

AYA KA

— あ や か —

SIDE STORIES



02

居酒屋『河童』
繁盛記

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SIDE
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TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K – PROJECT WORLD

"AYAKA – SIDE STORIES 02":

IZAKAYA "KAPPA" PROSPERITY STORY

"Please, leave it!"

Heartbreaking screams resounded throughout the place. A guy in his teens released it.

Considering his age, he is neither tall nor short. Similarly, there are no notable features in his physique or hairstyle. You could say that he is a normal boy that you can find anywhere.

And his eyes were cloudy and blurry like the sky that was about to rain.

"Please stop... already."

The boy called again. No screaming this time. It was a wish. Furthermore, he was dyed in an intense color.

However, wishes have two possibilities immediately after being born. Will it come true or not? Unfortunately, this time it seems to be the latter.

"Heh, should I go as far and leave?"

Before the boy's gaze, the young man looked back over his shoulder. The age is around twenty years. A dangerous smile like that of a player enjoying a pinch floated on his lips.

"It's like, 'If you eat poison, it's even a dish'."

"You can't do it, Jingi-san! No more!"

A child who reached out for him. But about to reach the young man with the tips of his fingers.

"Yuck."

"Wow... This person who drank mirin. And everything else..."

The boy, Yukito Yanagi, lowered his shoulders in disappointment and let out a deep breath.

"Hmm? What's with that face? Why do you look like you're about to cry?"

A young man who finally noticed Yukito's expression, Jingi Sagawa. He was about to turn the bottle of mirin upside down and drink it to the last drop.

"That makes me want to cry. That my teacher is drinking mirin instead of sake."

"It can't be helped. We don't have any decent liquor in this house right now."

As he spoke, he looked around. Currently, the two of them are in a corner of a clean and tidy kitchen.

"It's because you drank it, right? Seriously, if you want to drink that much, why don't you buy it?"

"If I had that kind of money..."

Jingi clucked at Yukito's words, but suddenly a suspicious smile appeared.

"Hey, Yukito-kun. Why don't you give me some money? I'll pay it back twice, no, ten times."

"I don't like."

Yukito pushed Jingi's hand away as he was trying to put his shoulders on him.

"Don't say cold things. Huh? It's a lifetime wish, so let's go."

"It's already the seventh time. Jingi-san's "lifetime wishes"."

Yukito said that with a shocked face.

By the way, his last wish in life was "Put a poultice on my waist."

A few days ago, it seems that the cleaning of the river, ordered by Kurama Haruaki, a disciple of his father, was unexpectedly harsh.

"Anyway, I won't lend you money."

"Kuh, heartless disciple."

"Please stop saying anything."

"Child. Stingy."

"Yes, yes."

"Stingy~"

"There are good things to say and bad things to say!"

Yukito, who was clear-headed when being insulted, suddenly rolled his eyes and raised his voice.

For him, who spent a lot of time in solitude, it seems that he could not give up the third provocative words.

"Did you ask permission? Say what you want."

Seeing Yukito, whose body was trembling in a trap, he smiled as if he was giving up.

"I'm angry! I'm going to tell Momoko-san about the mirin!"

When Yukito was outraged with the force of a steam that was about to come out of his head...

"I heard my name, did you call me?"

A woman appeared as if she was looking towards the kitchen. Lustrous hair longer than her waist, loose and tied. A beautiful woman looking good in an apron with a loving smile.

She is the Momoko he was talking about just now. The owner of that house, Momoko Amamiya, who is also the owner of Yukito and Jingo's quarters.

"Momoko-san! Jingo-san drank all the mirin!"

"Well. Is that true, Jingo-chan?"

Momoko placed her hand over her mouth and looked at him with a surprised expression.

"It's bad. I really want to drink alcohol."

Dedicated to worship with one hand. It was an apology as light as air, as if that had no weight

"Then why drink it all? Normally, you'd think Momoko-san would be in trouble when she cooked."

"It's certainly a problem. I was planning to eat boiled food for dinner today."

"Not like that! Isn't that a problem?"

"Then let's switch to a menu that doesn't use mirin."

"Eh?"

Yukito, who was giving in in quick succession, involuntarily bowed his head. Faced with Momoko, who has a calm personality, he thought that she wouldn't scold Jingo so harshly for the mirin. Still, she would at least give him a warning. He so she expected.

"Hehehe, Yukito, I'm sure you missed it."

Jingo whispered in Yukito's ear as he crossed his shoulders.

"Momoko-san is kind. As long as you apologize honestly, most things will be forgiven."

"Kuh...!"

"When you do something wrong, do you honestly apologize? This is advice from an old person who has lived in Amamiya's house for a long time."

With a pom-pom and a wrinkled face, Jingi touched Yukito's shoulder.

"I wonder what to do instead of slow cooker food?"

Despite the sudden menu change, Momoko seemed to be enjoying herself. "I can eat a lot of vegetables..." she searched her head for recipes.

However...

"Oh, no. I was on my way to a neighborhood association meeting."

Looking surprised, Momoko headed to the dining room across from the kitchen. Then she took off her apron and put it on one of the chairs that lined the dining room table.

"I'll be back at night."

She smiled at Yukito and Jingi in the kitchen and left.

"I'm sorry."

Jingi waved his hand as she flitted in the direction of the entrance. When he looked at him, Yukito, who was next to him, had an uninteresting look on his face.

"You seem dissatisfied."

"Momoko-san is too sweet to Jingi-san."

Yukito was angry and he expected she to punish him. For that reason alone, he wanted to raise an objection to Momoko's earlier answer.

"Momoko-san is not sweet to me."

He didn't understand, Jingi shrugged as if to say that. And then after leaving out a beat, he turned the answer.

"She's sweet to everyone."

"That could be..."

He tried to deny his words, but Yukito soon realized that he wasn't wrong. It hasn't been long since he started staying with the Amamiya family. During that period alone, Momoko took care of Yukito with his meals and other aspects of his life. Furthermore, if Yukito, who lived in an institution on the mainland, saw Yukito now, he would declare that he was spoiled.

"See you? You've been spoiled. There's no right to complain to Momoko-san."

"It was a mistake to expect such a kind person to play an angry role."

Yukito shrugged. He seemed like he was reflecting on his naive thinking.

"I want to have a big heart, even if it's only half of it. Then I should be able to laugh and forgive a helpless person like Jingi-san no matter what they do."

"It seems like you're praising Momoko-san, but you're really disrespecting me."

Jingi narrowed the corners of his eyes. Yukito only said what he thought, but he unexpectedly managed to cause damage.

"Momoko-san is human too, right? There's a lot to be upset about."

"Oh, really?"

"It is not surprising."

"Has she ever scolded you, Jingi-san?"

"Well, there was definitely a time when..."

Just as he was about to say it, the exasperated voice suddenly cut off. His expression turned cloudy and his face was drenched in sweat.

"Let's stop talking about this... I just remembered something scary."

He extended his lean to leave his body leaning against the fridge. Seeing that pitiful appearance, Yukito hesitated to delve into the matter.

The only certainty is that... it seems to be better not to make Momoko-san angry.

That is what it means.

"I am thirsty when I start to sweat a lot and cold."

After a while, he seems to have regained his moral composure. He adjusted his stance to get away from the refrigerator that he was indebted to.

"Ah, I'll have a drink...!"

It was a wish from the bottom of his heart. But...

"But you don't have mirin anymore, right? What should we do?"

Yukito brought an empty mirin bottle in front of Jingi.

The reason why the boy's voice is a bit swollen is probably because his teacher, who usually forces him to do unreasonable things, is in trouble. Unlike before, this time it was deliberate revenge. Although modest.

"I can't help it. It's for drinking."

Exhausted with a large sigh. Then, looking at the sky, he said with a bitter expression.

"Have to work..."

"You should think about that before drinking mirin, but normally..."

Yukito smiled wryly. Having lived his life avoiding socializing, this guy doesn't know much about what kind of people exist in the world. Even he understands it. He feels it in his skin, instinctively.

He shouldn't become an adult.

"Ok, Yukito. Run to see the post."

"Are you going to intercept the request addressed to Kurama-san again?"

Yukito blatantly disapproved of his words.

The post they're talking about is Kurama Haruaki's window on Ninoshima. If you post a letter there, you can make a request without going to Minoshima Kasen Shrine from him, who is an expert pulse manipulator.

The other day, Jingi and Yukito intercepted the application form that two of Kurama's disciples were trying to pick up in front of the mailbox. To be more specific, Yukito had just seen it and it was all the work of the best.

Anyway, it looks like he intends to take care of the senior apprentice application job again.

"I don't like having to argue with Kurama-san's disciples."

"I'm not saying you should argue. I'm just saying take your chances and take the application form with you."

"If you do that, you'll definitely get in trouble! If you're not good at it, is it a fight?!"

"You're just complaining, right?"

"What? I just want the Jingi-san to tell me..."

Just as Yukito was about to rebut, a light melody began to flow from somewhere. The source is a cell phone in Jingi's back pocket.

"How unusual, at a time like this."

Jingi tilted her head when he saw the registered name floating on the screen of the cell phone she took out.

"Hi?"

He put his ear to the speaker and began to speak. At the same time, he sent a gesture with his free hand to Yukito, who was puffing in front of him, saying, "Wait a minute."

"...Oh, yes. Huh? Kotaro Yashiki?"

When he mentioned the name of one of his bad friends, Kotaro Yashiki, Jingi smirked.

"So, are you alone today? Hehe, sorry to hear that... Huh? Me?"

Jingi slapped his voice into the microphone, "Don't be kidding!" The conversation continued with a negative attitude, but before long whining voices began to mix. It seems that the owner of the cell phone was being poked at a "painful place" and he didn't know what to say.

"I understand, ok."

Jingi ended the call with a mixed expression of dissatisfaction and resignation. He was silent for a while, but before long he called his only disciple, "Yukito."

"What?"

Yukito responded with slightly pointed lips, probably still not calming down from anger. Then his teacher looked up. It was a rare serious expression.

"Get ready. We will start a new training."

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The sky over Ninoshima split into two, ultramarine blue and reddish-orange. The ratio is seven to three. In the not too distant future, the canvas of the sky will be dyed in the color of night. But the sun clung to the crest of the island's low mountains, as if he didn't want to finish his time yet.

There are two men facing each other in the light of the setting sun, which seems to be the final fight. They are in the middle of an urban area, one of the few in Ninoshima.

"I'm sorry. Please come quickly."

Said a man. Pretty tall looking and somewhat philosophical. His age ranges from his twenties to his thirties. He wears an apron over his pants and clean shirt.

"If you don't think it's bad, don't call me."

The answer was from the other man, Jingi. Sticking both thumbs into the left and right pockets of his pants, he looked at the aproned man with a nonchalant face.

"Didn't I tell you on the phone? The mansion is going to Ichinoshima for a family wedding, so we don't have enough people."

"That's why I'm your assistant."

"That's because you're the most reliable."

"Not at all."

The aproned man's response made his eyebrow twitch. Although his expression was still negative, it seems that it was a good answer that tickled the heart of this labor denialist.

"Above all, you were the easiest to persuade. If they tell you, "I won't let you drink on the account again", you will definitely come, right?"

"Persuasion, huh? The general public calls it a threat, mind you."

Jingi clenched his fists and shook his body.

Seeing that, the man in the apron gave a small laugh.

"If you don't want to be called that, stop drinking on the bill from now on."

"Then please make the drink free every time. Then there will be no bills."

"Do you want to destroy the store, idiot?"

The man in the apron shook his head with a wry smile at the unlikely proposition. Then suddenly a boy was caught in the corner of his vision. It was Yukito Yanagi.

"Uh..."

Noticing the aproned man's gaze, Yukito touched the post next to him as if he was calling for help. It is a special post where Kurama Haruaki accepts applications from the Ninoshima Islanders. Oddly enough, Yukito was brought here for his mission, right near the place where he met two of Kurama's disciples the other day.

"Jingi, who is that kid?"

Looking at Yukito, the man in the apron asked.

"You've talked to him before. He's Yukito Yanagi."

"Oh, Yanagi-sensei."

The man in the apron nodded two or three times in response to his answer. Apparently, to some degree, he had heard Yukito's information through Jingi.

"I am Azuki Mitarai, the owner of the Izakaya "Usagi" in the back."

The man in the apron, Mitarai, jerked his thumb behind him. What is there is a nice two-story wooden building, although it is not large. On the sign on the second floor, the word "Usagi" is written in large letters.

"Nice to meet you, Yukito-kun."

"Hello. I'm Yukito Yanagi."

Yukito waved back as he rolled his eyes. Aside from Jingi and Momoko, who he sees every day, he still feels awkward when he meets someone for the first time. It cannot be avoided because it is the result of living a life that avoids socialization.

"Ah, that's right, Azuki-chan. He will be working with you today."

"Ah!"

Yukito's eyes widened in surprise at his words. It's an expression like "I haven't heard of that" that he wanted to model.

"I'll save myself with more manpower, but... Yukito-kun, is alright?"

"No, I..."

The next moment, when Yukito was about to reply to Mitarai's confirmation...

"Why don't you go there and have a chat with your teacher, my beloved disciple?"

Grabbing the disciple by the neck, the master pulled him without saying yes or no. Yukito finally managed to untie the devotion arm from him when he was some distance away from "Usagi" and Mitarai.

"What is this? What happened to the new training?"

Yukito frowned and walked over to him.

"This is training."

Jingi spoke without any sign of remorse.

"Please stop joking around. No matter how you look at it, it's a part-time worker at an Izakaya. It's completely irrelevant, right?"

"Hey, who said that you are training to connect your pulse? This will train your communication skills!"

"This, my communication skills?"

"That's right. You've lived avoiding people because you're afraid that your powers will get out of control, right? That's why, when you talk to people, you're afraid. Your eyes water. Your voice shakes. So, what do you do when your classmates talk to you in high school? Don't miss out on making friends."

"Oh...!"

Yukito, who was leaning forward to denounce his righteousness, leaned back slightly.

Definitely, without a doubt, the words of dedication are a fallacy. He intends to involve Yukito in order to reduce his own work, even a little.

Even Yukito is fully aware of that. But...

"Will I improve my communication skills through this "training"? If that's the case, a fun high school life surrounded by friends is your thing."

Just like the finishing blow, Jingi whispered into Yukito's ear. The cloudy smile, the sweet words that make people happy and the whispers of the devil.

"That's cowardly... That way of saying it."

Yukito didn't want to give up. However, the words no will no longer come out.

"I'm going to tell Azuki-chan that you're ready to work too."

"Ah..."

Yukito's voice stopped him as he realized something.

"What?"

"Actually, I'm a high school student yet. Is it okay to work part-time?"

"Don't worry. Ichinoshima's mainland atmosphere aside, other islands don't care about such details."

"But..."

"I get it. Well, let's say you're here to help out at a friend's house, not a part-time job. Then, as a token of gratitude, I'll get paid for it and that'll solve the problem."

Jingi moved away from Yukito as he waved his hand. He is sure that he plans to go to Mitarai again to tell him that Yukito will also be working.

Looking at that back, Yukito said:

"How often do such quips come to you so easily?"

He muttered that with a half-astonished, half-impressed face.

Like the exterior, the interior of the Izakaya "Usagi" was very simple. It consists of four long tables that seat between six and eight people, and seating at the counter that seats about seven people.

"Then, it's a job I'll be in charge of."

Mitarai in an apron opened his mouth. At the end of his line of sight, he saw the figures of Jingi and Yukito, who are also wearing aprons. They were having a pre-opening meeting in the kitchen, across the counter.

"My duty is to help cook and drink. Yukito-kun, I will ask you to attend to the customers."

"Eh?"

Jingi slightly raised his hand while yawning.

"Hahaha!"

Yukito straightened his back... no, he stiffened and answered.

"You're very nervous. He's funny."

Jingi happily patted Yukito's tense back. Usually, at times like this, the disciple shakes off the hand of the teacher upset with him.

"...I'm nervous. It's my first time serving customers, so I wonder if I can do it right."

It's the first part-time job of his life and it doesn't seem to be a problem in the hospitality industry. It seemed that his face was turning pale.

"Silly. No one is waiting for you."

"That's right!"

Yukito's face became visibly hurt by the words Jingi uttered. Perhaps it was strange for Yukito to keep changing his expression like that.

"It's your first time, so it's not going to work out anyway. You make a lot of mistakes and you get really embarrassed."

"Does that mean failing and being embarrassed is also training?"

Yukito asked anxiously. Despite his low level of socialization experience, he tried to understand the true meaning of his words. He believed sanely.

But...

"No, I just want to see you. It seems interesting to see you nervous."

"This person is a devil."

Yukito was horrified by his response as he laughed.

Reality and Sagawa Jingi are generally not good.

"It's almost time to open. Jingi, break it up into small appetizer bowls of potato salad."

"What I hate the most is that kind of detailed work."

Responding to the merchant's instructions, Jingi went to the shelf to grab a small bowl, even as he grumbled. At the same time, Mitarai approached Yukito.

"Don't worry, Yukito-kun. When the time comes, Jingi will follow up."

"Jingi-san is a follower?"

Yukito's eyes were half suspicious. Since there was an exchange before, it seems that the trust is buried rather than in the ground.

"The guy who comes to the store as a customer is the worst kind of person who doesn't pay the bill for his drinking habit. But as a staff member who works with him, there is no one more trustworthy than him."

After saying that with a smile, Mitarai tapped Yukito on the shoulder.

"Then please bring the noren. The shop is open."

"Oh, yes."

Yukito left the kitchen and picked up the noren placed near the restaurant's entrance.

However, he didn't go out to the store as he was and silently looked back over his shoulder. He could see the kitchen over the counter. Next to Mitarai, who was working with a straight face, Jingi was about to yawn.

"Reliable, huh."

Yukito shook his head as if to say that it was impossible and left the store.

And when the night approached Ninoshima, opened "Usagi".

As soon as he opened the shop, customers came for the May Rain ceremony. There are already two groups at the table and three seats at the counter. Izakaya "Usagi" seems to be quite popular, even if you subtract the fact that there aren't many stores on the island.

"W-Welcome!"

Yukito greeted the new group of elders with an awkward yet smiling face. He has come into contact with various groups so far. It's actually easier to have a conversation with a customer than it is to exchange words with someone you meet for the first time in your daily life.

(I think I'll try to work as a waiter when I start high school.), Yukito thought.

Yukito's tension eased as his thought flickered.

But...

"Ah! There's a cute girl I haven't seen before! Yashiki-chan, are you free today?"

"Uh, well, it's a family wedding. So instead..."

"Look, this kid! He's the one staying with Momoko-chan."

"Ah, so you are Yanagi-sensei's son who returned from the mainland!"

"I am indebted to Yanagi-sensei in many ways!"

"Well, that's correct. So, the order is..."

"At your age, Yanagi-sensei was a sweet boy!"

"That's right! Young Inou always had a pale face when he was influenced! I can't believe he's the mayor now!"

"Um... the order..."

Yukito was there with a worried face along with the elders who recalled their memories. To be able to get into this quick conversation, that's exactly what is missing in his training right now.

"Don't be silly, order fast and contribute to sales! This is not the front porch next door!"

A voice that sounds like a person interrupting a sports game came flying in from the kitchen. The source is Jingi with a mischievous smile on his face.

"Haha, what's up? Are you doing the dishes today to pay the bills?"

"Azuki-chan, you should use him as much as possible!"

The old return a great mockery to the truth. They then turned to Yukito again.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting. So, can I place an order?"

"Yes."

Yukito filled out the handwritten sheets with the names of the sake and the dishes that were finally ordered.

(I wonder if he helped me.), Yukito thought.

Yukito looked towards the kitchen as he took orders. The person who could have helped him was laughing open-mouthed with the customers sitting at the counter. It seems that Jingi also frequents this shop frequently, so if he sees a regular customer, he can always say hello like this.

(By chance? But...), Yukito thought.

Still, that didn't change the fact that he wanted to do it. However, since there was a high probability that he would get involved in a problematic way if he said it directly, Yukito decided to thank him in his heart.

"Here's the order. Two draft beers, one highball, one oolong highball, one edamame, one sashimi of the day, one bowl of yakitori sauce, one salt, one thick omelet, and one or more specialty salads."

About an hour had passed since the business opened, and Yukito and the Izakaya lounge staff were already following the board. They do not hesitate to take customer orders and communicate the content to the two people in the kitchen.

"Ok."

Mitarai nodded in response to Yukito, and immediately called the person in charge of drinks, "Jingi", who was about to start making alcoholic drinks.

"Help me cook. I'll make the yakitori, so make the sashimi, salad, and tamagoyaki."

"Huh? Do I somehow have more stuff than you?"

Despite the dissatisfied voice, Mitarai brilliantly ignored him. He then called Yukito over the counter from the kitchen.

"I'd like to order a drink from you. Please bring the green soybeans as well."

"I'll do Jingi-san's job!"

A kitchen that cannot be said to be big, if it hadn't been for such a place, Yukito would have inadvertently withdrawn. Of course, he was happy to be entrusted with a new job.

However, this is the first part-time job for Yukito. It cannot be avoided that anxiety prevails over happiness.

"It's okay because the menu isn't that difficult. The recipe is written in the notebook on the back shelf. It's something like a manual I wrote when I moved into the mansion."

"Yes."

As he answered, Yukito headed towards the shelf at the back of the kitchen pointed out by Mitarai. The target notebook was in the drawer, which was mainly used to store tableware.

"So, I wonder if I can..."

Yukito wondered with a stiff expression. So...

"Take it easy, easy."

At the cutting board, Jingi smiled as she lightly sliced through the colorful vegetables. He looks like he's making a special salad himself right now.

"Customers here don't mind if they get drunk. They don't know the taste of sake anyway."

"I can hear you!"

Laughing protests rang out from the audience in response to the open and honest comments.

Seeing such a light-hearted exchange, Yukito laughed as they called out to him saying "Hahaha...". He made him feel a little better.

(Let's try for now.), Yukito thought.

Yukito made up his mind and began to move.

The first thing Yukito started was a beer that required the least amount of processing.

Pouring beer from a beer mug into a pre-chilled mug. Simple as that.

However, even if it is simple when you write it, there are many things that do not turn out as expected when you try it. And apparently, pouring beer, for Yukito was one of those.

"I ended up with nothing but bubbles..."

Looking at the mug, which clearly had too much white area, Yukito's face darkened.

He was aiming for the golden ratio of 3 for bubbles and 7 for liquid, which he saw in movies and dramas, but ended up with something with the opposite ratio.

"That's strange... I followed the manual..."

Yukito looked at the notebook. There are instructions and illustrations on how to pour beer. Whether it was made by Mitarai or added by the mansion is unknown, but it is a cute round design.

"Ah. Was the angle supposed to be more?"

Yukito found the words "The angle at which the cup is tilted is the point" taped to the side of the illustration. Then, using the experiences of the predecessors as inspiration, he tried again.

"Ok, nice feeling."

A beer with a beautiful contrast between white and gold was born. Yukito satisfactorily lifted his mouth and poured a second glass of beer.

"Next is Oolong High."

Right next to the beer page, there was an entry for shochu high, so Yukito happened to work at oolong high.

He puts some ice in a chilled glass and adds an appropriate amount of shochu. From the attached illustration, it seems like the trick is to give it a slight stir once in there to make it delicious. Then he adds the oolong tea and mix it up so the whole thing feels familiar and complete.

(Maybe this is the right one.), Yukito thought.

Having finished preparing the three drinks that had already been ordered, Yukito's heart was beginning to relax a bit. But...

"Eh? Bubbles..."

He realized it when he took out the glass of whiskey. The foam of the first beer burst and the balance that seemed to be the golden ratio was lost.

"Uh, um... what should I do in this situation?"

Yukito flipped through the pages of the notebook quickly. However, while there are tips and tricks on how to create a drink menu, there's no way to fill in the gaps.

Also, by doing so, the foam area of not only the first beer but also the second beer became suspect.

"Sorry! Do you have the beer yet?"

As if to add another punch, a demanding voice rose from the audience.

(I have to do something... I have to do something soon... Quick, quick, quick...), Yukito thought.

Yukito desperately tried to find a solution. However, the more he hurried, the duller and heavier his thought became. It's a vicious circle to the point of being splendid.

"What the hell are you doing alone?"

"Cold?!"

Suddenly, a cold and stinging sensation hit the back of his neck. Then, his reduced field of vision suddenly widened and he noticed that there was a familiar person next to him.

"J-Jingi-san?"

"Don't serve beer while looking like it's the end of the world. I told you take it easy, take it easy."

With a fearless smile, Jingi tossed rock ice into the sink. It seems that this has alienated Yukito from his own world.

"Are you okay with cooking?"

"Ok, it was nothing, I was too efficient and I have free time."

While joking, Jingi looked at the area where Yukito was working. After a while, he made a guessing face with "Hmm."

"Prepare the edamame for now. Then refill the beer."

"So, this foamy beer is..."

"I'll take care of that. Look, the guests are waiting. Hurry up."

"Yes."

Yukito nodded, backed by the momentum of his dedication. The boy's face was much brighter than when he was alone and desperate.

Yukito ran to the refrigerator and took out a container containing edamame. The already boiled yellow-green pods were then transferred to a bamboo strainer for individual servings.

"Edamame is fine. After that, beer..."

Yukito muttered as he moved his hand away.

Jingi, who was looking at him sideways, said with a small smile, "Didn't you learn the word carefree in school?" But he's not just looking at the boy at work, his hand is in constant motion.

He poured ice into a glass, add whiskey and mix with soda. He inserted a mixer to finish, but the number of times he mixed is extremely small. This is to prevent carbonic acid from escaping.

"Eh..."

Yukito was involuntarily fascinated by the flowing tricks.

"Don't be blown away, get it to the customer quickly. You'll run out of bubbles again."

Was much. He placed the finished highball on the worktable. The sound made Yukito come to his senses. He had two freshly refilled beers in his hands and was playing refreshing music.

"I'm coming!"

Yukito ran towards the audience.

After that, going back and forth to the kitchen several times, he was finally able to offer all the drink menus.

"All drinks are gone."

When Yukito returned to the kitchen, the food was placed on the work table that had been handling alcohol until just now. A colorful salad and white sashimi that makes you feel fresh and elastic. They both look very delicious.

"I can cook. Please take that."

The tamagoyaki, the aroma of dashi soup rising along with the steam, was placed on a new square flat plate, and Jingi looked to Yukito.

"Oh, yes."

Yukito took the plate of food and spoke to him in a low voice.

"Thanks for that earlier. It was helpful."

He was embarrassed, so he tended to look away a bit instead of looking at him squarely. However, there was no reaction from Jingi.

"Jingi-san?"

Thinking that he hadn't heard, Yukito looks at Jingi again. So...

"Glup, glup, glup...!"

"Hey..."

Yukito widened his eyes and was surprised at what happened. That was because the sage in front of him was crouching on the spot and holding a mug of beer.

"You're crazy, Jingi-san...! You're at work...!"

"Puah, no problem. Azuki-chan is concentrating on the yakitori right now."

Looking over his shoulder and looking back. As he said, Mitarai in front of the grill was fighting the yakitori while he endured the heat of the blazing fire. There were no signs that he was directing attention there.

"That's why...!"

"I'm dealing with your mistakes, you know? Rather, thank me."

"My mistake..."

At that moment, the conversation from a few minutes ago revived in Yukito's mind. Seeing the beer whose bubbles were disappearing, Jingi said:

"I'll take care of that."

"Maybe he asked me to refill it because he wanted to drink it..."

"Hahaha..."

Jingi neither affirmed nor denied it, he just laughed with a fine beard of foam under his nose.

"That person..."

Yukito is in the so-called "I don't get it" state, to the degree of rubbish that goes diagonally above expectations. However, the truth is that he helped him when he was confused. Therefore, it is difficult to criticize or say so to Mitarai.

"And for now, I'll get you some food."

(When I start thinking seriously about this person, I get a headache.), Yukito thought.

Having made that decision, Yukito decided to concentrate on his work for now.

"Yukito."

As he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, Jingi called out to Yukito.

"If there's something you don't understand, ask me or Azuki-chan. No matter how busy I am, I can still answer your questions, okay?"

"....."

Those casually spoken words shocked Yukito.

The crisis he found himself in until recently was not due to his lack of ability. He didn't know what to do with part-time jobs and alcohol, so to speak, due to his lack of experience. Probably, if he had asked Jingi or Mitarai, he could have figured it out right away.

But at that time, Yukito didn't even think of the "asking because I don't know" method. It wasn't the beer or being rushed around that made him feel weak.

It did not exist from the beginning.

The choice itself to trust someone when you're in trouble.

He has lived his life keeping his distance from others and without expectations.

(It's a problem before communication skills.), Yukito thought.

Yukito chuckled to himself.

It was a part-time job that started as a quibble, but it may have been the right answer after trying.

The "training" of this time was a good opportunity to become aware of how to interact with others, that is rusty and immature.

"...Yes. If there's something I don't understand, I won't hesitate to ask."

Yukito smiled and said that.

It is impossible to change the distance with others at this time. But little by little he will begin to change because of the people who are next to him.

Yes, Yukito made a vow in his heart.

"Glup, Glup, Glup. Secretly drinking beer during a part-time job is exceptional."

Jingi, who was squatting down and drinking his second beer said, "Ah...", with an understanding face.

"Yukito. Next time, definitely don't go wrong with the beer, ok? Absolutely? It's because it is absolutely, ok?"

"....."

Yukito silently and coldly looked at Jingi, who was looking at him as if he was waiting for something.

Maybe he should immediately change the distance with just this housemate.

Far from it...

Despite some minor problems, the business of the Izakaya "Usagi" ran smoothly, and it has already been three hours since Yukito and Jingi started work.

"Umm... put some ice in the glass... this amount of whiskey... soda covers about 80% of the glass."

In the kitchen, Yukito's face fell as he faced the work table. In his hand is a caramel-colored glass that plays the refreshing sound of the soda. It's a drink.

"Alright."

Beside Yukito, arms folded, Jingi made an assessment.

So far there have been busy times when the kitchen is running at full speed. Now that dinner time is past, however, the audience is quiet, with one group at the table and two at the counter.

Because of that, Yukito was in charge of making the drinks, which was limited to the time Jingi helped with the cooking, for practice.

"But I still can't do it as fast as Jingi-san."

"I'm used to it. Besides, you don't have to take quantity seriously. You can make it faster that way."

"Is it okay to do it that way?"

Yukito asked a legitimate question, but Jingi's response was "That's my style.", which cannot be used as a guarantee.

"However! From a drinker's point of view, I can't forgive a lack of alcohol. No more sin! So if you're not sure, put it in a darker color."

As he said that, Jingi tipped the bottle of whiskey into the tall glass Yukito made.

He is chasing the whiskey.

"What an oversight... Mitarai-san will be angry..."

Worried, Yukito looked at Mitarai, who was in the background. However, the Izakaya owner was looking at the flames on the grill with somewhat distant eyes. So far, he doesn't seem to be aware of Jingi's outrageous acts.

"Okay, the Jingi Special is ready. Serve it to the customers."

Despite Yukito's concerns, the highball was completed with a special hand.

Actually, he was providing it.

"Oh? This whiskey is mostly alcohol!"

The customer, a middle-aged man, had a big smile on his face even as he complained.

"He loved it. He was happy."

"Really?"

Hearing Yukito's report in the kitchen, Jingi twitched his nose.

"When it comes to drinking, leave it to me. It's not like I'm always drunk on dates."

"You shouldn't be proud to say that."

Yukito smiled wryly. He began to wash the used glasses that had accumulated in the sink.

"Okay, you can take a break after washing it. There aren't many customers, so go eat now."

Saying that, Jingi turned around and asked Mitarai, "Are you alright, Azuki-chan?"

However, the answer did not come immediately.

"Azuki-chan? Is it alright if I give Yukito a break?"

Judging that the voice did not come, Jingi confirmed it again. It seems that he finally noticed, and Mitarai nodded briefly, "Ah."

"Because I'll cook you a meal, so grab your apron and wait at the counter."

With the shop owner's permission, Jingi rolled up his sleeves and smiled at Yukito.

There is nothing that can be called a break room at the Izakaya "Usagi". If you just want to take a short break, it is usual to sit at the back of the store, and if you are going to finish your meal, use the counter seats when there are not many customers.

According to that rule, Yukito, who was allowed to take a break to eat, was sitting at the end of the counter seat.

From time to time the sparsely packed audience can be heard laughing merrily. Of course, he was quiet compared to the hustle and bustle of rush hour when it was packed with people. But even so, Yukito felt that it was lively enough.

(It's a bit weird.), Yukito thought.

He had a part-time job for the first time in his life and was about to eat his first meal on his break.

"Even if I told them about today when I was on the mainland, they wouldn't believe me..."

Yukito muttered with a thoughtful face.

Right after that, the chair next to him began to shake with a buzz.

Yukito was taken aback for a moment, but immediately remembered the cell phone he had left in his apron pocket.

Talking on the cell phone in front of customers is really intimidating. Yukito thought so and left the store for a while with his phone vibrating.

"How cold..."

Yukito cringed involuntarily.

It must be because of the difference in temperature between the inside of the tent, which was full of heat, and the fact that it was completely dark. The Ninoshima wind mixed with the smell of the sea was a bit chilly.

"Sorry... I forgot to contact you."

Yukito checked his cell phone again and let out a regretful sigh. The person floating on the screen is "Momoko-san".

"Yes."

[Yukito-kun? Where are you now?]

As soon as the call started, an awkward voice came out of the speaker. Hearing that, Yukito felt even more embarrassed.

"Sorry, Momoko-san, I didn't contact you. In fact..."

Summoned by Mitarai, Jingi decided to work on "Usagi".

Yukito explained how they ended up working together on that process.

[Next time, please tell me, okay? Leaving Jingi-chan aside, I was really worried because Yukito-kun suddenly disappeared, you know?]

"Yes. I'll be careful."

With a remorseful look, Yukito bowed to Momoko on the other end of the phone.

[By the way, until what time do you two stay at the store? Will you have dinner at the restaurant?]

"I don't know until what time. Ah, but... Dinner is being cooked by Jingi-san."

As Yukito said that with a chest full of anticipation, Momoko laughed, "Fufu."

[I'm looking forward to it. Because Jingi-chan is good at cooking.]

"I also found out for the first time today. Jingi-san is actually a person who can do many things."

[That's how it is! If he tries, he can do it!]

Suddenly, Momoko's tone of voice rose. No, she jumped.

[Actually, it was I who taught him how to cook. Ever since I was little, I have been told that "prepare honest food for the people who will eat it".]

"Hmm, Momoko-san was Jingi-san's cooking teacher?"

Yukito let out a voice filled with surprise and admiration.

In response to the reaction, Momoko's words sped up even more.

[It's not that exaggerated to be a master. The words I just said are secondhand to my grandmother. But I tried my best to convey that to Jingi-chan.]

"Haha..."

Momoko's furious narrative showed no signs of stopping. And when Yukito was stumped...

"Yukito."

Jingi left through the store entrance. Furthermore, he motioned for Yukito to return to the shop.

[I still remember it. The first time Jingi-chan was in the kitchen was in elementary school.]

"I'm sorry, Momoko-san. It seems that something has happened in the shop, so I have to go back."

After hanging up the phone without waiting for an answer, Yukito ran into the store. His expression was somewhat relieved.

"I'm sorry, both of you."

It was Mitarai who said the apologetic words. His expression was terribly painful and his complexion had turned pale.

"If you don't feel well, it can't be helped. Huh?"

"Huh? Oh, yes."

Yukito nodded in panic as he was suddenly pulled away from him.

Yukito, who was called back to the kitchen, was told that Mitarai would be leaving early. He thought that some kind of problem had occurred in the shop, but this development really exceeded his expectations.

"I suddenly felt dizzy after rush hour. Nothing happened until then..."

Covering his face with his palm, Mitarai groaned.

"Aren't you tired? Considering the lack of manpower, the preparation and cleanup were already perfect before we arrived."

As he crossed his arms, Jingi sighed in exasperation and said, "You're working too hard."

"When someone who doesn't work says it, the weight is different."

Mitarai shrugged and smiled. Then he took off his apron and hung it on the hook on the side of the kitchen shelf. Getting ready to go home.

"Please close the shop when the customers leave. You can throw out the prepared ingredients or take them home. And about today's part-time job fee, next time I'll color it correctly."

"Shut up. Go upstairs quickly and go to sleep."

Mitarai talked about post-processing and Jingi pushed him out of the shop.

Mitarai's residence is on the second floor of "Usagi", after going up the stairs at the side of the store.

"Take care of yourself."

After dismissing Mitarai, who was forced to go home, Yukito looked around the kitchen and into the store. This is the end of his first part-time job.

(There were many things, but it was fun.), Yukito thought.

A small smile appeared on Yukito's lips. Today's event seems to have been a positive experience for him.

"Geez."

As soon as he returned to the kitchen, Jingi sat on the edge of the sink. Since Mitarai is not there, the behavior is careless, it is as usual.

"Then let's leave it like that until the guests leave. Yukito, for now, put the noren away."

"I understand."

Yukito headed for the store after receiving his instructions. If there is no good will, new customers should not come unless there is a very good reason.

"Yes, leftover ingredients."

Suddenly remembering Mitarai's words, Jingi opened the refrigerator. Some pre-cut meats, fish and vegetables seem to have a short shelf life. These are probably the things that need to be removed. And there are quite a few.

"It's a waste to throw it away, so let's take it home. No, it's better to sell it to another restaurant and make some money... ha!"

Jingi, who had been muttering to himself about his evil little plan, suddenly widened his eyes as if struck by lightning. And he immediately he ran to the store.

"Yukito!"

"What happen?"

Yukito, who had removed the noren and was about to return to the shop, went wide-eyed at the despair that appeared.

"Don't put it away. Don't put the noren away yet."

Yukito, who had received completely opposite instructions, tilted his head and asked, "Why all of a sudden?"

"I'll explain it to you later."

Jingi put his hand on Yukito's shoulder.

"More importantly, you haven't eaten yet, right? I'll give you something delicious."

He smiled very kindly.

"Delicious!"

"Ah, I see, I see."

Seeing Yukito's bright eyes, Jingi satisfactorily repeated his statement.

In front of Yukito, who is currently sitting at the counter, is a small cast iron skillet heated by fire. In "Usagi", it is a tool that is often used for menu items that are to be served freshly baked, such as gyoza dumplings in a cast iron pot.

A heaping pile of thinly sliced wagyu beef tenderloin sizzles in the pan. The seasoning is salt and pepper, and the sauce is Japanese flavored with grated daikon radish and ponzu sauce sprinkled with perilla leaves.

"This meat is the best, Jingi-san! I can eat all the rice I want!"

Yukito stuffed the meat into his mouth and used the upturned utensil to dig the rice into the rice bowl.

The last customer had just finished paying, so now the "Usagi" store is empty except for Yukito and Jingi. Therefore, even if Yukito is in a good mood, he won't be a bother to anyone.

"Eat, eat, eat."

"Yes!"

Giving a big smile to Jingi who was next to him, Yukito proceeded to eat the meat. Then suddenly, with an expression close to ecstasy, he let out a breath.

"Haa... Being able to get money from a part-time job and eat such delicious meat for free. I wonder if it's okay to be so happy."

"Hmm? Who said it's free?"

"Eh?"

Yukito's hand, which was once again reaching for the meat with his chopsticks, suddenly stopped. Jingi smiled and uttered outrageous words. If that's true...

"J-Jingi-san? Isn't this rice free?"

"Well, you can't get that kind of high-quality meat in an izakaya, right? That's a terrific item, and it's on the menu, "Wagyu beef tenderloin with shredded radish and ponzu sauce". Well, it's super special, so the price is 2500 yen."

"Well, because it's about Jingi-san..."

"It is true that I baked it. But who ate it? Who, where?"

"....."

Yukito involuntarily lowered his gaze when asked about the truth. Three quarters of the wagyu beef tenderloin that should have been in the pan was already gone. Yukito knew better than anyone where the meat had disappeared.

"Is the high-quality meat you eat at your hard-earned part-time job delicious?"

"Uh..."

With a rueful expression, Yukito grabbed his chopsticks.

He was happy with this grilled meat because he thought it was part of his reward for his work and it was free. If the price had been presented from the beginning, Yukito probably wouldn't have eaten it.

He wanted to use the money he earned from his first part-time job for what he wanted. If possible, everyone should want to do it. At the very least, there's no way he would want to use it for high-class meat that he was forced to eat like this.

"Huh? Do you have any regrets? Yes, I have good news for you."

Paff. Jingi clapped.

"You can treat me to that meat. However, there are conditions."

"Conditions?"

"Keep working with me until the store closes."

"Even if you tell me to work, the shop is already..."

"Yes, Izakaya "Usagi" is closed. From now on, Izakaya "Kappa" will open."

"Kappa?"

Yukito frowned at the mysterious meaning of the name. But more than that, there was a point in his speech that he needed to question.

"Um, about this, Mitarai-san..."

"Don't tell him."

"So you're saying you want to open a shop without permission?"

"As expected, it would be dangerous if it were found out. But it's not a problem."

Jingi put his elbow on the shoulder of Yukito who was sitting on the chair. And as he looked at the disciple's face...

"You and I are the only ones who know about this."

He gave him a proud smile.

In conclusion, he had a problem.

"No, I don't want... I don't want him to get mad at me. If you want to do it, shouldn't you do it yourself, Jingi-san?"

Yukito showed his rebellious intentions with a strong look.

Then he took a deep breath.

"This is delicious, Yukito! Wagyu beef tenderloin! After all, it is the most expensive menu item in this restaurant!"

Shhh. No, he let out a loud voice as to reach the person who lives on the second floor.

"Kuh..."

Yukito nodded in disappointment.

In front of him, Jingi gently placed a cup of tea. A cup of hot tea to take a breather after a meal and for those who accept defeat.

"Why did you suddenly get motivated? Even when Mitarai-san called you, you really didn't want to work."

In the teacup, Yukito stared at the light brown water surface with slight ripples. The tea that "Usagi" served as a service was not green tea but leaf tea.

"I still hate it. But, even though I don't like working, I don't dislike earning money."

Jingi made a circle with his thumb and forefinger and laughed.

"There are zero-cost ingredients and there's a place to cook and sell them. There's no way not to take advantage of this. If all goes well, I won't have to worry about paying for alcohol for a while."

Jingi spoke of his ambition with flaming eyes.

Looking at the situation from the side, Yukito thought seriously.

(I wish he could turn this motivation into a pulse.)

And in secret, the Izakaya "Kappa" began its activity.

On the surface, it's still just "Usagi". As a result, customers arrived knowing nothing.

"Good evening, are you still on duty?"

Another new customer appeared from behind the noren curtain. He was a man in his fifties with a towel wrapped around his head like a headband.

"Yes, welcome."

It was Yukito who greeted him with a drawn smile. The expression on his face stiffened again with a sense of tension that it wasn't a normal business, unlike when the store first opened.

"That's a new face. Where are you from?"

The man in the towel looked curiously at Yukito's face.

"Well..."

Yukito wondered why he was there and how he could explain it, including the circumstances of the store.

"Oh, come on, man!"

A cheerful voice from the kitchen echoed across the counter.

"Isn't that exhaustive? What happened to Azuki-chan?"

In response to the towel man's question, Jingi pointed to the second floor and said, "He's sick and left early."

"But the mansion is closed, so today we will manage this shop."

"Hey, are you okay with that, Jingi-chan?"

With a mocking laugh, the man in the towel sat down at the counter.

"Is it okay to place an order? For now, beer and fried nankotsu..."

"Sorry. We don't have much food or alcohol left today. We can only serve a set menu."

Yukito bowed his head apologetically.

On the other hand, the man with the towels looked worried.

"Is that so? So what do you have?"

"Highball and Kakiage!"

In response to the towel man's question, Jingi barked at the moment when he was about to eat. It was a tremendous force, like he was jumping off the counter.

"Jingi-san, please give me a special kakiage."

"Okay!"

As Yukito gave his order, Jingi grabbed a bowl that was nearby. The content is tempura batter made by mixing cake flour with liquid egg made by combining cold water and eggs. He poured over the edamame beans, the carrots cut into flower petals, and the pulled pork in another bowl.

After confirming the ingredients that Mitarai had entrusted to get rid of, Jingi came up with this kakiage. There is a high degree of freedom in the combination of ingredients, and since the vegetables are already cut for preparation, it does not take long. And more than anything...

"This freshly fried one is violently delicious...!"

With an evil profile that makes it hard to believe he's cooking, Jingi stared at the kakiage dancing in the golden oil.

The weak point of fried foods is that they do not have a lasting flavor. Compared to other cooking methods, flavor and texture are lost significantly over time.

However, if he can limit the dishes he prepares to just kakiage and continue to offer customers freshly fried kakiage, that's not the limit.

That is the "answer" that Jingi had deduced. That's half the reason.

By the way, for the other half it was simply annoying to prepare various dishes.

However, freshly fried kakiage wrapped in a fragrant crispy batter was very popular, oblivious to the schemes of the kitchen.

"Stuffed Kakiage!"

"Here too!"

"Yes!"

Yukito hurriedly filled out the additional order forms that arrived one after another. Unlike normal business hours, however, there is only one dish. As long as he hadn't made the wrong number, it would have been difficult for him to make a communication mistake.

Anticipating this development, Jingi gave Yukito another role besides serving customers. Is...

"Yukito-kun, thanks again for the highball."

"Yes, I understand!"

There was a scene where he failed, but he was able to learn several things as a beverage manager.

Yukito returned to the kitchen and first told Jingi the amount of extra kakiage. And once again, he would make a drink at the work table.

(I think Jingi-san did it like this.)

While remembering the vivid handiwork of his master, Yukito created an amber-colored cup as if he traced it.

Although not as perfect as expected, it is a satisfying result for Yukito, including the fact that the process was carried out without any deadlocks. But...

"Was there too much whiskey?"

Perhaps it was because he mimicked his dedication that he skipped weighing the sake, so he could have ended up with a strong-feeling whiskey.

"Well, Jingi-san also said, 'There is no drinker who gets angry because the alcohol is strong', so it's fine."

"Isn't that a good thing...?"

"Hey."

A muffled cry escaped from Yukito's throat.

Before he knew it, Jingi was behind him like a vengeful ghost in a horror movie.

"The cost is zero because we use ingredients that will be thrown away. The more you sell, the more profit you make. But alcohol doesn't work that way."

"Yes, it hurts, Jingi-san."

As he insisted, Jingi barely dug his ten fingers into Yukito's shoulders.

"I'm going to pretend I broke the whiskey and pay Azuki-chan later. So be careful with the amount. Not a millimeter, no, not a drop, you know?"

"I understand! I understand!"

When Yukito agreed as he writhed in pain, Jingi finally let go of his hand.

"Isn't that completely different from what you just said?"

Yukito blew up his cheeks like a balloon.

In front of his line of sight is the back of Jingi, who returned to cooking kakiage with long strides.

While the only employee accumulated dissatisfaction, the business of the Izakaya "Kappa" went smoothly like the flow of a river.

"It's selling out...! Kakiage with zero material costs is selling like crazy...!"

Jingi looked down and smiled. The tempura pot in front of him is still cooking kakiage.

But he is looking even lower. Coins and bills in a plastic garbage bag under his feet. Those are the profits he has made from his secret business so far.

"I can buy a lot of alcohol with this amount of money."

Jingi raised the corners of his mouth even higher. At the same time, he turned over the kakiage that was swimming in the oil with the chopsticks in his hand. The sunken surface exposes his face, revealing a vivid fox color.

"No, wait."

In the middle of turning over the second kakiage, Jingi suddenly stopped. And he began to think.

He got some money. Even so, if he buys a lot of expensive alcohol, or goes out many times to have fun in bars, he will soon hit rock bottom.

So why doesn't he make more money so he doesn't have to worry about alcohol for a while?

But even if he wants to, there isn't an infinite amount of materials he can use for free. If the current strong sales continue, they probably won't be able to open until closing time.

As a result of continuing to think like this, Jingo came up with a certain plan. However, this is a prohibited business in restaurants.

The seafood, meat and vegetables used in the kakiage are halved and the remaining amount is added to the batter. This saves material while maintaining volume.

"Okay, this will extend the time until the material runs out."

Looking at the kakiage, which had just been taken out of the oil and looked the same as before, Jingo nodded in satisfaction.

Also, continues the "reform" of Jingo. The next thing to do is the one that is the biggest obstacle to sales.

"Yukito."

Jingo called out to Yukito. He thinks that he was about to prepare a whiskey just now and was about to take out a glass.

"Aren't you busy with the crowded seats? I'll also be in charge of the drinks, so focus on serving the customers."

"Eh? If that happens, Jingo-san will be in trouble this time..."

Yukito frowned. Jingo, who continues to make kakiage incessantly, seems worried that he has more work to do.

"Leave it to me. Now, you receive orders from customers like bang bang."

"Haha..."

Yukito left the kitchen and went with the audience as if he was being kicked out.

As soon as he confirmed that, Jingo started working on the concept of a new type of highball. Even if the whiskey is watered down by the interest rate alone, customers will complain. To avoid it...

"I'll use the technique you taught me, Taki-chan."

While he said a name that seems to be a friend's, Jingo continued to make tall glasses according to the same procedure as before. However, the whiskey is definitely less than what Yukito was making. As it is, it's just a fine whiskey.

But this is where the technique really shines.

Finish with a tablespoon of undiluted whiskey.

The surface of the water is amber in color and a faint amber color falls on it like morning dew falling from plants. At first glance nothing has changed in the glass. However, the moment you drink it, the rich aroma of whiskey tickles your nose.

It was originally a technique to make the highball even more delicious, but Jingi used it to cheat the reduced amount of alcohol.

"Hey, I'm waiting for the highball."

From the kitchen, Jingi handed the new whiskey to the customer sitting at the counter. A young man in his early twenties wearing a cap.

"Huh? This whiskey... well, maybe it's just my imagination."

He bowed his head for a moment, but after that, the customer in the cap didn't seem to care and he started playing with his cell phone while he drank a scotch.

"...Okay, success."

Speaking with a voice that could only be heard by his own ears, Jingi clenched his fists in a position invisible to the audience. Apparently, the smell wafting off the surface of the glass fooled him well.

In this way, Jingi, who was blinded by the future price of sake, continued his business by making full use of his abundant technology and his simple tricks.

As a result, he managed to get much better results than originally planned.

He couldn't stop laughing at that. Even Yukito, who worked with him, had Ebisu's face all the time, to the point that he couldn't help but frown and say, "It's disgusting."

However, the wrinkle of the business, which seems to lengthen life time after time, has definitely come from the Izakaya "Kappa" side.

"There are only a few ingredients left. With this I can make some kakiage and there are a few left..."

Jingi clicked his tongue reluctantly.

With the passage of time, the number of clients had been considerably reduced.

There are still customers. The opportunity to earn money is in front of him. So what should he do?

"I can't afford to use tomorrow's ingredients or I'll lose the profit. It's a dough, we have to increase the dough to maintain the appearance of the kakiage!"

Reduce the number of ingredients to the limit and increase the mass to compensate. This is how kakiage was born, a fried food that was almost only battered.

"Jingi-san, I've been getting complaints that there are no ingredients in the kakiage..."

When Yukito came to introduce himself to the kitchen with a worried face...

"Then as an apology, I'll add another dish, no, two kakiage dishes!"

The exaltation was powerful, he presented two dishes with freshly fried "rebosado".

"Also, there are complaints that the whiskey is thin."

"Give the whining boy another drink! We can still make a lot of money!"

"It's already unreasonable."

Yukito let out a long breath.

Izakaya "Kappa" was no longer in a state that could be considered a decent restaurant. No, he doubted that it was decent from the start.

By continuing to serve only thin battered highballs and kakiage, customers disappeared from the store before closing time.

"All the customers went home angry."

"It was too much?"

Yukito and Jingi were standing next to each other in the kitchen, looking at the empty seats. Including the time of "Usagi", the space that was normally lively in "Kappa" has now become a way of just sitting in silence.

"Hey, should we start getting ready to close shop?"

Taking a deep breath, Jingi looked at Yukito.

"I'll clean the kitchen area, so take care of the bathroom."

"I understand."

After receiving instructions, Yukito headed to the bathroom with cleaning tools. He then he hung up the "cleaning" sign and closed the door.

"Do you want me to clean it too?"

Jingi also went to close the job. First, he removed the oil stains that had stuck around the stove. As he was thinking, something touched the tip of his toe.

It was about today's sales at the Izakaya "Kappa", which was packed in a plastic bag that was placed at his feet.

"If you win that much, it's your letter."

Looking at the greatly inflated bag, Jingi nodded in satisfaction.

Although the urge didn't last until the end, she was able to get enough funds not to worry about drinking for a while, that was his goal.

"If I wanted to, I would sell all the kakiage."

Jingi looked at the oil drainer in the sink. There, the kakiage, freshly fried and mostly covered in batter, was smoky white.

(It's a waste to throw it away, so let's feed it to Yukito.)

When she was thinking about such things, she heard the noise of the shop door being opened.

"Last chance...!"

Jingi's eyes widened.

The next moment, he pulled a plate from the shelf and quickly served the kakiage, which had lost its place to go. Force the client with that, no. If he provides it, he will have used up all the materials that were planned to be discarded.

Thanks for selling it. It can be said that it is the most beautiful way to close the curtain of the Izakaya "Kappa".

"Let's decorate it, the one called the beauty of the end."

A fearless smile appeared on Jingi's lips.

At the same time, he seemed to be pouring a whiskey, so he put ice in the glass without wasting anything.

But...

"Huh? There's almost no whiskey left for the highballs."

He shook the whiskey bottle in his hand, but he could only hear the faint sound of water.

Immediately, Jingi reached for a new bottle of whiskey and stopped halfway.

"If I open a new bottle here, in the future I'll drink less alcohol...!"

Why has he been doing this all this time? All of this must have been to avoid the dreary days of drinking mirin to satisfy one's greed for sake.

Remembering his original intentions, Jingi grabbed the whiskey bottle, which was nearly empty. In those eyes dwells the light of an unbreakable will.

(This is my way of life...!)

Weariness barked at his heart.

And, overlooking it, a bowl of infinitely clear, transparent water. Although it was meant to be a highball, it would not be.

If you dare to name it, it is carbonated water with a slight aroma of whiskey.

"Haa... haa... there's no going back."

As expected, there must have been several conflicts, and Jingi wiped his sweaty brow.

And right after that, he heard a rattling noise.

He sat down, the last customer at the counter.

"Wait for the kakiage and highball!"

Without even looking at the customer's face, Jingi put the food and drink on the table.

He had won.

After consuming all the ingredients and alcohol, they used up everything.

Complete victory.

That's what he thought until he heard that voice.

"Oh! It's nice to be served freshly fried food as soon as you sit down!"

"Eh...?"

Standing in front of the stunned Jingi was Momoko, who was in such a good mood that she was almost humming.

"I came here because I wanted to see Jingi-chan and Yukito-kun working. Hmm, it smells good."

Momoko clasped her hands together and curtsied as she inhaled the fragrant oil that rose from the kakiage.

"I will enjoy having this."

"Wait."

Momoko bit into the kakiage before Jingi uttered a voice of restraint.

It was fast.

The sound of freshly fried dough echoed through the quiet shop.

And the silence came.

Momoko didn't move from her stance to take a bite of the kakiage. On the other hand, Jingi was staring at her as he sweated like a waterfall.

Soon after, Momoko put her chopsticks into the plate of kakiage, and picked up a tall glass set next to her with the faintly whiskey-scented carbonated water that Jingi made. Then, she tipped the glass vertically and drank it all in one go, letting out a "yuck" sigh.

"Kakiage with no ingredients, carbonated water in the name of a highball. Did you serve a customer with such insincerity?"

Momoko quietly lowered the glass that only had ice on the table. Her eyes, which are directed at the truth, narrowed like threads. However, it was clear from Jingi's pale and grandly drawn expression that it was not a smile.

"You need to retrain yourself. Cooking and heart."

"Wait a minute, Momoko-san! I'll do it properly from now on! I'll cook sincerely! That's why..."

"Okay. Jingi-chan, you're a kid who can do it if you try."

Momoko got up from her chair without hearing the end of Jingi's persuasion. She then reached out to the other side of the counter.

"Come on, let's start special training now."

"Right now...?"

"Hurry up, my God."

Momoko's eyes narrowed as she answered the question, which caused her cheeks to tremble.

This time it was a genuine and loving smile.

"Fu, it's over."

Yukito, who was cleaning the bathroom, opened the door and went out.

It was a part-time job that started out tricky, but admittedly he had a lot of experience. To express his gratitude, he was working hard to clean every corner, but unexpectedly time passed.

"Jingi-san, what should I do after cleaning the bathroom...? Jingi-san?"

He looked around the kitchen and even the audience, but there was no sign of Jingi. However, there was half eaten kakiage and a glass of whiskey on the counter seat. Apparently, a customer came while Yukito was cleaning.

"Where have you gone?"

Looking worried, Yukito let out a breath.

It was 22:00 hours and the hands of the clock were approaching the closing time of the Izakaya "Usagi".

That night, Jingi never came back to the store.

The next morning.

Yukito woke up in his own bed on the second floor of the Amamiya residence where he was staying.

His body feels terribly heavy. That is probably due to physical and mental fatigue caused by unknown work.

After that, Yukito worked to close the Izakaya "Usagi" in his absence. In addition to having to do a job that could have been shared by two people, Yukito had his first day at a part-time job yesterday. When he finished everything with the manual in hand, it was already close to midnight.

Before Jingi, who overcame the difficulties and returned home, he couldn't be satisfied if he didn't say a single complaint.

Yukito returned to the Amamiya family in a trance, but the house was dark and even Momoko was absent, let alone Jingi. Yukito, who had been hit by a watermark on his shoulder, was tired and forgot to change clothes and take a bath, returned to his room and went to bed early.

"I wonder if Jingi-san and Momoko-san are back?"

Yukito muttered while he was still rubbing his sleepy eyes, then got up from the bed and left his room.

Right after that, the smell of miso soup tickled Yukito's nose. Also, the sound of a kitchen knife hitting a chopping board could be heard faintly from the first floor.

Stimulated by smell and hearing, Yukito headed for the kitchen on the first floor. What he saw there was the back of a young man in a pure white kitchen robe. In a way, Yukito is the person he wanted to meet the most.

"Wait, Jingi-san! Why did you suddenly disappear yesterday...?"

"I'm sorry!"

At the moment when Yukito, who had regained his anger from the previous day, was about to approach him, Jingi turned and bowed his head on the urge to hit his forehead against the ground.

"Yesterday, no, I want to apologize for everything I've done to you. I'm so sorry, Yukito-kun..."

"Umm... Jingi-san?"

Yukito involuntarily sent a puzzled look and said, "Did you pick up and eat something bad?"

"He's not the old Jingi-chan he used to be."

A voice came from behind. When Yukito looked over his shoulder, Momoko was standing with her back against the hallway wall. She is as beautiful as ever, but this morning the dark circles under her eyes stand out.

Did she stay up all night?

"You retrained with me. Right, Jingi-chan?"

"Yes! From now on, I, Sagawa Jingi, intend to do my best in everything I see! I will never do anything to make Momoko-san sad again!"

"I believe you, Jingi-chan."

Momoko nodded and clapped her hands while Jingi cursed with his heels straightened and his spine straight.

Watching the exchange between the two, Yukito realized. At first glance he seems animated, but there is no light in his eyes. To give a familiar example, he had eyes like a dead fish.

"Well, let's continue the story over breakfast. Yukito-kun, go wash your face."

"Oh, yes."

At Momoko's insistence, Yukito slowly walked towards the bathroom. He's a little dizzy, but it's not because he woke up. That's mainly because the shift in responsibilities has been tremendous and the processing of the brain hasn't caught up.

"I wonder if Momoko-san's anger caused you to end up like this, Jingi-san."

Yukito muttered the answer that was derived from the conversation between Jingi and Momoko. After all, he was someone who shouldn't be offended.

Arriving at the bathroom, Yukito turns on the faucet and waits for the hot water to come out. Washing your face with water in early spring is painful. While he was doing it, he heard the voice of Jingi and Momoko from the kitchen.

"After breakfast, let's go apologize to Mitarai-kun and the guests who came to "Usagi"."

"Of course! I'm thinking of doing a free service on "Usagi" as an apology today!"

"Jingi-san, who used to be trash, is making beautiful comments..."

While he admired her, Yukito washed his face with hot water two, three times. And when he lifted his head, he saw himself reflected in the mirror with a smirk dripping from his bangs and his chin.

"The kind Jingi-san, it's feels disgusting when I think about it calmly."

It was Yukito's honest impression that spilled out of his clear thoughts.

In addition, the friendly Jingi came to an end at noon the next day.

The reason is that during the training with Yukito, a stream of water accidentally caught his attention. After regaining his self-esteem, Jingi yelled, "Idiot! Buy me some sake as an apology!"

Yukito smiled for some reason even though it was a very unreasonable request.