

## Chapter 4 - Journey

### Part 1

Wakamiya Rika's sleeping time dwindled to almost nothing after the report of Tsuchimikado Harutora's spiritual disaster terrorism spread.

Wakamiya was a young journalist of a large publisher and belonged to the editing team of the Monthly Onmyouji. Just like its name, the magazine was a gathering of information related to Onmyouji. The Monthly Onmyouji was a magazine that introduced the world of magic and Onmyouji to the general public. But they had spent a lot of effort to get new readers. The representative example of this was their crowning the hero National First-Class Onmyouji with the title of 'Twelve Divine Generals'. That being said, they were just a magazine catering to the market. The editing team was a total of six people, including contract and part-time workers. Four of them were formal employees, including Wakamiya, of course.

"Hey! Kurahashi[8] still isn't done with the Mystical Investigators' activity report yet?"

"Sorry, I'll go check."

"Furubayashi-san, I think he went to Hachioji regarding the matter of the 'Colonel' missing yesterday."

"Hachioji? The Development Lab, huh."

"In his investigation he noticed that the Fujikawa Industries people also went to Hachioji. Maybe they're developing a new type for military use."

"For the spiritual disaster terrorism, huh."

The Monthly Onmyouji's editing team had entered twenty-four-hour coverage mode since hearing the Onmyou Agency's announcement last afternoon. But the magic community was still exclusive, and it was very hard for outsiders to get important information.

Wakamiya registered herself in the name log and walked outside.

"Hey! Wakamiya!"

It was the editor-in-chief Furubayashi.

"What happened afterwards with the Kurahashi daughter's disappearance?"

"I still don't know. She hasn't appeared at the Onmyou Academy since then."

"What? You didn't say anything about such an important thing? Do you have any testimony from nearby residents? Kurahashi Kyouko's been taking leave from the Onmyou Academy since then, huh. And her father put a monitoring shikigami on her."

"Chief, it's best to be careful what you say. You can't ask the Kurahashi family directly."

"Of course. They're the world-famous Kurahashi family. That's why the Onmyou Agency Chief has to move in secret."

"Okay, I'll go sort it out now."

"Now? What were you doing yesterday and the day before!?"

"Uh, I had some business....."

Furubayashi got mad.

"It's the Onmyou Academy and the Tsuchimikado! Did you even know that Tsuchimikado Natsume's on the run!!!??"

"That..... Since a long time ago....."

"Hmph, don't be snippy with me!"

"The Mystical Investigators are searching for her whereabouts with all they have right now, so I don't think there's much for me to do."

"I want to hear a report, not excuses!"

"But I'm very busy right now. I'll make an official report to you later."

"You'd better realize the dangerous position you're in."

Just then,

"Furubayashi-kun, what's going on!?"

"President?"

"It's a big uproar. There was another announcement. If you don't have enough people, you come talk with me. This is the priority right now."

"Alright, thanks." He looked at Wakamiya. "Well then, contact me over the phone if there's news, Wakamiya."

The editing team understood several things about the evening the Phase Four spiritual disaster occurred in Ogikubo. They had learned that the captured Tsuchimikado family had been fugitives with Natsume. There had been a large-scale magic battle before the spiritual disaster happened. During the magic battle, 'Fire Demon' Miyachi who was known as the strongest exorcist had used a long-range magic, and his target had been Tsuchimikado Harutora who now called himself the North Star King. Also, the editor-in-chief had pointed out a small commotion in the Kurahashi residence along with the disappearance of the Chief's only daughter, Kurahashi Kyouko. Though they weren't sure how the Phase Four was related to the magic battle, they couldn't assume they were unrelated.

There were other things too. Before and after the spiritual disaster happened, there had been a large vehicle running amok in a place not far from Ogikubo. There were traces left behind by Independent Officer Shigeoka's shikigami team. Also, on the same day, there were witnesses who saw two people riding shikigami and flying in the direction of Ogikubo. Perhaps everything was somehow related. But Wakamiya and the others had too much work to do and could only limit themselves to possibilities. This incident was extremely special to Wakamiya, and she wanted to at least confirm who it was manipulating things in the shadows. This incident wasn't just a chain of events that caused the Phase Four in Ogikubo. The roots of this incident were related to the

Hinamatsuri Repurification two years ago and the Great Hinamatsuri Purification four years ago.

"Maybe it truly started with Tsuchimikado Yakou."

Over the past two spiritual disasters, Wakamiya had locked on to one person, Hirata Atsune.

During the first spiritual disaster terrorist attack, the Great Hinamatsuri Purification, he had been given the missions of searching for the Twin-Horned Syndicate's hideout and investigating their secrets. Afterwards, he had been a central figure commanding the work related to the Twin-Horned Syndicate. But Hirata had suddenly vanished unaccounted for during the Mystical Investigator's joint Twin-Horned Syndicate sweep operation. The simultaneous disappearance of the 'Divine Fan' Amami had also shocked the entire magic community. After all, Amami was a veteran of the Onmyou Agency and the second-in-command. But Wakamiya had looked towards Hirata's disappearance. Unlike Amami, Hirata had vanished as the operation ended, apparently during the magic battle with the Twin-Horned Syndicate in the Exorcist Bureau Shinjuku Branch. Hirata's daily life had become a mystery after the Great Hinamatsuri Purification where he made his name. But the one thing she noticed was that at the same time, a girl stopped showing up around him. She was a red-haired girl wearing the Onmyou Academy uniform. The people around Hirata were generally all work-related except for that girl. But why was that? What's more, no one knew the girl's true identity even though people in the agency had seen her several times. Because of the uniform clue, Wakamiya had investigated the Onmyou Academy, but she wasn't an Onmyou Academy student. That was a discovery she couldn't ignore. This girl had visited the Onmyou Academy two summers ago and had been in Harutora's and Natsume's class. It was very possible that the girl's goal of visiting the school was to see the two Tsuchimikados. Also, it was very likely that this visit had been arranged by Onmyou Agency higher-ups. The relationship between Hirata and the red-haired girl was unclear, and she couldn't be sure of the girl's relationship with the two Tsuchimikados.

But Wakamiya had changed her investigation target to the people around her, and hence she had found out that she lived in a hotel very close to the agency building. But the work that followed would be extremely hard. Just like she had imagined, the girl was like an Onmyouji in that Wakamiya would lose her as soon as her attention lapsed. Perhaps she used stealth magic in her daily life. Even with that data, she was unable to make a judgment. But she had obtained information she had never dreamed of about that night three days ago. Actually, a helicopter from the Onmyou Agency had descended before the Phase Four in Ogikubo happened. An employee had seen the red-haired girl riding this helicopter. If the evidence was correct, then she had been at the scene of the Phase Four as well. And it had been the Onmyou Agency Chief Kurahashi who had arranged for the helicopter. Wakamiya was sure that there had been some sort of activity around it.

## Part 2

When Wakamiya arrived at the hotel, it was already evening.

The girl lived in a luxury suite. Wakamiya was extremely interested and had reserved a room in the same place.

"First, the monitoring webcam." She could see the door to the girl's room with a wireless webcam.

"I should investigate first. If anything's too hard, I can think of other ways."

"This won't work, and this corner's a bit....."

Wakamiya walked along the hallway and looked at the door when she passed by the girl's room. She

was surprised. Was the door open? Indeed, the door was slightly ajar. Wakamiya became extremely excited. This was an opportunity. If she went in right now.....

"What should I do? What should I do?"

Wakamiya entered the room, unable to resist the temptation. She tiptoed careful and looked around inside the room.

"No one's here?"

She told herself not to be careless, but there certainly was no one here and no traces of anyone having lived here. The red-haired girl had lived here for a while, so there should be some personal items, but she didn't notice anything. It was like an empty room.

"What's going on?"

Had she gone to the wrong room? Her information shouldn't have been wrong.

"Why aren't there any traces?"

Wakamiya boldly headed towards the bedroom, but she didn't spot anything at all. She became confused.

"Calm down. Could it just be a guise? The Ogikubo incident, the spiritual disaster announcement..... No....."

Wakamiya hastily walked outside.

"The princess changed locations a long time ago."

A young man had appeared. He looked at Wakamiya indifferently. But Wakamiya's face paled, her body stiffened, and she became unable to say anything at all. But she clearly understood that the 'Princess' the young man spoke of was that red-haired girl. But why was this young man still here? Wakamiya decided to probe deeper.

"I'm Wakamiya Rika of the Monthly Onmyouji editing team."

Wakamiya felt a chill in her body as if she had been sentenced to death.

"It wouldn't be good to have you die here. Magazine reporters have their routines. I'll have you tell me a few things first."

The young man approached Wakamiya. Wakamiya wanted to run, but her body wouldn't move. And it wasn't that she was too scared to move, she truly was unable to move. It looked like first-class magic had been cast on her.

"First, is anyone else working with you? Were you trying to approach the princess independently? Or do other people know?"

Wakamiya spoke without being able to control herself.

"S-Someone's working with me."

Wakamiya's eyes moved weakly as she was bound by magic, but her voice was smooth.

"Kogure-san....."

Kogure, standing by the doorway to the bedroom, stared at the young man with an ice-cold look, then drew the katana from his waist.....

### Part 3

Wakamiya and Kogure had come in contact during the summer two years ago.

Who knew how many times she had interviewed him for the Monthly Onmyouji.

She was the little sister of his teacher from his academy days, Wakamiya Eri. She had interviewed Kogure for other reasons than magazine material.

"My big sister's death still pains me, but I want to ask about - no, I should ask about other things right now."

Wakamiya wanted to ask about what had happened in the fireworks festival last month.

This was what she wanted to spread the word about. It resonated with Kogure's determination. That night Kogure had seen Natsume die, confronted his close friend, and encountered Amami, yet had still chosen to stay in at the Onmyou Agency. He had three reasons.

First: Just like Kogure himself said on that night, even if there were a huge conspiracy being plotted within the agency, he couldn't run away from his identity as an Independent Exorcist in spiritual-disaster-ridden Tokyo. That was the main reason he had stayed in the Onmyou Agency.

Second: He wanted to confirm for himself. He wasn't trying to be wily or tricky. But if he swung his sword, he wanted to swing it of his own will.

Third: His feeling back then in that place. Ohtomo had hidden himself and Saotome had joined Harutora's side, so he ought to stay at the Onmyou Agency.

Though there was a huge darkness inside the Onmyou Agency, that wasn't true about all of the Onmyou Agency. Kogure had continued his work purifying spiritual disasters as he stayed at the Onmyou Agency. He had heard rumors that Shigeoka would be returning. Kogure felt that Shigeoka's spiritual disaster purification ability was better than his own, so it would be fine even if he left the Exorcist Bureau. He had transferred to the Mystical Investigators and used his own eyes, ears and spirit-sense to confirm what was happening in the Onmyou Agency. When he had determined this, Wakamiya had shown up.

It had already been a year and a half since then.

"This is already the second time."

Kogure said that as he entered the bedroom. His body was poised and ready as he held his blade in his left hand.

"Kogure-san, the..... the Unmoving Golden Chains....."

This incident had been Wakamiya's independent action. But they had asked about this hotel before. And Kogure had given Wakamiya his recommendations during the matter regarding Hirata Atsune.

But in the end, the young man before him - no, the shikigami - was outside of Kogure's expectations. He had died once before.

"Don't try running away this time, Mutobe Chihiro of the Twin-Horned Syndicate."

The 'Divine Sword' - Kogure Zenjirou.

#### Part 4

It was already evening when Natsume and Touji reached the station.

The two of them had come to the JR Ochanomizu Station, avoiding the agency building as much as possible as they passed by it.

"Though it's a bit far away, our auras are very eye-catching, so we can't be careless."

According to Kyouko's divination, Kogure-san had left the Onmyou Agency and showed up at a hotel. Though they didn't know the specific time, it was definitely during the evening. So they didn't have much time.

"Do you think the other two are here too?"

"Miyoshi and Yamashiro? They didn't show up in the hotel, but it's extremely possible that they're acting together."

"Come to think of it, Kogure-san would act right away on his own when he was searching for Ohtomo-sensei."

"I wonder what the dark spot Kyouko was talking about is."

"It looks like she can't divine everything completely."

"Yeah, that's why we have to adapt to the situation."

"Yeah, this isn't a stadium. We can't make the slightest mistake."

"Okay, that goes for you too, Touji-kun."

They wanted to pull Kogure over to their side no matter what, but Natsume and the others' final target was Harutora.

The two of them stopped at the same time and stared ahead.

"Is...Is that Kogure-san!?"

"No, it's a Yase Doji! It's Kumomaru."

"Damn, we were a step late!"

I can't confirm it without looking, but I didn't spot Yamashiro's aura."

"Ah, what a bad development!"

"Hmm?"

If Kogure and Kumomaru were clashing, that meant he was opposing the Souma. And very few people in the Onmyou Agency knew of the existence of the Yase Doji.

"We have to help. If Kogure-san's there, we can definitely outclass the Yase Doji."

Just like Touji said, this was a great opportunity to strike a blow at the enemy's fighting power.

"Come on, hurry."

Natsume hastened her steps, but she suddenly stopped. Touji also stopped right away. He surveyed the surroundings and asked:

"What's up?"

"Sorry, I have a call."

"What? From Amami-san?"

"No, from Tenma-kun."

Could it be that Mystical Investigators had come to the warehouse.....

She couldn't ignore this. Natsume hastily answered the phone.

"Natsume-kun, are you there already?"

As expected, Tenma's voice was very panicked.

"We're almost there, we don't know the situation. Kogure-san seems to be fighting with the Yase Doji Kumomaru."

"Kogure-san? With a Yase Doji?"

"Yeah. That's why it's very urgent over here. What happened on your end?"

"Akino disappeared! I was wondering whether she went with you guys."

Natsume was stunned.

Touji gritted his teeth and said "That fool."

"Natsume, does Akino know about that place?"

"If she heard our conversation....."

"Have you contacted Akino? Did you call her?"

But,

"Akino left her phone here!!"

"How could this happen?"

"Kyouko's performing divination, but she's not so familiar with Akino so it's very difficult. Suzuka-chan's chasing after her right now. She's heading towards you."

"Suzuka?"

Natsume stood there blankly. The phone fell from her hand and her body went slack, collapsing to the ground. Shocked, Touji hastily caught her. Natsume had already lost consciousness.

Natsume's body had suddenly stopped functioning.

## Part 5

'I like your ears, Akino.'

Natsume, who had said that to her, had been Akino's first similarly-aged friend. They had been true friends who laughed together and helped each other.

During the incident when their Kichijoji hideout had been attacked, Akino had wanted to become Natsume's strength, but she had felt that she wasn't much help. Rather, she was a hindrance. As a result, it had been Harutora and his companions who had rescued Natsume.

Natsume was Akino's only friend.

But Akino felt that this wouldn't do.

The current Akino was different. Natsume had become Akino's friend.

So Akino had resolved to grow further. As Natsume's friend, she couldn't let her be humiliated.

No, Akino was the one who wanted to become a friend Natsume could rely on, like Natsume's other friends.

But reality was cruel. She hadn't been of any help. Instead, she had negatively influenced the entire team.

Feelings of inferiority awoke within her. Though Natsume was very gentle, Akino was just a useless individual.

So Akino didn't want to bring Natsume any further trouble. As long as Akino was there, she would make trouble for Natsume. So she at least wanted to help her out with one thing. She had to.

"It should be around here."

JR Ochanomizu Station.

If Akino's directions were accurate, then over there was the direction to Kichijoji. It had only been two or three days, but it felt like it had already been a long time. Were the captured Takahiro, Chizuru, and Yasuzumi alright? Amami had said that their lives would be spared, but they were definitely being treated harshly. But now wasn't the time to worry about others. She might get caught if she dropped her guard.

"Where's Akihabara? Over there? Then the hotel Natsume talked about should be there."

She recalled the operation details and started moving. Of course, she was using stealth magic.

"But I'm so worried about Natsume."

Something strange had happened to Natsume when she left. It had only been for a moment, but the circulation of her aura had stopped.

Natsume herself hadn't been so concerned about it. But Akino felt restless.

Akino hastened her steps. Natsume and Touji should be stealthed as well. It was very hard to find their auras. But considering Kyouko's divination, the two of them should be near the hotel, so she just needed to find that hotel.

"Hmm!? What!?"

Extremely large auras exploded out in front of her. Powerful magical energy collided forcefully.

Was someone fighting? It wasn't Natsume or Touji.

"What!?"

It was the shikigami from back then, no doubt about it!

What had happened? Was Natsume here too? That was for sure.

Just then, a taxi passed by across from her. Suzuka was in the backseat.

Why was that? Why had she chased her here?

Akino ran, hiding herself by crouching behind a vending machine.

Her stealth had vanished completely since she had sprinted with all her might, and her rabbit ears had materialized on her head. She hadn't thought she would be chased all the way here. Akino hadn't thought anyone would care about her. And to think it had been Suzuka. Though their ages were similar, Akino had trouble getting along with Suzuka.

"What should I do..."

She didn't have time to be confused here. She had to go to Natsume quickly. How should she apologize to Suzuka?

Suddenly, a voice that came from somewhere seemed to call out to her. Her rabbit ears extended and listened.

"Full Moon, can you hear"

Her rabbit ears twitched slightly as a reply. Akino also twitched a bit. She remembered this voice. It was the voice of that black-clothed boy, Tsuchimikado Harutora.

"What is it?"

A voice answered from above Akino's body.

It was the Full Moon.

What was going on? Akino seemed to sense another 'her'.

"Akino, you listen too. I'm Tsuchimikado Harutora, who you met before."

"Yeah."

"Right now I'm starting a magic ritual. Please help me with the strength of the Full Moon. I can't leave where I am right now, so I'll control you from a distance. Okay? Starting!"

Suddenly, a different scene appeared in Akino's mind.

It was an abandoned room.

Harutora was in front of her.

"Okay. Are you alone right now? Thanks, Akino. Accompany me for a while. I hope that you don't speak of this to anyone, especially Natsume. If she knew about this, it would have a negative effect on her."

"What's going on....."

"I'm starting. I don't know how much I can do controlling it from a distance. Raven's Wing, Full Moon, give me your strength."

"The Tsuchimikado Onmyoudou sect would like to address Taizan Fukun, the lord of the underworld."

Harutora chanted the incantation, showing a stern look. That look mesmerized Akino.

"The sun and moon illuminate one another here. I, Tsuchimikado Harutora, inherit the secret technique in the name of the Tsuchimikado family head."

Just then, the Raven's Wing and the Full Moon resonated. A powerful spiritual power floated between them.

"Gods....."

Harutora finished chanting a long incantation.

"Ancestral spirits, grant me guidance through the afterlife!"

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