

AYA KA

— あ や か —

SIDE STORIES



11

尽義、夢のまた夢

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原作：GoRA/KINGRECORDS

AYAKA
SIDE
STORIES
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尽義、
夢のまた夢

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K – PROJECT WORLD

"AYAKA – SIDE STORIES 11": JINGI, A DREAM AFTER A DREAM

Deceased.

(I'm definitely dead.), Sagawa Jingi thought.

He could feel the boundaries of his body becoming blurred.

He could feel his heart getting thinner.

He was sad and lonely.

But more than that, he for some reason felt a refreshing sense of fullness.

A long time ago, Makoto Yanagi took Yukito to Ichinoshima to attend to some business, and while he was away, he and two of his brothers went out to sea. That was when Kurama Haruaki and Ibuki Aka were even closer than biological brothers.

He put on a swimsuit and a small jacket, carried his backpack and headed to the beach where he could swim. He asked Momoko to prepare rice balls for lunch, filled his water bottle with plenty of barley tea, put on a straw hat, and planned to play for more than half a day.

In fact, that day was great.

The summer sun was intense, but once they were in the shade of a tree, he blew a cool breeze. When he looked out to sea, he could see small fish swimming and seaweed swaying. On the way, he took a sip of cold barley tea from the ice-filled water bottle and soaked it all over his body.

Having thoroughly enjoyed their summer vacation, the two brothers began to jump into the sea as if to take their last dips, just when it was time to retire. They dived one after another from small rocky areas that could not even be called cliffs to the surface of the sea.

Its height is about three meters. Aka had a bold form and Haruaki had graceful movements, landing headfirst into the water beautifully.

"Jingi, you too!"

As he swam, Aka covered his mouth with his hands and called out to him. His tone was as if he was scolding his younger brother.

"Jingi. There's no need to force yourself!"

On the other hand, a smiling Haruaki simply waved at Jingi from the sea. Jingi was lost. To be honest, he was scared.

But...

When he received the expectant and worried gazes of his two brothers, his heart naturally calmed down. Swallowing heavily, he ran, kicked the rocky area and raised his arms high as he jumped into the clear sky.

It was very similar to how he felt that day.

It may be a strange way to put it, but he felt as if his two brothers had "shown him how to do it."

His two brothers also swam to Jingi and praised him when he sank under the water and then surfaced again.

That's all.

He did what he had to do.

He always ended up doing what he was supposed to do.

Just when his consciousness was about to disappear, he remembered that glorious moment that summer and Sagawa Jingi's existence disappeared.

It was supposed to be like this.

But that didn't happen. Strangely and mysteriously, his inner world, once completely obscured, suddenly took a new form and regenerated while retaining clear cognitive abilities.

(Huh? What happened?)

Long before he was happy to have regained consciousness, he was simply wondering.

(I'm dead?)

After his vague senses began to function properly, he slowly looked around him. (So this place is definitely in my neighborhood!)

There is no doubt that this is Ninoshima, where Jingi lives. A peaceful rural landscape with rice fields stretching as far as the eye can see. From there, it takes about ten minutes to reach the house where Momoko, Jingi, and now Yukito lived.

In the midst of the confusion, Jingi suddenly heard voices approaching from ahead and directed his attention towards them.

Upon seeing them, he saw that two older ladies from the neighborhood, whom he knew well, were approaching while they were talking.

"Oh! Tanaka Oba-chan! Nomura Oba-chan!"

He greeted and called faces he had known since he was a child. However, neither of them responded to Jingi at all, instead they walked directly towards Jingi while smiling and chatting with each other.

And...

They passed through him easily.

Jingi was surprised.

Without a doubt, the two ladies passed through Jingi's body and continued away from Jingi along the path behind him.

Jingi suddenly noticed a possibility and looked at his hands.

"Wah!"

He was still semi-transparent. He quickly checked every part of his body. Before he knew it, he was wearing a pure white suit that he didn't remember ever wearing. It is the so-called death costume worn by classic ghosts. As a courtesy, he even had a triangular piece of cloth over his head.

Nowadays, that is rarely seen, not even in comedy parodies.

Jingi sat on the spot, exhausted.

"Oh, I'm dead after all."

And then he became a ghost.

Jingi was stunned for a while, but the change was relatively quick. He spontaneously said:

"Well, it can't be helped since I'm dead."

Thinking like this, he slowly got up from the ground. He dusted off the dirt that had stuck to his clothes like a habit since he was alive (although it wasn't actually stuck to him since he was a ghost) and headed towards his house with light steps.

He was now curious to see how the people of this island spent their time after his death. It's obvious, but it's a sight he could never see if he were living a normal life.

There was a plan in Jingi's head.

After all, he did a great job hiding the mission he had set out to do and, in the end, he single-handedly put an end to the disaster.

Isn't it safe to call him the hero who protected this island?

He was sure that everyone would praise him and mourn his death. Maybe they'll even make a bronze statue.

"Or "Jingi-san Memorial Day", a holiday for islanders?"

As Jingi slowly walked forward, feeling a little encouraged, he noticed a familiar figure walking ahead of him.

A person dressed in the traditional priest's costume. That's Kurama Haruaki, Jingi's older brother.

Jingi became happy and shouted loudly.

"Hey! Haru-nii!"

However, Haruaki did not respond to the call at all and moved forward at a fast pace.

"I see, you couldn't hear me."

Jingi desperately tried to chase him, but he couldn't control his body. Maybe it's because he is a novice ghost, although he has some speed, if he takes a step forward, he feels like he is just floating in the air.

His steps were like those of an astronaut landing on the moon. He had no choice but to take a big leap.

"Hehe, I got it."

He landed on Haruaki to carry him on his shoulders. Haruaki stopped for a moment and put his hand on the back of his head suspiciously, but he didn't seem to notice that a ghost had attached itself to him.

He turned his head and started walking forward again.

"Go, go."

Jingi let himself go and patted Haruaki on the head. It didn't seem like he was aware of Jingi's existence, but Haruaki kept tilting his head in confusion.

As Jingi expected, Haruaki went directly to the house where Jingi, Momoko, and Yukito lived.

There is a sign in front of the entrance.

"Meeting to remember Sagawa Jingi."

That's what it says. Jingi read the words and nodded once. On the other hand, Jingi was still impressed.

After all, everyone remembers him. Maybe Haruaki also came for that purpose. He got off Haruaki, who he had been using as a horse, and stared at the sign.

On the other hand, Haruaki, who used to live in that house, opened the sliding entrance door in a rather casual manner.

"Momoko-san? I've come to visit you. Momoko-san?"

He called the house.

Then from the kitchen...

"Ah, Haruaki-kun! I'm sorry. I can't get out of here right now. Could you come up?"

A response came along with the sound of something stir-frying. It seems that it was in full cooking.

The essence is...

(You haven't changed, Momoko-san.)

That's what he was thinking. Haruaki put a smile on his lips.

"Ok, excuse me."

He took off his setta, placed them carefully in the entryway and walked down the hallway to the living room. Jingi followed him.

When he entered the room, the first thing that caught his attention were the buckets of sushi and the large plates of food on the long table, as well as the rows and rows of beer cans, shochu highs, and plastic soda bottles.

The scene was reminiscent of a memorial service held in a country house.

However, Jingi was not impressed and frowned. Since it was a memorial service for someone who protected the island, he thought there would be more people from the entire island, but there were only three people inside: Yashiki, Saruwatari, Mitarai, and other loyal friends.

This isn't much different than drinking at an izakaya, when it comes to those men.

They were sitting cross-legged in a completely relaxed atmosphere, eating chips and jerky and drinking beer, but when they saw Haruaki, Jingi's older brother and a local celebrity, they straightened up a little.

"Ah, Kurama-sensei, hello. We're starting now."

Mitarai, who is the eldest, bowed his head slightly.

Haruaki immediately smiled and stopped him with his hand.

"Please take it easy."

Haruaki also took a position near them, took a can of beer and opened the tab.

"Jingi liked this kind of thing, right?"

He made a toast. Yashiki and Saruwatari's faces broke, and Mitarai also had a smile on his lips. Everyone made a toast with the beers they were drinking together.

"A toast to Jingi."

"Hurrah."

"Wow."

(Eh?)

Jingi thought those guys were strangely bright, but since he didn't really like humid weather, he decided to keep an eye on them for now.

Before he knew it, the memorial gathering had begun, which was too small for the hero who saved the island.

"By the way, what happened to the others?"

Kurama asked those who were remembering Jingi. Yashiki, a dear friend of Jingi, was drinking beer.

"It seems that a new enka singer is coming to sell at a nearby supermarket, so all the grandparents are heading there massively."

"Enka singer?"

"Apparently, this is a third-generation Japanese-Brazilian singer named Solemio Togashi, who wears a Mongolian sumo suit and whose special skill is singing while juggling."

(Eh? What? I lost to a singer like that?)

Jingi was surprised.

Saruwatari put his hands behind his head.

"Well, for a moment I wondered if I should go there or not."

"Do not miss!"

Although he couldn't hear it, he was pushing him.

"He's been my friend since you were a child!", Yashiki added.

"And the other neighbors generally said, 'If I can go, I'll go'."

It seems like the memorial service for the person who risked his life is being treated like a party for college students.

Jingi's eyes widened in shock.

Haruaki nodded.

"Everyone is busy with various things. Apparently, the mayor, Inou-san, also has plans to get bugs out of the futon and get a haircut."

"He can do that another time!"

Unable to contain himself, Jingi screamed again. Then they began to happily remember Jingi.

However, when he heard them, they did not speak well.

"He drank a lot and was bad."

"He was gathering food."

"He was trying to commit a loan scam against elementary school students."

"He lost so much playing pachinko that he rolled on the floor screaming."

(Hey, you guys...)

Jingi trembled with anger.

(They are saying things that are not true!)

Actually, most of it is true, but he would like them to limit their memories to only the good ones. So, as if they felt that feeling...

"Well, I feel a little sorry for him. Next time, let's say something nice about him, okay?"

Jingi nodded vigorously.

Then, the atmosphere that had been so lively a moment ago fell silent. A heavy silence. In fact, the current environment is more appropriate for a memorial gathering. Everyone looked at each other and was silent.

Haruaki, who had been thinking with his arms crossed, finally spoke.

"No, that's right, Jingi... he always cut his nails properly, right?"

"Ah..."

Everyone started screaming as if they had been saved.

"Yes!"

"I'm sure that guy's nails were pretty good!"

Everyone congratulated him as if they had fulfilled his responsibilities. Jingi screamed irresistibly.

"I guess that's all I can do if I try to figure things out!"

However, the tsukkomi did not reach him. Instead, he heard a voice coming from the hallway.

"Oh, everyone is in high spirits."

A calm and meek voice came from the hallway. Jingi looked at the Goddess of Salvation with a desperate expression.

(Momoko-san!)

Unlike those heartless people, he was sure that she would be saddened by his loss and praise his bravery.

Even now, she made preparations for the memorial meeting (laughs) and even cooked the food. Momoko was the only kind woman who hadn't changed.

But...

"....."

Jingi's mouth dropped open.

Momoko had changed a lot. Although she was inside the house, she was wearing a thick fur coat, a dazzling diamond ring on her finger, and a pearl necklace around her neck. The decorations alone would cost millions.

However, her facial expression was still the same kind smile as before, so it was a strange mismatch. The men in the room were not only depressed by the impressive outfit, but also fell silent.

Before long, Yashiki and Saruwatari were secretly whispering to each other.

"Look, Momoko-san, it seems that she has taken out a considerable amount of life insurance for Jingi."

"I see, that's why she made a lot of money."

"Keep it real!"

Jingi paled.

"This is the first time I've heard it!"

Momoko heard whispers from Yashiki and Saruwatari.

"Hey, listen. I haven't changed at all. Look."

She grabbed a plate of freshly prepared food from the tray and placed it on the table.

"Slow-cooked caviar and foie gras and fried truffle."

"She's changed after all!"

She was not the kind of person who would prepare incomprehensible dishes with such extravagant ingredients. Money is scary.

Saruwatari and Yashiki were talking secretly again.

"By the way, according to information from a construction company I know, it seems that this house will be renovated in a big way and will be eye-catching in the near future."

"I see. That's why Jingi's belongings were sold at Memekari the other day. There were a lot of things that got in the way."

"Momoko-san, the change is too fast!"

Momoko probably didn't hear Jingi's voice, but she laughed and said:

"That kid did a really good job in his final moments."

She was whispering that.

"Momoko-san!"

Jingi is now terrified by the darkness of her. So, Haruaki said to take it easy.

"By the way, what happened to Jingi's grave?"

"Eh? A grave?"

When Jingi seemed to suspect something, Momoko looked at them with a knowing expression on her face.

"Ah, over here."

With that, she put on her sandals from the terrace and went out into the garden. Others followed her example.

So...

"Here it is."

Momoko had a big smile on her face and pointed to a small, thick clay bun. A shamoji was glued on top and the words "Jingi's grave" were written on the front with a marker.

"My name is spelled incorrectly!"

Jingi was screaming.

"No, nowadays, if your pet turtle dies, it will have a better grave! If you have the insurance money, at least make it a little more elaborate!"

However, Jingi's statements went unheeded, and Haruaki, Yashiki, Saruwatari, and Mitarai closed their eyes with solemn expressions on their faces and clasped their hands towards the shamoji.

"Hey! At least one person should have doubts!"

So there...

"Please take it easy!"

A young, raw and angry voice was heard from behind. When Jingi turned around, he saw Yukito Yanagi standing there with a manajiri in his arms.

Jingi slowly shed tears of joy. That's all. That guy was there. Yukito, who was his favorite disciple and loved him more than anyone.

He's sure it's him.

But...

"Please, Kurama-san. We're supposed to start training today, right? I've been waiting for you for a long time!"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Haruaki smiled and apologized.

"So, let's get this over with and get started, shall we?"

"Thanks, teacher."

Yukito was leaning beautifully at an angle of almost 45 degrees.

"He changed teachers!"

Jingi screamed loudly.

"It's too early for many things!"

Finally, Yashiki lost his balance, staggered towards the clay bun, and kicked the Shamoji to the ground.

"Tehe."

Yashiki put his fist to his forehead and stuck out his tongue.

"Hey, don't do that! Fix it properly! Oh, don't step on it! Don't step on it! You idiot! Ah! You're all idiots!"

Jingi shouted.

It was already a tsukkomi from the bottom of his soul.

Immediately, the image of Haruaki, Momoko, Yukito, and their friends chatting loudly in the garden became blurry, his hearing became distant, and his vision narrowed.

And Jingi's senses...

Once again it was painted an overwhelming gray color.

The first thing he felt was strangely similar to the summer day when he went to the beach with his two brothers, jumping from a cliff into the sea.

At that moment, sea water entered his nostrils and he almost panicked. That time he couldn't breathe for the first time either and waved his arms and legs involuntarily. He couldn't tell what was up or down, he was disoriented and felt like he was going to scream.

He opened his eyes,

"Ah? Eh? Huh?"

He looked around frantically. He tried to breathe, but he stopped reflexively. He felt like he was underwater.

But...

(What is this place?)

The area was filled with a color that was neither gold nor ocher. It was not cloudy at all, but visibility was not very good. Although he was still short of breath and felt like he was drowning, Jingi gradually regained his composure.

(This place... maybe...)

His experience and knowledge as a person of connection naturally taught him the answer.

(Am I on the line of life?)

A torrent of life where all lives return and become one stream. The source of all power. A large underground flow of energy that penetrates underground on Ayaka Island.

He was floating inside it.

No, he was slowly but surely disappearing.

What fills his environment as liquid is life force. Looking up, down, left and right, there was no end, just an enormous amount of life surrounding Jingi. As he trembled, he felt a surge of power that made his body tremble.

(In other words, what happened before was a dream, right?)

And the response was natural.

(Guess I'm dead after all.)

Right now he was probably about to be immersed and assimilated into the life cycle. Before long, his consciousness will completely dissolve into the life energy and his ego will eventually disappear. He seems to feel that fleeting moment, which is like a slight illusion.

(But...)

He couldn't help but smile bitterly.

(What a dream.)

It was quite an advance.

(If I had a dream, I would like to have a better dream.)

Probably the more he sleeps, the more his disappearance progresses. However, the more he struggles within that life line, the more his consciousness recedes.

His body felt warm and his mind became flat. Then, feeling the most intense drowsiness he had ever felt, Jingi closed his eyelids again.

The next thing he knew he was back at the Ninoshima camp. The place was exactly the same as when he first woke up. However, the surrounding landscape changed from day to night. A faint moon adorned with clouds hung in the sky, and the cries of frogs and insects could be heard loudly in the surrounding rice fields filled with black water.

And one more thing.

The biggest difference from last time is that Jingi himself is very aware that this is a dream he is having in the middle of the life line. He checked his limbs and took a closer look at what he was wearing.

Instead of the classic ghost costume from last time, he was wearing the green hoodie that he normally likes to wear.

"Well, it's happening again, I guess I'll just have to get up and walk."

He knew it instinctively. The more often he dreams, the more likely it is that he will become absorbed in the cycle of life and eventually completely lose his sense of self.

And, at that moment, he would await pure harmony with the vital energy, that is, a definitive death.

"But how did I wake up?"

It was then that he crossed his arms and was lost in his thoughts. He noticed two figures slowly approaching him from the darkness.

"Onya?"

Jingi strained his eyes. There were no streetlights around, so it was difficult to see who the other person was. However, as soon as the clouds passed over the moon and the area was once again enveloped in soft light, he realized it.

"What? Tanaka Oba-chan and Nomura Oba-chan?"

That was the same dream as last time.

In his previous dream, he met those two old ladies from the neighborhood.

"Hey!"

Jingi waved his hand tentatively. He thought he would ghost herself again, but this time they both responded to his voice. Everyone seemed surprised and turned their heads towards him.

Jingi became happy and tried to wave even more vigorously.

But...

He immediately noticed something strange and stopped moving.

Before he knew it, the sounds of frogs and insects had stopped.

"Eh?"

Jingi backed away a little, still smiling. Something was wrong. First of all, the two ladies were acting strangely.

They stiffened their arms and legs and walked towards him with extremely clumsy movements.

The advancement was strange, as if all the joints were broken.

And...

"Uuuh~"

"Aaah..."

Their eyes were blank and they were constantly making noises that didn't make any sense.

(I don't like it very much, but... I've seen movies and games that feature something like this several times.)

Jingi slowly withdrew. Meanwhile, the ladies extended their fingers towards him and closed the distance.

There was a hint of longing.

They called Jingi, like fresh human meat.

"Hahaha."

Jingi turned his back on them.

"See you later, ladies!"

He ran as fast as he could.

They were zombies.

No doubt.

The two ladies had turned into zombies.

So...

"Gaaah!"

"Aaaaaah!"

Both Tanaka-chan and Nomura-chan have been carrying out the mission together.

And they were quite fast.

(It's the type of zombie that comes running depending on the situation!)

Jingi screamed desperately in his heart as he ran across the furrow with the speed of a sprinter, his fingertips immobilized.

(This is a dream! This is a dream!)

However, his most sincere wish did not come true and he continued to be chased by two old zombies while he said things like "Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah."

The place Jingi jumped to was a two-story barn that was right in front of him.

That's the kind of place you would normally keep your farming tools. It smells like hay and a little moldy. Although out of breath, Jingi desperately turned his body, raised his shoulders, and closed the door.

It wasn't long before he heard the sound of zombies crashing outside.

"Ah~"

"Eh~"

Jingi was scared and horrified, so he sank to the spot, leaning his back against the door. He was shaking.

(I am very aware that it is a dream I am having on the line of life.)

The situation seemed too real.

Knowing it was a nightmare was one thing, but knowing it was enough to cover the trembling fear was another matter.

It's that moment...

"Jingi-san?"

A faint voice came from deep within the darkness of the barn. Jingi looked at him surprised.

A boy stepped out into the moonlight shining through the second story window. Jingi shouted the boy's name with an expression of disbelief on his face.

"Yukito? He is Yukito?"

That person was definitely Yukito Yanagi. The moment Jingi saw that delicate face with a sad expression on his face...

(Good! Nice to see you!)

That feeling suddenly grew and he didn't even pay attention to the long, thin object in his hand. He tried to run towards Yukito.

At that moment...

Zudon.

A trembling roar echoed through the area, and Jingi was on his butt. There was a hole in the ground a short distance from his feet and a slight amount of smoke.

"Y-Yukito?"

Jingi finally realized it.

Yukito was holding something that looked like a rifle.

Besides...

"Jingi-san."

"Eh?"

"Now say the tongue twister."

He held the barrel of the gun pointed directly at Jingi's forehead. The explosion that sounded earlier was the result of him firing a single shot.

"Okay! Tongue twister!"

Yukito shouted in a strained voice. Seeing his finger press the trigger, Jingi panicked.

"Na, Namamugi Namagome Nakakago."

".....!"

"No, that's not true! Wait! I just took a bite. Raw wheat raw rice raw eggs!"

He understood it immediately.

Yukito was checking if he had turned into a zombie. He was relieved to be able to respond for the moment.

"Next. Roll, roll and keep rolling, six rolling."

There was another question from Yukito. Jingi grew impatient.

"Eh? Wait a minute. I can't say things like that normally."

"Then, red capybara, blue capybara, yellow capybara, red paprika, blue paprika, yellow paprika. Either apologize to Aya or your parents. I apologized to Aya and the greengrocer. A singer comes and tells me to sing, but I can sing well enough to sing, I will sing, but since I can't sing well enough, I won't sing, but that's okay."

"Ah, can you say Akakapibara? Well, you're very good at tongue twisters!"

"Suspicious."

Yukito looked at Jingi with suspicious eyes and tried to shoot him. Jingi shouted without caring what he was doing.

"I'm Sagawa Jingi! You're Yukito Yanagi! I'm your teacher. I'm the one who picked you up on this island! You remember, right? I was waiting at the school gate, drinking sake. I was the one who threw you into the river! What I said at that moment was "Just fly!".

Yukito's body stiffened for a moment. In an attempt to dissuade him, Jingi rolled up his sleeves and hiked up the hem of his pants, showing every part of his body.

"Look! Look! There are no bite marks anywhere, right? There are no scars, right? I haven't turned into a zombie at all! I'm a human!"

A drop of water fell down Yukito's cheek.

He lets out a sob.

"Uh, uh. I'm sorry. Jingi-san, I guess you haven't been bitten yet, right? I was really scared. I'm sorry. I was very suspicious."

"No, it's fine."

Jingi said as he broke out in a cold sweat.

"If your suspicions are cleared, could you put down the gun first?"

Yukito regretted it with tears streaming down his face, but he didn't move the muzzle of his gun and kept it pointed at Jingi.

He had the air of a trained soldier.

Yukito looked scared.

"Ah, ah. Sorry, sorry."

He finally abandoned his stance. Jingi took a deep breath.

"So what happened?"

He asked Yukito with a bitter smile. Yukito began to respond with tears streaming down his face.

"Yes. At first, I went to Inou-san's house for some business. But then those guys came in, and Inou-san was bitten, and his group joined Inou-san right in front of me. So, I had no choice."

(I see. That's why he killed Inou.)

Jingi felt sorry for Yukito.

It was understandable that he was nervous, since he had done something to someone he knew.

He tried to put a hand on Yukito's shoulder to comfort him. Yukito continued speaking.

"Then after that, I shot the city hall employees one by one, and Ichijou-san, Yako-kun, Chatarou-kun, the police officers, the supermarket employee, the head priest of the temple, and the thief who he was hiding. I knocked down the people who seemed to be attacking me at random, and also Mitarai-san, Yashiki-san, Saruwatari-san and everyone else."

Jingi gently removed his outstretched hand.

(This boy, Yukito is the crazy type.)

How many people has he killed?

Jingi thought for a moment. Then, he cleared his throat and placed his hands on Yukito's shoulders again.

Looking into his eyes.

"It's okay, Yukito."

"What?"

"Listen carefully."

He paused for a moment.

"This is a dream!"

At that moment, Jingi felt an incredible shock on his cheeks and was impressed. After a while he realized that he had been hit with the butt of a rifle.

"W-what?"

Jingi sat with her legs diagonally like a girl, put his hand on his cheek, and looked at Yukito with teary eyes. Yukito let out a sigh and said sadly.

"Jingi-san."

He smiled slightly.

"Please, faces reality."

(Damn.)

An alert pulsed at a dangerous level in Jingi's head.

(This guy, what's worse, he can't understand anything at all!)

When Jingi was stunned...

".....!"

Yukito looked surprised and turned towards the door. Attracted, Jingi also directed his attention there.

He immediately understood why Yukito had reacted.

Mishi.

The barn door began to creak. Outside, he heard multiple moans of "Aaaaaaaaaah~". He felt like dozens of zombies were gathering.

"....."

"....."

The moment Jingi and Yukito looked at each other as if to say, "This is bad", a strange explosion sound was heard and the lock that had been closed broke in two. Since it was an ancient item, its strength was probably lower from the beginning.

And the worst...

The zombies ran into the room in an avalanche. Some of the zombies in front fell forward too hard, but those following them calmly stepped over the pitiful zombies and defeated them, rushing towards Jingi and Yukito like a murky current.

"Ah, here! Yukito!"

When he saw Yukito, he was running up the stairs to the second floor, carrying a rifle.

He didn't think twice about Jingi, that he was depressed.

Naturally, Jingi wanted to do the same, but...

"Awah! Awawawawah..."

His hips gave way and he couldn't get up properly.

If he panics, there is nothing he can do to save himself.

"Ah~"

"Uh~"

The smell of rot reached his nose and the zombies came so close that he could almost see their empty eyes.

(We're screwed!)

At that moment, Jingi closed his eyes as he thought.

"The softest and most solid things in the world are conquered and nothingness enters nothingness."

A gust of wind broke out and Jingi's body floated in the air. Surrounded by pure white light.

"Waaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!"

Jingi's body turned and flew into the sky from the door opened by the zombie. For a brief moment, zombies could be seen being dragged, rolled, and crushed against walls, farm tools, etc.

Jingi realized it immediately.

(This is Haru-nii's technique!)

When he looked to the side, Yukito was flying in the sky in almost the same conditions. The local tornado took Jingi and Yukito to a large pine tree growing on a small hill, and the roaring sound there was carefully dispersed, as if it were a lie.

At the same time, Jingi and Yukito suddenly fell on the spot.

He hardly felt any shock, as if an invisible giant had pinched him with his fingertips and gently placed him on the ground.

"Hey, I'm glad I made it on time. Are you guys hurt?"

A person sitting near the base of the pine tree called to them in a low voice. Jingi recognized his face and immediately let out a cry of joy.

"Haru-nii!"

As Jingi expected, it was Kurama Haruaki, the priest of Kaizumi Shrine and Jingi's older brother.

"You really helped me!"

He must have known about Jingi's situation and went to rescue them. The same skill as always. He was a model of a reliable older brother. Just as Jingi came over to express his gratitude.

"Do not come!"

Came a sharp scolding voice that was uncharacteristic of Haruaki. Jingi stood there, surprised. Haruaki laughed weakly.

"No, I'm sorry for yelling, Jingi."

Looking closely, he could see that Haruaki's face was sickly pale. A large amount of sweat dripped down his handsome face, as if he was enduring some kind of pain.

"What's wrong, Haru-nii?"

Jingi was upset.

"Kurama-san..."

Yukito, who was standing next to Jingi, also frowned worriedly.

He had a somewhat sinister feeling. With a smile on his lips, Haruaki calmly gave instructions.

Pointing in the direction with trembling fingers,

"If you go straight down this hill, you'll reach your house. Run away, both of you. Don't worry about me, I'll stop the zombies here."

"What are you talking about?"

Jingi cleared his throat.

"What will happen to Haru-nii? Why...? Won't you come with us?"

There were no words beyond that. Haruaki laughed a little. He took off his clothes and exposed his collarbone to the moonlight.

"They took me by surprise. It means I still lacked training."

There were painful scars there.

It's probably a scar caused by a zombie.

".....!"

Jingi was speechless. Haruaki corrected his messy clothes and continued to press the area with the palm of his hand.

"Hurry up!"

He looked Jingi in the eyes and spoke harshly.

"I don't know how long I'll be conscious! Hurry up and leave before I join them!"

A kind older brother. The oldest and most trusted member of his class. Even if it were only in his dreams to abandon such an important person who had been with him since he was a child, there was no way he could do it so easily.

However, Jingi...

"I understand! Haru-nii! I'm sorry. I'll leave you here for now! See you again!"

There was a reason why he hurriedly pushed Yukito's back and started down the hill.

Yukito.

He saw him open the barrel of his rifle and check to see if it was loaded with bullets.

He was trying to kill him.

"Hey, Yukito."

Jingi asked as he moved to a small trot.

"Where the hell did you get that rifle?"

Yukito, who was running ahead of Jingi, turned and smiled briefly for a moment.

"It was in a weapons cabinet that I found by chance at the police station I was at. Is there a problem?"

The look in his eyes was scary. He was gripping the barrel of the gun tightly, as if he was trying not to have it taken away.

"N-no, not really."

He decided not to broach the subject further.

The two ran for about five minutes and managed to reach the house where they lived. It was locked, but Yukito opened it with the key he took out of his pocket.

Jingi took the initiative to enter, followed by Yukito, who closed the door from the inside. Then, as he took off his shoes and was about to go up to the front door, Jingi was caught in his tracks.

"Wah!"

He lost his balance. Maybe he was just tired. He managed to grab the corner of the shoe box with his suddenly protruding hand and managed to keep from falling.

"Haha. I'm confused."

He lightly scratched his palm and a small amount of blood flowed out. He showed Yukito the small amount of bleeding that couldn't even be called a scratch with a shy smile.

"....."

The expression suddenly disappeared from Yukito's face.

"Eh?"

His blood suddenly ran cold.

"Ah. Are you a zombie?"

"No, no, wait! You were watching! Don't you remember that I almost fell?"

"Zombie. You, enemy."

"Why are you speaking in one sentence?"

"Zombie. Kill..."

Yukito then raised his rifle and suddenly pulled the trigger without warning. There was a roar. Jingi narrowly avoided it by ducking. It was an impressive headshot that targeted the zombie's vital point, his brain.

He heard the sound of the wall breaking behind him.

"Tch."

Yukito clicked his tongue. Jingi left the place running while he stumbled.

"Awawawawah!"

(Yukito is broken!) Jingi thought.

He ran for his life down the hallway. Yukito, who had become a killing machine, slowly began to follow the trail.

"Jingi-san!"

Zudon.

"Let's talk!"

Zudon.

"It's okay. I'm sure we can understand each other!"

Zudon.

"Aren't we master and disciple? It's so sad to have such a suspicious relationship!"

Zudon. Zudon. Zudon.

Rifle shots were interspersed with tearful lines.

(He's much scarier than zombies!) Jingi thought.

It was several times worse than zombies, given his emotional voice. Desperately running through the house, Jingi finally found himself in a corner of the hallway with nowhere to escape to.

"Wawawawah!"

He sank, leaning his back against the wall and scratching his feet desperately, but it was a dead end and he could go no further.

"Booboo..."

Yukito approached, gently replacing the bullets in his rifle like an experienced soldier.

"Jingi-san."

He prepared his rifle.

"Jingi-san, finally, Ayakai, is there a proper way to use it?"

"Who knows, idiot!"

At that moment, Jingi closed his eyes as he thought.

"Guh..."

Yukito suddenly made a strange noise. Jingi widened his eyes suspiciously. And he was left speechless.

Just now, a woman was biting Yukito's neck. A completely unexpected ambush appeared from somewhere.

"W-why?"

Yukito collapsed with a tearful expression on his face. The woman stepped over Yukito and slowly approached him.

Momoko was dripping blood from her mouth.

"Ah~ uuh~"

Zombie Momoko opened her mouth wide and charged towards Jingi. Furthermore, she wore beautiful fur and precious jewelry.

"Why is it the same dream as before?"

Jingi shouted.

There was nowhere else to flee to.

Jingi woke up, still screaming. He looked around his with a start and realized that he was once again in the dense flow of life.

No, he had been floating in the flow of life for a long time, perhaps the correct expression would be to say that he had awakened from a foaming dream.

However, the dream he was having was so real that he felt as if his body had been instantly transported from Ninoshima, which was dominated by zombies.

And although he knew it was a dream, he was so afraid that in the end he screamed.

"Anyway, it was a terrible turn of events."

Jingi was sad. Yukito and Momoko still do not appear in minor roles.

Maybe deep down he has always considered them dangerous people?

"I just want to dream of being pampered, relaxing, eating delicious food and drinking quality alcohol."

If he was going to continue melting into the flow of life, he would at least like to end his life with good thoughts. Jingi held his breath and tried his best to close his eyes.

He wanted to have a pleasant dream this time.

When he came to, he found himself back in the Ninoshima camp. It was probably in the afternoon.

The sun rose above his head, casting a warm light, and he could smell the faint scent of flowers.

Although the times and seasons were slightly different, the two shadows were slowly approaching each other on the road.

(Are those ladies in my dreams by default?)

They were Tanaka Oba-chan and Nomura Oba-chan from the neighborhood. Last time, they turned into a zombie and attacked, so Jingi kept his back alert so he could escape at any time.

So...

"Ah..."

"Oh, Jingi-chan?"

The two looked surprised and ran towards him. For a moment, Jingi struggled to make a decision, but from the expressions on the ladies' faces, he didn't feel there was much danger, so he stayed where he was for the moment.

When they got to Jingi's left and right...

"Were you in a place like this? Everyone was worried, you know?"

"Well, if you're going out, you have to let me know."

They started walking, dragging Jingi with them.

When she returned to his house with the two ladies, he was surprised to find his older brother, Aka Ibuki, standing there.

No, he wasn't the only one.

All the members of "Ayaka Security", including Ichijou Ibara, were there. When they recognized Jingi, everyone seemed surprised or relieved.

"W-what? What's going on?"

Originally, they were mainly active in Ichinoshima. It was rare to see so many members gathered in Ninoshima.

"What's wrong, Aka-nii? Has the entire company gathered here?"

When Jingi asked curiously...

"Uh."

Aka shook his head with a bitter smile. He tapped Jingi on the shoulder with his hand.

"There's nothing I can do about it. You're the cause."

"Eh? Me?"

Jingi gaped and pointed at himself. Ibara said with a rather harsh voice.

"Sagawa Jingi. We came together in a hurry to find you. I want you to feel responsible."

"Don't say that, Ibara."

Aka gave a quick warning to Ibara and looked at his subordinates.

"We're leaving. Apply for a special subsidy later."

"Wait a minute, Aka-nii. Are you leaving already?"

When Jingi called him...

"It looks like I'm going to meet someone I don't want to see. As long as I can confirm that you're safe, it's fine."

Without looking back, Aka walked away from him, hands behind his back. The members of "Ayaka Security" did the same with a slight nod. Ibara was the only one looking at him with an expression that seemed to want to say something, but she quickly turned her back on him and ran after her friends at a trot.

Both ladies...

"Well then, Jingi-chan, see you soon."

"Your body is important."

After saying that, they headed home. Jingi looked at them in shock.

Then, he tried to switch places with Aka and the others.

"Jingi-san!"

He heard Yukito Yanagi's voice from inside the house.

"Ah, Jingi-chan!"

Then he heard Momoko cheering and the two jumped. For a moment, the nightmares of last time and the one before returned to Jingi, and his body stiffened, but there was no sign that they had transformed into the Yukito and Momoko of before.

The two cried with joy at Jingi's return, took him by the hand and invited him into the house.

Jingi was thinking as he let himself go.

(I wonder why? Did I disappear for a long time?)

It was a great welcome. First, they forced him to take a bath, and when he came out of the bathroom, he put on freshly laundered clothes and was taken to the living room. Yukito took the initiative to uncork a bottle of beer and pour it.

"Uh, oh. That's bad."

"What are you talking about? As a disciple, it's natural!"

For Yukito who said that with a smile...

(This is a bit unpleasant.)

He thought about it for a moment, but he didn't feel bad about it. Before long, Momoko brought a variety of freshly prepared homemade dishes from the kitchen.

Braised bonito marinated in sesame oil, seaweed cream cheese, japanese-style salmon and avocado tart, gizzard ponzu sauce, lightly pickled tofu, chicken breast with chili sauce and fresh squid carrots.

It wasn't something like "caviar and simmered foie gras and fried truffles" that he had seen in his previous dream, but rather Momoko's repertoire of dishes that he especially liked.

All of them combine perfectly with sake.

While he happily ate those delicacies and drank beer...

"Hello, Jingi. I'm glad you returned safely."

Haruaki arrived with a bottle of local sake hanging in one hand.

"Hey, Jingi."

"Hello!"

"Hey, don't make me worry so much."

Also appearing is the trio of bad friends, Yashiki, Saruwatari and Mitarai. Besides them, Momoko and Yukito, who had finished cooking, also joined the banquet and everyone toasted again. Everyone praised Jingi.

"Jingi is actually quite manly."

"I'm so glad to be your friend."

"He is my proud little brother."

"The guidance he gave me was precise and I have nothing but respect for him."

Even if it was just a dream, it made Jingi happy.

Because that's exactly what Jingi wanted.

Good sake and delicious food.

Sometimes...

"Being able to drink alcohol so carelessly and non-stop is, in a sense, a talent."

"Not thinking about anything is the best way to manage stress. Jingi is ahead of the times."

There were some comments that he didn't know if they were praise or criticism, but he didn't care. Besides...

"Jingi-san, you are so cool!"

"Okay! Good drink!"

The way they praised people was becoming more and more careless, but for the moment he would close his eyes.

Just when he thought that...

Although it was a dream, he still didn't understand why everyone was so worried about him. What's more, if Jingi showed even the slightest sign of leaving his seat, everyone would turn around and ask why. In the end, he was annoyed that Yukito even followed him to the bathroom.

It's like they're watching him...

The rest was Momoko.

For a moment now, she had been shedding tears from time to time, and was constantly wiping them with her handkerchief, which made him feel really uncomfortable.

The person claimed that onion juice got into her eyes while she was cooking...

That is not true. There is definitely something behind that banquet. Even with that in mind, Jingi continued drinking in a good mood until he completely lost consciousness. In a way it was an escape.

It was easier and more fun to put an end to the doubts that had arisen in his mind.

And the behavior of that principle of not doing everything has had serious consequences and has turned against Jingi.

After waking up from his intoxication, Jingi realized that he was tied to a grid-like board. Carefully, not only his wrists and ankles, but also his neck and torso were tied tightly with rough ropes.

With his legs spread, Jingi was stretched out against the board.

"Damn! That's what I thought!"

Jingi screamed, but Yukito quickly gagged him.

"Tch. It seems that the drug was not as effective as I expected, Kurama-san."

Yukito clicked his tongue with an evil look on his face. The situation was different from when he was a zombie, but it seemed that this was also Dark Yukito.

Apparently they had given him something strange to drink.

Before he knew it, he saw not only the people who had been at the banquet earlier, but also Inou and other islanders he recognized. They all wore white robes similar to those worn by mountain priests. As they looked at Jingi, who was lying there...

"Jingi. Please don't hold a grudge against me."

Haruaki said with a serious face.

"Now you can offer yourself to the fire dragon."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Jingi-chan."

Momoko said as she wiped away her tears.

"It's to protect the island. If you sacrifice yourself, everyone will be saved."

"Alright, let's throw him into the crater and go back home."

Yukito said as if he was throwing flammable trash.

(He's the only one with a strange personality!) Jingi thought.

It's true, but his gag prevented him from complaining. Among them, the islanders, led by Haruaki...

"Okay!"

"Let's do it!"

He shouted and lifted Jingi onto the board.

"Noooooooo~! Stop it!"

The group then walked around the volcano (probably) in Shinoshima for a while.

"Jingi!"

"Bye!"

Jingi was suddenly launched into the air from what appeared to be a volcanic mouth. An overwhelming feeling of falling. And a sense of urgency approaching behind him.

(Swallowed by fire!)

The moment he thought that...

Jingi's body bounced violently from the depths of the earth and then rose into the air again.

As he rose slightly from the crater, he saw Yukito, Momoko and the others applauding loudly.

"So, there's actually a trampoline inside!"

Jingi let out a tsukkomi cry and woke up in the middle of the life line.

"What is this?"

Thinking about it a little...

"Is there a system where you can't wake up unless you scream out loud from the bottom of your heart?"

Jingi was complaining in the middle of the life line.

He had enough time to cross his arms and frown because he was already used to it.

But it was another nightmare. It seemed like he was being sacrificed to quell the fire dragon, but the people around him were too dangerous. Especially Yukito.

"That's why everyone was so excited, damn it!"

Jingi has been wearing down little by little. Even when he dreams, he feels that his existence is gradually shrinking. At this rate, it won't be long until he is completely immersed in the life line.

"Oh, no. What I want to see is... that's right. It's fine, as always. Yukito is a little cheeky, but honest. And Momoko-san is kind and a little natural. And..."

Just one thing.

If he is allowed to dream in the truest sense.

"I guess I'd like to see Haru-nii and Aka-nii getting along like before."

Jingi closed his eyes, withdrew all the strength he had left in his mind and body, and surrendered to the flow of life. And while he slept, he had a new dream.

By the fourth time, it was much easier to realize that it was a dream and understand the situation. Rural landscape as far as the eye can see. White storm clouds and dazzling sunlight. Although there are slight variations in seasonality and timing, so far they have all appeared in the same location in Ninoshima.

(Maybe it's like the starting point of the game?)

And the two ladies in front of him.

(I guess those people are default characters too.)

The mission is to run.

"Tanaka Oba-chan, Nomura Oba-chan, hello!"

He ran between the two, greeting them.

"Oh, Jingi-chan."

"Hello. You're always in a good mood."

They both smiled and waved. He had a kind of premonition. He was sure that his wish would come true this time.

He was in a good mood with the pleasant (probably) summer scenery. He kept running all the way home, breathing lightly, stopping in front of the entrance and taking a few deep breaths.

After making sure that his breathing was normal, he wiped the sweat from his forehead and entered through the front door.

The first person he met in the hallway was Yukito.

He was a little nervous because in all of his dreams so far, Yukito had a terrible personality.

"Eh? Jingi-san, where have you been?"

He seemed like a normal Yukito, the same as always. He pouted and protested.

"You promised to watch me train in the morning! You drank too much yesterday too. I'm going to tell Kurama-san and Ibuki-san that you're being too casual too!"

A naïve and sensitive boy. Even though he was hated and slapped, Jingi could see that he really respected him.

"....."

Without realizing it, Jingi extended his hand towards Yukito's head and was playing with his hair.

"W-what?"

Yukito rolled his eyes and walked away. While he held his head with both hands...

"Hey, are you still drunk?"

He looked at Jingi accusingly. However, Jingi did not respond and looked for his next target.

He went to the kitchen and found Momoko cooking. She set the bowl she had been using to taste in the sink and looked at Jingi.

"Eh? Jingi-chan, are you back? Wait for me. Lunch will be ready soon."

Momoko Amamiya.

She is like an older sister who has always lovingly watched over Jingi. Without her, not only Jingi, but also Haruaki and Aka would have lived completely different lives.

Has he adequately expressed his gratitude to her?

He now deeply regretted it.

"Momoko-san, thank you as always."

Jingi took Momoko's hand and bowed cordially to her.

And...

"I'm sorry."

He couldn't even apologize for passing away first. She must have cried a lot.

Momoko is kinder than anyone. Yukito too. He was sure that, although he complained, he cried profusely.

Suddenly, Jingi understood. The reason why Yukito and Momoko were so scary and abnormal in his dreams was because Jingi feared that from the bottom of his heart. Since they were such important members of the family, everything seemed to turn into a nightmare.

"Jingi-chan?"

Momoko frowned and tilted her head slightly.

"You're drunk?"

She came to almost the same conclusion as Yukito. She glanced at Yukito, who followed Jingi, but Yukito simply shrugged, as if to say, "I don't know what's going on."

Meanwhile, Jingi staggered towards the living room. He opened the sliding door and waited to see the scene he always wanted.

Haruaki and Aka.

Seeing his brothers get along.

"Hello, Jingi."

"What happened? Did something happen?"

Kurama Haruaki and Ibuki Aka were definitely there.

Two adults live in that house. Things like that haven't stopped since his teacher, Makoto Yanagi, passed away.

"Haru-nii, Aka-nii..."

Jingi's voice became hoarse with emotion and then he said:

"Then why are you both dressed like that?"

He asked, his face suddenly half serious.

"Eh? Are you acting really weird?"

Haruaki, who was only wearing a swimsuit and a T-shirt, looked at himself curiously. He usually wears the solemn costume of a priest, so seeing him in a simple figure with so much skin feels even more strange.

"We're going to the beach, so it's natural, right? You should hurry up and change your clothes."

Aka, who quickly put on his snorkel and underwater goggles, ordered Jingi to do that. Again, instead of the tight suit he always wears, he wears a t-shirt and navy pants.

Then the two began to talk happily about what they would do when they went to the beach.

"Alright, let's swim as hard as we can!"

Haruaki said as he turned his body around and did something similar to gymnastics.

"Let's use the harpoon to hit the fish, okay?"

Aka, who was trying to contain himself, but looked clearly more excited than usual, suggested that. Together, the two remembered their mission.

"Come on, Jingi, let's go!"

"Let's play as hard as we can!"

Sparkling eyes. The innocent smile of his childhood. However, both of them had the same faces and physiques as the adults. Jingi held back, trembling slightly.

"Jingi!"

"Look!"

His two brothers who had become adults pulled him left and right.

"They get along like before!"

Finally, he couldn't hold back any longer and snapped. The awakening trigger activated and Jingi woke up again.

Jingi finally lowered his head in despair. He realized that the energy that made up his consciousness was running out.

"Damn, I have so many incomprehensible dreams..."

He whispered that resentfully. He couldn't help but feel sleepy from before. As it was, he would break into small pieces and be swallowed by the flow of life energy.

The next time he falls asleep, he will never wake up again.

(Damn.)

The last dream was the one that touched his heart the most.

Well, leaving aside Haruaki and Aka.

(That made me realize that I had a lot of unfinished things.)

He had more things to teach Yukito.

He wanted to thank Momoko.

Why couldn't he tell Haruaki and Aka to get along?

He wanted to hang out more with his bad friends. Enjoy a glass of sake while he enjoys the peaceful scenery of Ninoshima. Being able to go fishing or play pachinko.

He wanted to apologize for causing trouble for Inou.

He wanted to see everyone's faces.

He wanted to see them smile.

(Damn.)

Tears fell. He bit his lip and let the tears fall. Suddenly, the words of his teacher Makoto Yanagi came to his mind. He commented on the qualities of his disciples as connections:

"Haruaki is, well, a genius. I guess it's a matter of lineage, but there's something he's born with. He'll be able to fly to the heights as easily as a gust of wind."

He continued.

"Aka is a theoretical person. One by one, he practices what he can't do and shapes it. Since he can see his surroundings clearly, I am sure there will be many people who will admire him in the future. He will surely become a pillar thick and strong that will never break."

Makoto laughed as Jingi asked, "What about me? What about me?"

"Maybe you don't have much talent. Even at this age, you're still lazy and, surprisingly, cowardly and careless."

That's what he said. Makoto pouted at Jingi.

"That's why you look more like me."

He ruffled Jingi's hair and stroked it with his large hand.

"Jingi. Even if the road is ugly, get up. Being in good shape is not the style of people like us."

In the middle of the life line, Jingi silently opened his eyes again.

"I understand... Master."

Even if he is in the mud...

Maybe it's a murky stream of life. Even if it's ugly...

(I'll hold on to life until the end!)

Jingi began scratching his hands and feet frantically. Imagining levitation, he did his best to hold on to his fading existence and began to swim frantically, aiming only for the top. Every time he felt like he was about to break, he thought about Yukito, Haruaki, Aka, Momoko and his master. The only thing he thought about was his family and his friends.

(Once again, just one more time.)

Then, with all his strength, he finally surfaced from the life line and took a deep breath.

However, the current is too fast and buoyancy is almost ineffective.

"Gaaak! Whoops!"

If he does not move his limbs with all his might, the flow of life force will engulf him in no time.

"Shit! Damn!"

At that moment, Jingi felt as if he heard the interesting voice of his master in his ear.

(Here, Jingi. It's time to take a breath. Good luck. I've prepared some help.)

Jingi regained his strength and crawled. Somehow he had a hunch. He was sure that a helping hand would be waiting for him when he swam there.

And what he saw was...

"Master! Is this?! This is it!"

It was a giant pipe protruding from the inside of the life line. It looked familiar. Although it is larger than the standard, it is definitely a masterpiece that master Makoto Yanagi loved. He felt so homesick that he felt like crying.

Jingi held on to the Kiseru and used his remaining strength to skillfully climb up the body.

Note: Kiseru is the Japanese term for the ancient Japanese pipe. Kiseru were used to smoke a wide variety of substances, including tobacco, cannabis and opium.

Then, he came to a place where he could maintain his posture and shouted as loud as he could.

"Yukitooooooooooooooooo!"

He called to the being in which he had to believe the most.

"Help me!"

Beyond life.

He felt that he could see the face of a child who was destined to become a water dragon through a very faint slit that connected to that world.

Without hesitation, Sagawa Jingi decided to simply live.