



「はじまり」にまつわる七つの物語

SEVEN STORIES ABOUT "THE BEGINNING"

CHAPTER 2: BEFORE ARRIVAL (TAKAHASHI YASHICHIROU)

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K-PROJECT WORLD

Behind the Kagihoi Trade Association market, a forced evacuation site established before the war to prevent the spread of fires during aerial bombing raids, now sprawls like a vacant lot.

Right now, the cheers of children playing baseball fill the air. Although it's a makeshift baseball field with lines etched into the ground and a blackboard above it, once the game starts, it becomes its own stadium. The sport, or perhaps the competition, excites them.

On one side are the children who live near the market:

"Let's go!"

"One more strike!"

"Do your best, big brother!"

And the coach (who does nothing but boo), the "Red King," Unno Yutaka.

"Hey! You know what awaits you if a new face like that hits you!"

The other group consists of about half of the Biribiri group, who are temporarily under the custody of the Kagihoi group.

"Go for it!"

"Don't miss!"

"Home run! Home run!"

And the coach (who taught them the rules and much more), Tamataro Okuma.

"Aim well! Keep your arms together and hit accurately!"

Everyone wore only their uniforms, sneakers, and caps. All they had was a hard ball that Unno had brought from somewhere, but some gloves were worn and others were missing, and their bats were just pieces of sticks painted red.

There was no pleasant sound when the ball was hit.

They stumbled when it was hit and faltered as they ran.

They caught it, juggled it, and threw it wildly.

It was all difficult, but everyone tried their best and had a lot of fun.

The two most excited:

"You bastards! Where are you throwing it?"

"Good hit, keep it up!"

While the coaches shouted at both ends of the clearing, the children enjoyed the joy of hitting the ball and the frustration of being hit. It was a completely peaceful and normal scene.

Todokoro Suwako watched them from a distance. She wasn't very fond of sports, but she let out an apathetic yawn.

"Waah..."

"Are you bored, Todokoro-san?"

Suddenly, the "Gray King" Otono Benji appeared next to her. He was carrying an accordion and some luggage, so his feet felt a little heavy.

Immediately after the recent incident, he had planned to disappear with his Kirinoichi group, but the "Golden King" Kokujoji Daikaku, noticing, said to him, "Once the situation has calmed down, we Kings want to make an arrangement for future generations. Could you wait to leave until then?"

He remained there, and for a little less than a month, he was on the fringes of society. Since it was a familiar face, Suwako could complain sincerely.

"Yes, I guess I yawned a lot. After all, the Kagiroyi group only deals with boys. All the girls went with Iku-chan to Chika-san's house."

Otono rolled his neck slightly to avoid the pain.

"You went out to play last week, right? You can go as often as you like."

"Yes, but the stronghold of the men in blue... it was uncomfortable."

"Hahaha. Well, I guess that makes sense."

The men in blue suits, commonly known as the "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau", also house about half of the "Biribiri Group" in their headquarters, the majestic guesthouse.

For Suwako, a yakuza, entering such a public place (a place she calls "respectable") is intimidating, but the surroundings are filled with men in blue suits. As much as she likes Chika, it's hard to say it's a place where she can relax.

Taking pity on her, Otono stroked the luggage he was carrying and offered to help.

"Well, I've been asked to look after this guy tomorrow, so I'll ask Chika-san to bring Iku-chan and the others over to play."

"Really, bro?"

The effect was immediate, and Suwako's eyes sparkled through her dark glasses.

(This guy is a big responsibility.)

Otono thought as he secretly laughed bitterly.

One of the children spotted him (a thin, tall man covered in bandages) and stood out.

"Oh, it's the bandage man!"

He yelled loudly, forgetting about the ball.

The joy of the moment quickly spread.

The children ran toward him, saying in unison,

"Uncle!"

"It's a picture book!"

"Give me candy!"

"What's up today?"

Otono slowly put down his bag and handed it back generously.

"Wait a minute. Todokoro-san, can I have some candy?"

"Sure. Look, the candy won't escape, even if you don't push it!"

After receiving a container, Suwako began distributing the sweets to the children. They aren't solid, round candies, but "taguri", made with starch syrup on a stick.

Normally, these sweets are sold by attracting customers with Kamishibai (paper theater), but Otono's is just for entertainment, so there's no charge.

Seeing young children in the crowd, whether they are neighbors or the Biribiri Group, competing for the sweets, complaining about how much or how little there is, giving them to someone or accidentally dropping them, and harassing Otono, who is setting up the Kamishibai stand, is truly noisy.

Surrounded by such enthusiasm, Otono spoke in a relaxed voice.

"These kids are pretty good, right?"

Suwako first looked at the many smiling faces...

"....."

Then, she looked at the two of them, who, lured by sweets and a movie, had abandoned the heated match, and chuckled at the two "brats" who weren't so different from each other.

"Well, I don't dislike them."

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Immediately after the incident, the treatment of the "Green King", Tsunogui Iku, and her retainers, the Biribiri Group, was a matter of debate. Kokujoji Daikaku didn't take their achievements or positions lightly, so the decision to institutionalize them and provide them with proper care had already been made.

However, their abilities and aptitude for society... in other words, the question of whether they could lead normal lives without causing trouble to others made Kokujoji hesitant to take the easy way out and force them all into an institution. It would be enough for someone with the same skills to supervise or educate them, but he and his ministers are currently busy with the project to secretly take over Japan, and no one has time to waste.

To the troubled "Golden King", the "Blue King", Somei Nazumi, made a proposal:

"I have a brilliant idea that will easily put an end to your troubles."

In other words, half of them will be in charge of the "Red King" and the Kagiroyhi Group, and the other half, the "Blue King" and the "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau".

Unno immediately agreed, simply because he had fought alongside Iku.

"Okay. I'll feed you until you're full, right?"

Chika also seemed enthusiastic as she agreed.

"I understand. This isn't the first time I've molded a child like this into a "human form."

"I suppose it's because of the days you spent with me, right?"

Ignoring Nazumi's pretentious question, Chika took Iku in, and Miya, the other girls, and the quiet boys were taken in by the "Fourth Legal Affairs Office".

In contrast, boys her own age, or even more energetic and mischievous, were taken in by the "Kagiroyhi Group".

They were to spend a few months there, or even less, depending on their behavior, to test their ability to adapt to everyday life. However, the children involved ignored Kokujoji's serious intentions and spent their time as they pleased in their respective homes.

As a result, no one caused trouble in vain.

Because everyone was hungry. Because they didn't know what to do other than steal.

That was the only reason the Biribiri Group caused trouble.

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The blue-robed men, also known as the "Fourth Legal Affairs Office", live on the same grounds (or rather, on a corner) as the main guesthouse, whose use has not yet been authorized. There are two main buildings: the "Seieisha", which also functions as a dormitory and workplace for the office staff, and the dojo where the staff practices martial arts.

About half of the Biribiri Group, including Tsunogui Iku, sleep and wake up in the dojo. Chika, who was in charge of supervising them, surprisingly only imposed two "rules".

One was to get up punctually and go to bed at the correct time.

Another was to dress appropriately.

That was all.

Both boys and girls are given uniforms, and the staff teaches them how to use them (they also wear work clothes or uniforms for everyday use). Iku, Miya, and the other children obeyed the rules, with one condition: they could eat until they were full.

After a few days of living like this, the girls were bored, so Chika taught them how to lay out their futons and bathe. Then, at the newly opened dojo, the officers' training continued as usual. The children soon began imitating out of curiosity, and Chika had them practice a simple kata, claiming it would make their food tastier.

Soon, the children began accompanying the staff in their daily work and even helping out on occasion. Without realizing it, they had begun to learn various things to pass the time between meals. Chika had only scolded them three times during that time, about entering the main building, handling fire, and fighting with proper strength.

Iku and the Biribiri Group spent their days worry-free.

"You won't improve if you just swing it any way you want!"

Following his previous habit of caring for children, training outdoors on sunny days, he roared at the blue sky.

"Swordsmanship is based on logic, use your head!"

Although he is violent, he seems to be well-liked by the children, and several people gather around him to imitate the movement of the wooden sword. However, even a movement as simple as swinging it downward is quite difficult for a child.

Iyoda, watching them fight, gave them a few words of advice.

"If your right elbow points outward, it will lose strength. Try pointing it slightly downward."

Although his instructions were not very dignified, they were precise.

The children knew how effective they were, so they followed them obediently.

At that moment, Hakizawa, Nizuka, and Hentani arrived with several children.

"Iyoda-kun, Hoizumi-kun, how about taking a break?"

"It's sunny today, but if you play too much outside, you'll catch a cold."

"We're done working, so it's time for a snack!"

The children were carrying bamboo brooms and winnowing baskets. They (including the office staff) are not allowed to touch the inside of the main building, so they were cleaning the surroundings as much as possible.

Iyoda nods as he watches the sun rise.

"That's right. Then let's take a bath and then go to the dojo to get something to eat."

"I'm on duty at the baths today. Anyone who wants to help, come!"

Hoizumi ran out, leading several others who responded with an energetic "Yes!".

"How nice. If the bathroom were bigger, we could all use it together."

"There are girls too, that's not very sensible, Hakizawa-san!"

"Well, if you want to say it, perhaps it's being polite?"

Away from all that noise, a quiet study session was taking place in the dojo.

Since Chika didn't make any demands on learning attitude (apparently, there was a precedent: a "naughty boy who was also a child prodigy" with bad behavior), the children could touch the letters and images however they liked, whether lying down, leaning against the wall, leaning forward, or buried in mountains.

Except for those that are clearly contrary to public order and morality, ancient classics, picture books, graphics, magazines, and even manga are crowded onto large shelves and used as teaching aids.

"Toneyama, how do you read this?"

"It's called omokage. It's like an image that comes to mind."

The people in charge of instruction here are Toneyama and Rokugo.

"I wrote it and I did it."

"Yes, you have a lot of energy. Let's try writing a series of characters in a straight line now."

There was a very pleasant atmosphere in the study group, full of quiet children.

Among them, the one who seemed particularly enthusiastic was Tsunogui Iku, the "Green King". She had only been learning for a few weeks, but she was already getting used to sitting upright.

The books stacked on the large desk were the "Great Learning", "The Doctrine of the Mean", "The Analects", "Mencius", as well as the "Book of Changes", the "Book of Songs", the "Book of Documents", the "Book of Rites", and the "Spring and Autumn Annals"... the Chinese classics known as the Four Books and the Five Classics.

Other dictionaries and Japanese annotated books were scattered across the desk.

"Divine mandate is called nature, natural inclination is called the path, cultivating the path is called teaching... is this what the King is talking about?"

Looking at the document, Iku asked the teacher in front of her.

The teacher, Somei Nazumi, searched for words that would convince the young woman.

"The mandate of heaven and following one's nature are similar. But what about cultivating the path? I don't think we've let go of our power to that extent to apply it to ourselves."

"..."Contain" could be the opposite."

"Hmm, what an interesting way of looking at things."

The two Kings began their hundreds of debates.

Iku's educational policy, presented by Chika, is extremely rational.

"First, you need to know the principles and standards of how humans move. You can see who you are by finding similarities and differences within yourself. The more you know and find, the clearer the picture will be. If you can recognize yourself and others, you will naturally see how to behave."

The Four Books and the Five Classics are examples of values deeply rooted in people, and the conversation with Nazumi is a hypothesis and a verification. For Iku, both were important tasks to explore her vague self-image.

But there are also more important things. Her friendship with Miya, who burst into the dojo like a whirlwind, was one of them.

"Iku-chan! Chika-san will make you matching clothes!"

"Really?"

Iku stood up, happier that they matched than that they were wearing Western clothing.

Chika, dressed in a kosode kimono and haori, appeared behind Miya and handed her a furoshiki-wrapped bag containing her prize.

"I've ordered fabric. Choose your favorite colors."

"Yes!"

Iku screamed and ran like lightning, pushing them.

Several girls chased after her, saying, "Great! I want one too."

Silence returned to the dojo.

"....."

With the heated discussion abruptly cut short and Nazumi left at his desk, he had no choice but to pull his own documents from his pocket.

Of course, the reason the Somei couple and all the other members of the agency are gathered at the guesthouse isn't because they're on vacation. They're undergoing a trial period to change their organizational structure, shifting from a style of constant street patrols and surveillance to an emergency response style that responds to general police reports.

"....."

The conflict with the Nanakamado Intelligence Agency was over, and the largest incident in terms of supernatural crime (or, rather, disaster) had just occurred, so the proliferation of stray animals had remained calm for almost a month. While this was limited to supernatural abilities, the security situation had remained calm.

After analyzing all of this, he proposed to Kokujoji to take charge of the Biribiri Group.

However, there were also unexpected developments.

The drastic reduction in the time he spent with Chika was the most significant of all.

"...Cough."

Losing focus, Nazumi stuffed the documents into his pocket.

He decided to correct his oversight, even if it was a bit annoying, as it should have been a foreseeable situation. Determined in his mind, but anxious from Toneyama and Rokugo's perspective, the "Blue King" Somei Nazumi followed his wife.

There's no need to go into details about the disastrous results.

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The "Tokijikuin Temple", with the move to Nanakamado.

The "Golden King's" ministers, already busy conquering Japan, are taking full advantage of their superhuman strength and speed. Heavy machinery lined up in a dangerous row in the garden to dismantle the underground facility that sealed the "Slate".

After slipping through the gap, young Nangu fell to his knees in the hallway outside Kokujoji Daikaku's office. He is not yet an official servant of the "Golden King"; he only serves as an attendant like any ordinary person, but no one in "Tokijikuin" underestimates his skill.

He murmured softly, his voice only reaching the room through the shoji screen.

"Daikaku-sama, a telegram has arrived."

"Come in."

As expected, he quietly opened and closed the sliding screens before entering the room and respectfully handing over the telegram. Kokujoji Daikaku stood up from the documents he was approving and looked at the text he had received. He read it carefully for a few minutes before emitting a deep grunt.

"I see."

"Is there a problem?"

There was an unusual hesitation in the response to the question.

(Is it really that important?)

As Nangu prepared himself, another strange and confused voice returned.

"All right. Return to your original work."

"Eh..."

One should be considerate of one's master's feelings, but one should never guess.

Following the rules of an attendant, the boy bowed and left the room.

Kokujoji thought for a moment, then stopped in front of a map taped to a corner.

It was a world map with the Pacific Ocean in the center.

(Hmm, I thought so.)

On his face, the expression he had almost shown to young Nangu... a complex expression formed that was both a smile and a tragedy.

The content of the telegram was a report on the course and speed of a certain flying object.

It had been circling the Atlantic Ocean for the past few days, but had changed course and was heading west.

What would happen if the course and speed didn't change?

After how many days, which country on the west coast of the Pacific Ocean would it reach?

It was easy to guess.

(It's hopeless.)

In an instant, Kokujoji wanted to draw a line that reached Japan, but he quickly regained his composure.

Trying to remain calm and free from unnecessary emotions, he mentally formulated his plan of action.

Ignore the United States' actions and don't intervene.

The Japanese government will treat this as an unexpected and unforeseen situation.

Leave the response to the US military stationed there, and "Tokijikuin" will not move until it enters airspace.

After discovering this, he explained to the outside world that "it is impossible to interfere with that ship".

(That's all.)

After thinking about it, he suddenly thought:

(That's right, maybe we should meet at this time and date... if all goes well.)

He dreams that he's in a good mood, but quickly dismisses it.

(He won't come down... but maybe I can prove it to him.)

Kokujoji just observed reality.

He chose the reality that was closest to his ideal out of all the options.

(I'll be prepared for an emergency message.)

Well, this time it really is official business, he told himself, and marked the date on his calendar.

January 20th.