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Grunge Daddy Ichiban

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*“Creating is the Ritual, Love is the Reason.”
— Kendrick-Kamau Negasi*

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Chapter 1

Showered in chaos

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“Creating is the Ritual; Love is the Reason.”

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The barn loomed on the outskirts of the orange-beam-drenched sprawl, its splintered beams sagging under the weight of time. The air smelled of mildew and forgotten harvests. Reginald — a blue horse burdened with an intellect too vast for his equine frame — perched atop a rotting hay bale, chewing a stalk of hay with deliberate disdain. As he chewed, each bite a deliberate commentary on the absurdity unfolding below.

"Let's establish this immediately," Reginald mused, his voice a low rumble laced with scholarly cynicism, as if he were lecturing a particularly dim audience. "I did not engineer the arrival of Grunge Daddy Ichiban. I am merely the unfortunate witness to an anomaly—a flannel-clad void given mortal shape. Destiny blinked, and here we are. And trust me, I'd rather be grading papers on Nietzsche than babysitting this mess."

Inside the apartment—a crumbling sanctuary wedged between pawn shops and flickering billboards—the bathroom had become a crucible of chaos. Steam rose in thick, phantom tendrils, curling around the cracked tiles and fogging the mirror into a smeary void. The showerhead spat scalding water, each droplet stinging Ichiban's skin like a thousand tiny accusations. He stood beneath it, bare-chested, his kimono-esque coat discarded in a heap by the sink, his dark locs in an autonomous performance art. The heat was a distraction, a penance, but it couldn't drown out the hum in his bones—the Red Gaze stirring, a fungal whisper threading through his veins.

The first assailant dropped from the ceiling vent with the grace of a shadow given form, a ninja clad in black, his twin kamas flashing like crescent moons. His movements were a symphony of precision, honed by years of silent slaughter in service to unseen masters. Ichiban didn't flinch. Instinct took over, his hand snapping to the nearest weapon—a bottle of Herbal Essences shampoo, its label promising softness amid the violence. He flung it with lethal intent, the plastic projectile spinning end over end. The ninja dodged, a flicker of disdain crossing his masked face, but Ichiban

was already in motion, lunging forward, knee driving into the man's spine with a crack that echoed off the tiles. The ninja crumpled, teeth skittering across the floor like dice tossed in a back-alley game.

"A thesis on applied force," Reginald murmured, his voice drifting through the steam as if he were narrating from some ethereal plane. "Elegant in its brutality. A+ for effort."

The mist thickened as more figures emerged—two, then three—silhouettes birthed from the vapor, their chain sickles whirring through the air like mechanical serpents. The chains glinted, catching the dim light from a flickering bulb overhead, and Ichiban reacted without pause. He ripped the shower curtain rod free from its mounts, the metal screeching in protest, and wielded it like a staff. Steel clashed against steel as he parried the first strike, the impact vibrating up his arms, a dull ache settling into his shoulders.

"Really? Chain sickles?" Reginald drawled, his tone dripping with mock incredulity. "Did you raid the budget ninja warehouse? I mean, I get it—times are tough—but this is embarrassing."

Ichiban yanked a chain mid-swing, using its momentum to redirect its path. The sickle's curved blade arced back, striking its wielder's companion with surgical precision—skull met skull in a wet crunch, and both bodies collapsed, dissolving into wisps of vapor that mingled with the steam. A faint metallic tang lingered in the air, the scent of blood and rust.

The final assassin emerged from the haze—lean, sinewy, his face wrapped in barbed wire that gleamed like a crown of thorns. He moved like liquid shadow, nunchucks spinning in a blur of controlled fury. The wooden handles cracked against Ichiban's ribs, each blow a dull thud that sent waves of pain radiating through his torso. He grunted, absorbing the punishment, his breath hitching but his focus unshaken.

"Oh, this is rich!" Reginald laughed, his voice rising with perverse delight. "The legendary Ichiban, getting his ass whooped by Bruce Lee's Temu cousin. I'd pay to see this on pay-per-view."

Ichiban's hand closed around a bar of Ivory soap—99.44% pure, 100% unorthodox weaponry. He feinted left, letting the bar slip from his grasp to rebound off the tile with a calculated ricochet, then redirected it with a flick of his wrist. The soap struck the ninja's eyes, a perfect shot that elicited a howl of agony as the man clawed at his face, blinded by suds and shame.

"Soap?" Reginald howled, his laughter bouncing off the walls. "You weaponized SOAP? I have never been prouder. This is peak absurdity, my friend."

The ninja's wail cut off abruptly as Ichiban seized the nunchucks mid-flail, wrapping the chain around the man's throat in a single fluid motion. A sharp twist, a gurgle, and the body slumped, dissolving into mist like the others. A single feather remained—black as midnight, its edges honed to

razor sharpness—drifting to the wet floor with an almost reverent slowness.

Moonlight sliced through the apartment's shattered blinds, casting jagged stripes across the warped floorboards. Ichiban knelt in the dim glow, shirtless, his chest rising and falling with deliberate calm. In his palm rested The Red Gaze—a dried mushroom, its surface cracked and pulsing faintly, as if it still drew breath from some unseen source. Its fungal scent was earthy and bitter, a reminder of the void it had come from.

He hesitated, the weight of the decision pressing against his ribs. Then, he surrendered.

The mushroom dissolved on his tongue, crumbling into ash with a taste like iron and decay, something older than stars igniting in his bloodstream. His veins glowed briefly, a lattice of mycelium threading beneath his skin, illuminating the room in a sickly green hue. For a moment, he could taste the abyss—raw, unfiltered, infinite—and it swallowed him whole.

Stars withered in his vision, their light snuffed out by an encroaching darkness that oozed through his senses like tar. At the center of this void stood the Supreme Being, an entity sculpted from shifting shadows and refracted light, her form both singular and multitude. Her presence pressed against his mind, a weight that threatened to unravel him.

Her voice was a chorus, layered and resonant, cutting through the silence like a blade. "You carry silence within you. But silence is not absence—it is potential unrealized."

Visions erupted in his consciousness, vivid and unrelenting:

—Chairman Meow, lifeless in a rain-soaked gutter, his orange fur matted with blood, eyes staring blankly at a sky that offered no mercy.

—Men in falcon-emblazoned jackets, their laughter serrated and cruel, blades glinting as they carved their mark into the city's underbelly.

—A katana, drenched in crimson, reflecting a face that was no longer his own—distorted, hollow, a mask of vengeance.

"Avenge the cat," the Supreme Being intoned, her voice a command that burrowed into his bones. "Turn their laughter to ash. Let The Red Gaze be your crucible."

Flames coiled through his veins, rewriting his sinews with purpose, his marrow with fury. The vision faded, and reality snapped back into focus.

Ichiban gasped, his lungs clawing for air as the apartment shuddered around him. The walls seemed to breathe, expanding and contracting in time with his ragged inhalations. The static on the ancient CRT television sharpened, resolving into an image of the alley where Chairman Meow had

died—a grainy feed, live and unfiltered. He was seeing through space, the Red Gaze amplifying his senses beyond the mortal coil.

He lifted his hand, trembling slightly, and the katana resting on the coffee table rose in response, hovering an inch above the scratched wood. It vibrated with unseen force, a low hum filling the room. Blood trickled from his nostrils, thick and black, staining his upper lip. The Red Gaze wasn't a gift—it was a loan, and the interest was steep.

"Oh, wonderful," Reginald remarked, materializing in the corner with an apple in his mouth, his tone dripping with sarcasm. "You've evolved from 'unhinged hermit' to 'unhinged hermit with telekinesis.' Progress. But for the love of God, clean yourself up. You look like a discount Nosferatu."

A shadow flitted past the window—Heron, gaunt and hooded, his ember eyes burning like twin coals in the night. He vanished as swiftly as he appeared, but not before a second razor-edged feather embedded itself in the windowsill with a soft thunk, quivering slightly.

The landline rang, its cord twisting like a noose as the shrill tone cut through the silence. Ichiban wiped the blood from his face with the back of his hand and lifted the receiver.

Silence stretched across the line, heavy and expectant. Then—

"Retrieve the briefcase by eleven," came a voice, amused and sharp, like a blade drawn across silk. "It's vibrating with bad decisions."

Click.

Ichiban donned his kimono-esque coat, the fabric swallowing the city's fractured glow as he stepped into the streets. Rain slicked the pavement, pooling in the cracked concrete like blood seeping from a fresh wound. The air carried the metallic tang of something ancient stirring beneath the modern rot—a whisper of the void threading through the neon haze.

"The feather isn't a trinket, Ichiban," Reginald called from a rusted fire escape, his silhouette stark against the flickering lights. "It's an invoice. And those always get collected. Trust me, I've seen the paperwork."

A distant engine roared, its growl reverberating through the alleyways. A scream punctuated the night, sharp and fleeting, swallowed by the city's ceaseless hum. The ground quivered beneath Ichiban's boots, a pulsing resonance humming through the glass windows of abandoned storefronts. He turned toward the alley, his heartbeat slowing to match the rhythm of something inevitable drawing closer.

A figure coalesced in the dark—tall, clad in a trench coat lined with jagged feathers, a hooked blade resting casually against his hip. Heron.

Their eyes locked, a silent acknowledgment passing between them. No greeting. No pretense.

With a flick of his wrist, Heron tossed a black envelope into Ichiban's grasp. It landed with a weight that belied its size, the object inside pressing against the paper like a promise—or a threat.

"Ah, delightful," Reginald muttered sotto voce, peering over Ichiban's shoulder. "A cryptic package from a man who treats murder as a pastime. Open it, I beg you."

Ichiban tore the envelope open. A single steel coin glinted in his palm, engraved with a falcon mid-flight, its wings spread in a gesture of dominion. Beneath it, scrawled in sharp ink, were a time and place.

Midnight. The docks.

Time to collect his debts.

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The absurdity continues.

You just read Chapter One of *The Absurd Allegorical Introduction of Grunge Daddy Ichiban: Redux* — mute, telekinetic, haunted by a dead cat named Chairman Meow, narrated by a horse who did not engineer this.

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