, you've committed a crime!"

The middle-aged Steward spoke in a deep voice.

"May I ask what crime that would be?"

The young Onmyoji didn't resist, staying perfectly composed.

"You colluded with Hanakaiin Tōru, Hanakaiin Itsuki, and Hanakaiin Ra to murder Hanakaiin Kokorozashi. The evidence is conclusive — are you still going to play dumb?"

"In Hanakaiin Tōru's room, we've already found the letter you wrote to him!"

"Now, come with me!"

"Wait for the Master House's judgment!"

Saying this, the Steward tugged the chain, dragging Hanakaiin Haru outside.

Hanakaiin Haru cooperated, offering no resistance whatsoever.

Even though such treatment carried strong overtones of humiliation.

The surrounding servants watched with reactions of either shock or fright.

Of course, some harbored a sense of schadenfreude.

Though that schadenfreude was deeply hidden, so much so that the normal eye wouldn't easily discern it, Hanakaiin Haru saw it.

He didn't mind.

In fact, when the middle-aged Steward mentioned the names Hanakaiin Tōru, Hanakaiin Itsuki, and Hanakaiin Ra, he had ceased to care entirely.

Though surprising.

It wasn't the worst outcome, was it?

"It's not the worst outcome!"

When Hanakaiin Itsuki saw Hanakaiin Haru entering the Barrier, he broke into a grin.

Hanakaiin Haru glanced at the three present, then at the corpse lying there. Calmly nodding, he sat down on the ground and said, "Far better than I imagined."

"What exactly are you all riddling about?"

"Why does it feel like I'm the only one in the dark?"

Hanakaiin Ra scratched his head, his face full of frustration.

"Ra, look carefully — who's missing?"

Hanakaiin Tōru sighed as he spoke.

"Everyone's here!"

"No one's missing!"

Hanakaiin Ra looked utterly perplexed.

Such an answer didn't just prompt Hanakaiin Tōru to sigh; a sneering expression appeared on Hanakaiin Itsuki's face, while Hanakaiin Haru simply turned his head away, refusing to look at Hanakaiin Ra.

For the first time, they realized Hanakaiin Ra's mind might not be working so well.

"Who are the people from the Split House participating in this trial?"

Faced with the still-bewildered Hanakaiin Ra, Hanakaiin Tōru had no choice but to unveil the mystery.

Hanakaiin Ra blinked blankly.

He scanned the people present, then, taking a deep breath, shouted —

"Hanakaiin Ue?!"

"It's him?!"

Images of a smug, overconfident, but ultimately incompetent figure instantly surfaced in Hanakaiin Ra's mind.

"Impossible!"

"Someone like that?!"

Almost instinctively, Hanakaiin Ra let out this incredulous remark.

"Of course he's impossible."

"But don't forget..."

Hanakaiin Tōru gestured toward the guards from the Master House outside.

Suddenly, Hanakaiin Ra pieced it all together.

It all made sense.

The Master House!

What trial for the Split House joining the Master House!

The Master House would always remain the Master House!

And Hanakaiin Ue and Hanakaiin Kokorozashi?

Both were pawns!

The only difference was that Hanakaiin Kokorozashi believed he would end up the ultimate victor, whereas Hanakaiin Ue understood his role.

Pawns must embrace their own fate as pawns!

Thus, Hanakaiin Ue still lived.

"Damn it!"

"Was this guy's behavior all an act?"

Hanakaiin Ra roared indignantly.

"Everyone wears a facade, living life behind masks — what's so wrong with that?"

"At least, in certain moments, you might feel a little more at ease."

The one who spoke wasn't Hanakaiin Tōru, but Hanakaiin Itsuki.

The infamous young Onmyoji seemed like a philosopher.

This prompted Hanakaiin Haru to turn his head.

"I thought you'd break out outright."

Hanakaiin Haru said.

"Why didn't you?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki rolled his eyes.

"Because I trust my companions."

Hanakaiin Haru replied.

"And I trust my friends."

Hanakaiin Itsuki retorted.

"I imagine you're not talking about Jason, are you?"

Hanakaiin Haru asked.

"You think just because you met Jason first, he automatically became your companion?"

"He shares a common passion with me — he's my friend!"

Hanakaiin Itsuki sneered coldly.

The two glared at each other, neither backing down.

"What's this Jason they're referring to?"

Hanakaiin Ra remained perplexed.

"He seems to be someone important!"

Hanakaiin Tōru said, looking at the night sky again. Though the Barrier obscured the view, rendering the night somewhat blurry, his gaze was still profound.

It was as if he were reminiscing.

Or perhaps simply lamenting.

"Would the Master House make a move against this Jason?"

Hanakaiin Ra asked softly.

"Of course."

"He's Haru's companion and Itsuki's friend, naturally involved in the assassination of Hanakaiin Kokorozashi — the Master House always prioritizes prudence above all else."

"Jason's 'Sword Saint' title alone is enough to warrant their meticulous caution."

Hanakaiin Tōru explained.

Chapter 1150: The Fog Rolls In! (2)

"What do you mean by cautious and prudent?"

"Isn't this just killing to silence someone?"

Hanakaiin Ra said angrily.

"Were you really raised in the Hanakaiin Family?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki suddenly asked curiously.

"What?"

"Are you saying you weren't?"

Hanakaiin Ra retorted furiously.

"I was."

"But we're different!"

"You lived far too comfortably!"

"No!"

"You were protected too well!"

Hanakaiin Itsuki spoke, glancing at Hanakaiin Tōru with a hint of admiration.

Hanakaiin Ra frowned, feeling offended again.

And Hanakaiin Tōru?

He said nothing, simply gazing at the night sky.

"Tōru, you had your own plan initially. Are you now just planning to wait?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki stated with certainty.

"Yes, wait."

Hanakaiin Tōru nodded, his gaze at the night sky growing increasingly serious.

Hanakaiin Itsuki looked at Hanakaiin Tōru's demeanor, exhaled, and lay down where he was.

"Lazy guy."

He muttered under his breath, closing his eyes.

Hanakaiin Haru did the same, shutting her eyes.

Only Hanakaiin Ra kept his eyes wide open.

He glanced at Hanakaiin Itsuki, then at Hanakaiin Haru, and finally at Hanakaiin Tōru.

He felt like he had a thousand things to say.

Something he should express.

Yet it seemed no one wanted to acknowledge him.

Like a discarded puppy, Hanakaiin Ra slowly inched toward Hanakaiin Tōru.

He spoke in a low voice.

"Tōru-nii."

"Am I stupid?"

Hanakaiin Tōru withdrew his gaze from the night sky and shook his head seriously.

"My silly little brother, how could you be stupid?"

Hanakaiin Ra:

...

Jason, waiting for Hui Lijing's return, was lounging on the sofa with his eyes closed.

But the next moment, he sat upright.

"Moved already?"

"Was it the Hanakaiin Family?"

"Or was it Blossom Cherry?"

"Or did both coordinate in this?"

Jason thought to himself as he grabbed his backpack and took out a mask and cleaver.

"I didn't want this, but someone always forces me!"

Jason murmured softly, putting on the mask.

Then, picking up the cleaver, he stood up.

The next moment—

Jason vanished from the room; even the brightest lights couldn't reveal his silhouette.

"Are you sure the target is inside the room?"

A robe-clad Onmyoji asked the person beside him.

"Confirmed."

"Since returning in the afternoon, they haven't left."

Just having verified the information, the subordinate answered.

"Good."

"Now, it's time for us to act."

Saying this, the Onmyoji turned to look at the crowd behind him.

Behind this Onmyoji stood over ten people.

Each wore white ceremonial robes and black tall hats, exuding steady energy and cold expressions.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it's our time to serve the family."

"Eliminate the target and ensure the continuation of our legacy."

"This is a fight for survival, so give it your all!"

The leader bowed respectfully as he spoke.

"Understood!"

The dozen Onmyoji answered in unison.

Then, they gestured toward the distance.

Suddenly, shadows flickered.

Hundreds of armored Samurai and an even greater number of black-clad Ninja emerged.

The Samurai exuded ferocity, like blades unsheathed.

The Ninja remained silent and menacing, with harsh gazes.

"Enter and surround him."

"Hunt him down!"

The Onmyoji commanded.

Meanwhile, a Barrier enveloped the entire block.

They wanted to minimize collateral damage.

This wasn't due to their kindness.

Rather, it was a requirement from their partners.

They had ridiculed their collaborators before, calling them crocodile tears.

Just mere mortals.

What was there to consider?

But ultimately, they accepted the suggestion.

After all, they were far from mortal.

When dealing with mortals, some charity seemed appropriate.

Consider it an added thrill for this hunt.

With ten Onmyoji acting simultaneously, the Barrier was completed almost instantly.

Hundreds of Samurai, followed by countless Ninja, quickly approached "Mask x Cleaver x Flesh."

When the small building was completely surrounded, a squad of Ninja swiftly climbed upstairs.

Not only at the doorway but on the rooftop too, Ninja silhouettes appeared.

The squad leader took out a thin wire, inserted it into the lock, and gently twisted it open.

Click!

The crisp sound of the door unlocking served as a signal.

The Ninja crowded around the door rolled into the room.

Meanwhile, the Ninja on the rooftop occupied the four corners, prepared to strike at any moment.

In their calculations, the target's only escape route was to jump onto the rooftop.

But!

There was nothing!

The room was completely empty!

"No one!"

"The target must've fled!"

"But didn't escape far!"

The squad leader scanned the empty room, inspecting the sofa with visible pressure marks, brushing his hand over it to feel the lingering warmth, and immediately reported.

"Pursue!"

The radio transmitted affirmative orders.

Immediately, the Ninjas launched into action.

If he hadn't fled far, then he must still be within the block.

Staying within the block boosted their confidence in tracking him down.

After all, they were professionals.

Every Ninja carried such assurance.

This made them all the more aggressive.

Unlike the agile movements of the Ninjas across walls and rooftops, the Samurai displayed more composure, operating in pairs, like sentries stationed across the entire block, no more than a hundred meters apart.

Each pair was clearly visible to one another.

"This target is supposedly a Sword Saint?"

In one team stationed at a street corner, a Samurai couldn't hold back his query.

"Sword Saint, my ass!"

"It's just bragging!"

"If he were truly a Sword Saint, running away would've been impossible."

The other one declared confidently.

"Maybe it's strategy?"

The first speaker speculated.

"You've read too many books to lose your common sense."

"Who believes in strategies anymore?"

"We simply outnumber the enemy and crush him—that's the best tactic!"

The other Samurai scoffed disdainfully.

"That's actually a form of strategy!"

The first Samurai emphasized.

"This counts as strategy?"

"What kind of strategy is this?"

"Anyone knows that the many overpower the few."

The other laughed contemptuously.

"But, have you heard this saying?"

The younger Samurai asked.

"What saying?"

The older Samurai replied.

"Truth is always in the hands of the few!"

The young Samurai stated seriously.

The words made the older Samurai chuckle dryly.

"Do you know why truth lies in the hands of the few?"

The elder retorted.

"Is it because... they're smart? Calm?"

The younger Samurai thought for a moment before asking.

"No!"

"It's because everyone who agrees with them gets killed."

"And they?"

"They're barely hanging on."

"That's why they're the minority."

The elder Samurai answered.

The younger Samurai froze, instinctively wanting to refute, but when the words reached his lips, he felt his senior's perspective seemed oddly reasonable.

Without realizing it, the young Samurai was stunned into silence.

Seeing the younger Samurai in such a state, the elder Samurai chuckled again.

"Don't think too much about these things."

"It's useless."

"Just remember to grip your sword tightly—agree with your view, spare them; disagree, cut them down. The first time you strike, you'll be anxious, scared someone would see through your facade of might and twisted logic. But after ten or a hundred cuts, your words will become truth. Nobody will doubt you."

"Because those who would doubt you are dead."

The elder Samurai said, brandishing his katana.

The long blade gleamed with a chilling light under the moonlight.

The younger Samurai watched, then unconsciously picked up his own sword.

At this moment, he seemed to grasp the truth.

He felt a strange urge to indulge in it.

It was a peculiar thrill.

But then, the young Samurai frowned, looking into the distance with a hint of complaint in his voice—

"Why's it getting foggy?"