



「はじまり」にまつわる七つの物語

## **SEVEN STORIES ABOUT "THE BEGINNING"**

### **CHAPTER 6: END OF THE BEGINNING, THE BEGINNING OF THE END (AZANO KOUHEI)**

#### **TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K-PROJECT WORLD**

"It seems the pit is getting fuller and fuller. Is this really what they call fate?"

Otori Seigo forced a smile as he watched the victims fill the facility's former gymnasium.

Otori stood on the second floor of the gymnasium, in a hallway that ran along the wall of the arena. He could see the arena on the first floor and, of course, the victims gathered there.

Many of the victims were soaked, some with water dripping from their hair and clothes. The super typhoon that made landfall on the Kii Peninsula early yesterday morning expanded its strength as it moved up the Pacific coast and made another landfall on the Izu Peninsula. This afternoon it made a direct hit in the Kanto region. The government's response was delayed, and damage is spreading to several locations.

However, not a single drop of rain fell on the glass panes installed in the hallway behind Otori. There was no sign of wind, and it was so calm that it was hard to believe he was in the path of a major typhoon.

However, from the window, he couldn't see what was happening outside. It wasn't the wind or the rain that was blowing, but a layer of fog that obscured everything.

"There you are! I've been looking for you."

A man appeared at the end of the hallway where Otori was standing. He was a large, muscular man, someone who'd think he was a professional wrestler. However, he was wearing a cassock. He'd always thought it didn't suit him, but now it wasn't anyone else's problem. After all, he was wearing the same clothes now.

The man, using his cane to propel himself, crossed the hallway, dragging one leg slightly, and approached Otori. Otori frowned when he saw that his shoulders were wet from the rain.

"You came out of the fog like that? Don't be reckless."

"I wanted to check it out. And there it was again, that great sword."

"Yes. I know. I can't see it, but I can feel it."

With that, Otori looked up at the ceiling of the gymnasium. To be precise, far away, beyond.

There, floating, motionless in the raging storm, was a single sword. A gigantic, gray sword that seemed unreal.

"...Sword of Damocles, hey... I'm sure you'll still be hooked on that old man's nonsense."

"Stop making fun of me. Kokujoji Daikaku is a middleman who controls the post-war political and financial world. I still cringe when I think about that time we were summoned."

"If that's the case, then I'm now a "king" like that old man, right?"

"Well, it's unreasonable to have something that big floating over your head, so you have no choice but to believe Kokujoji's explanation."

"Does that make your blood run cold?"

Otori joked, and the man snorted arrogantly.

"There are large nations that control a certain percentage of the world, and there are small nations that could be destroyed in the blink of an eye."

"No doubt."

"For starters, they're much scarier when you see them face to face. Look in the mirror, mirror."

"You're right."

After all, Otori was only a local government official until last month. He worked in the city hall's social welfare department, working for the underprivileged. The man in front of him was the priest of the church where Otori used to help out in the soup kitchens.

But then he overstepped his official duties and began serving the people, got involved in the expropriation of church lands, and then fought gangsters. Without realizing it, he had become a "king". It seemed like a joke.

Of course, he understood that what had happened to him was no joke. He was forced to understand when he was called to the Slate. The same was true of the fog blocking the typhoon outside. That fog was the result of Otori's efforts and an expression of his power as "King". Like the sword above his head, it was a truly supernatural power.

"A thick, impenetrable fog that gently envelops and protects the weak and poor. Is that something from a manga?", Otori said with a wry smile, ruffling his hair.

He looked down at the evacuees.

This country has recovered and developed from the depths of despair, nearly destroyed by war, at a pace that has astonished the world.

The most important person in this is the aforementioned Kokujoji Daikaku. He calls himself the "Golden King". This typhoon has already caused quite a bit of damage, but most of it will be recovered in a few days. This is the national strength this country now possesses.

However, due to the rapidity of this growth, it has left the weak behind, unable to adapt. While many citizens prosper and become wealthy, others fall into poverty and become weaker. Those who forge ahead do not look down on them.

One example is the people who have taken refuge in poverty. That's why they have fled to unofficial shelters like this one, with nowhere else to go.

These are people who originally belonged to a weaker social class. They must have lost their homes and jobs in that disaster. Not knowing what tomorrow will bring, they huddle together to survive in the present.

And yet...

"...I'm glad I found this place."

"...I guess so."

The refugees who had fled to the Shrine of the Mists sighed with a slight sense of relief. Although they were still unaware of his status as "King", they were grateful for his protection.

Otori was genuinely pleased to see this before his eyes.

"What are you going to do?"

"What?"

"You know, right?"

Hearing what the priest said, Otori sighed bitterly.

The words he had spoken earlier echoed in his mind.

My own destiny.

It was too biased and forced. What's more, the burden he carried was too heavy. It was a pressure he didn't understand and, frankly, didn't like.

But he had to admit... he didn't feel bad about being able to help people.

"If I'm the king now... I have no choice. I'm not that kind, but I'll try to create one. My own country. Is it a clan? I suppose it would be a gray clan."

As he spoke with resignation, Otori looked at the people below him kindly. The priest silently observed Otori's gaze from the side.

"I don't think I can abandon those people. I will establish the Otori Kingdom. Even if it blows away, I will try my best."

In fact, he was more than half overwhelmed by the situation. His lack of initiative is his weakness.

And, no matter what, his strength is that he takes things seriously when he starts something. When he said he would do his best, that was what he truly felt.

"I see.", said the priest, savoring his words.

"But, well, there probably isn't an Otori Kingdom. What should we do? What about the "Phoenix Kingdom"?"

"That name makes me doubt your sanity."

"Really? It's just a random idea, but it's not that bad..."

"Rejected. A request from the first citizen."

At first, not understanding the priest's response, Otori turned around with a dumb "Huh?" expression.

The priest said calmly,

"You're called a clan member? Hurry up."

After saying that, he continued, looking at Otori, who couldn't answer, stunned.

"Did you really think you could build a country without me? By yourself? How high are you? Have you forgotten Kokujoji's warning? Or is that stupid sword floating in the sky? If the King makes a mistake, it will fall and bring ruin. I can't leave a reckless fellow like you alone. I value my life too."

The priest suddenly became talkative. Besides, he seemed to be serious, which was quite irritating.

It was irritating, but...

But still...

Otori cleared his throat to hide his sentimentality and remained silent for a moment, considering what to say.

"So... I'm the Prime Minister."

"I suppose I'll be paid a salary."

"It will be paid as I progress."

"I was stupid to ask that."

After snorting, the priest puffed out his chest and laughed, showing his teeth. Otori laughed too. As he laughed, he realized, much more clearly than the mysterious sword hovering above his head, that he would probably remember this moment many times in his life.

It all starts here, right now...

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"Begin."

"Hmm... well, I suppose. With this, we've managed to ensure a minimum standard of healthy and cultured living... right?"

Iwafune Tenkei stroked his beard suspiciously, while Hisui Nagare, sitting on a pile of folded cardboard, nodded exaggeratedly.

"I have no complaints. Especially not about this shack. I see, this underground passage was perfect as a "secret base", but it was unnecessarily large as a living base. By deliberately dividing it into the smallest possible space, it increases its functionality as a living space. Impressive. It was a blind spot. Congratulations!"

"My, my, it's hard to bring in the building materials."

A vast underground space that was once a key point for flood control. The walls, floors, and ceilings are made of inorganic concrete, and thick pillars line the ground, creating a world isolated from the surface. In the middle of it all stands a ramshackle-looking shack.

This is the sanctuary for the two of them, who will attempt to return.

"It's fine.", Nagare continued.

There was no falsehood in his words.

"It's too good for me, who have already lost everything."

"Because you bit Kokujoji. That old man would have died if we had left him alone."

"That's in doubt. We can consider whether the "Golden King" will die of old age or of natural causes if we leave him alone."

"...I don't want to think about that."

Iwafune shrugged, twisting his lips and laughing.

The direct reason they both fled so deep underground was because Nagare challenged Kokujoji and was defeated. Nagare is still alive because he didn't hold back, admitted defeat, and did his best to escape; or perhaps Kokujoji didn't want to bear the burden of killing a king.

In any case, Nagare is still alive, and Iwafune supports him. The "Green King" and the "Gray King", chosen by the Slate, will now enter a period of darkness.

"...Jungle" has taken root underground and will sprout to the surface in the near future. This is where we will change the world."

Without hesitation or fear, Nagare expressed his determination. Iwafune also nodded sincerely to Nagare's words.

Iwafune and Nagare have been together for almost five years. The time they spent together has revitalized Iwafune's heart, which was supposed to be dead. It was a noisy but peaceful time that should not have been granted to a great sinner like him.

But that will change from now on. For Nagare, the time they spend together and their way of being have changed, and will continue to do so.

Perhaps the true beginning of their relationship is right now, in this place.

"The beginning always has to happen someday..."

Iwafune unconsciously fought the words that suddenly and unconsciously escaped him.

It all starts here. For Iwafune, this was the second time he felt his heart swell with excitement and anticipation for the future that still awaited him. And although the memories of the first time are still vivid, looking back, what wells up inside him isn't nostalgia for his youth, but a sharp pain and bitterness, a deep sense of loss that remains frozen and unmanageable.

Noticing Iwafune's reaction, Nagare tilted his head and asked, "Iwa-san?"

Iwafune shook his head and replied,

"Oh, I'm sorry. It's nothing."

He took a deep breath and exhaled deeply.

He closed his eyes, waited a few seconds, and looked not at the past, but at the present.

An unconscious "prayer" for next time was reflected in the old man Iwafune's eyes.

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"Is it really that bad?"

"Yes."

Otori stifled a groan at the "Colorless King" Miwa's simple response.

Otori stood before the "Colorless King" in the chapel of the church that was the center of the Gray clan, "Cathedral". He had asked his companions to leave the room. It was too sensitive a subject to discuss openly.



What Miwa told him was a prophecy of impending doom. The possibility of an inevitable outcome.

It was the "Red King", Kagutsu Genji.

"It's just a possibility, right?"

"Of course it's true. But that doesn't mean we should take it lightly."

"Are you saying Habari is out of control?"

"No. He's done his job well, but... as a result, you could say there's a synergy developing between "Scepter 4" and "Purgatory". Things are accelerating."

"It's a bad joke."

"I hope it's just a joke."

Miwa responded calmly, with a lucid demeanor, and a certain resignation. Otori glared at him, then closed his eyes and massaged his eyelids with his fingertips.

If this man said that, it must be true. The current "Red King" is dangerous.

His power is immense, and it cannot be controlled, let alone predicted. After all, it's difficult even to communicate with him properly. Miwa's ability to predict the future is his power as "King", but he can't fully understand Kagutsu's actions.

He is a mass of power whose thoughts, desires, and actions are unknown. Furthermore, that power governs "destruction". That is the current "Red King", Kagutsu Genji.

"What about what you said before, that the "Green King" is working in the shadows?"

"The "Tokijikuin" are putting all their effort into it, but unfortunately, they haven't been able to locate him. The "King" is also unpredictable. It will be difficult to contact him unless he wants to."

"Your prophecy is also useless."

"Exactly."

Miwa immediately agreed with the somewhat sarcastic comment. However, for a moment, as he replied, he seemed to sense a sense of weariness.

Of the Seven Kings, Miwa is the one who is trying the hardest to avoid ruin.

"Sorry."

"No."

Miwa smiled slightly at Otori's brief apology.



There is a year's difference between Otori and Miwa. Although Miwa is older, Otori has lived as a "King" the longest.

As the "eldest", it is Otori who should fulfill the responsibilities of a "King".

But Otori was so busy protecting his own clan (the largest of the Seven Kings in terms of size alone) that he couldn't afford anything else. He did it for those he was determined to protect, but he couldn't deny that he was avoiding trouble.

However, if it was the duty of a "King", there was someone who must fulfill it more than anyone else.

"Even if you're in such a desperate situation, is Kokujoji still the same? Even if it's Kagutsu, if the "Golden King" is dealing with him directly, he can at least admonish him."

"Actually, it's difficult. The "Golden King" is the key. If he moves, various balances will be upset.", Miwa answered carefully and continued, "However..."

"The fact that the "Golden King" is keeping watch is a warning to the other Kings. I've said some rather dark things, but it should be possible to prevent destruction. I'm not as good as him, but I have no intention of losing."

Otori relaxed slightly when Miwa declared so decisively.

"You're trustworthy."

"I'm an unreliable prophet."

"But I'm sorry."

The two exchanged small smiles at Miwa's lighthearted comment.

For example, Otori could never have the feeling of a mission as grand as protecting the world. He thought he'd gained quite a bit of experience as a "King", but the feeling that it "wasn't his style" hasn't gone away.

On the other hand, his determination to do everything possible remains unchanged. Whatever the crisis, if it damages Otori's beloved "Cathedral", he will face it at the risk of his life.

As if understanding Otori's resolve,

"We have Kokujoji Daikaku, Habari Jin, and Otori Seigo. And I'm here. I don't know the position of the "Green King", but I'm sure we have enough combat power to prevent destruction."

He knew Miwa's words were somewhat comforting. Still, Otori nodded without hesitation, saying, "Yes."

"Well, I don't want you to rely too heavily on me, so basically, the three of you have to figure this out."

"We'll do what we can."

"Oh, wait. That silence and smile just now really scared me."

"Don't worry."

Miwa replied coldly, and Otori frowned, wondering if he had gotten too carried away.

However, suddenly...

"Come to think of it, that King from the beginning won't appear this time either? He has some connection to Kokujoji, right? If he's on our side, I think it would put us at ease a bit."

Although it was a blatant change of subject, Miwa didn't mind and replied, "That's right."

"I think he, the "Silver King", won't get involved in any conflict on Earth."

"Even if the world is destroyed?"

"Probably."

"He's a really strange guy. Perhaps he's already dead?"

"Probably not. The "Silver King's" power is "unchanging". He's an eternal being."

With that, Miwa looked up at the church's stained-glass window.

To be precise, he was looking beyond the window, up at the sky.

The "Silver King" has been in the sky for over half a century, under the rule of an airship that never lands. He has silently watched over all the Kings born since then.

The First King.

The King of the Beginning.

If he were to descend to Earth, could they prevent the impending destruction?

And when he wields his power, will he begin something new?

"The beginning of the end... that would be terrible."

Miwa grimaced at Otori's sinister words. Otori laughed and apologized a second time.

Then he looked at the other side of the stained-glass window.

"But... I wonder what kind of person the "Silver King" is."

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"The "Silver King" is in the Land of the Dead."

Iwafune reacted sharply to Nagare's words through Kotosaka.

Nagare gave a few more instructions to his clanmate, Mishakuji Yukari, who was leaving Mihashira Tower, and then disconnected from Kotosaka.

He took a deep breath and slowly leaned back, making the back of his chair creak.

Then he turned around in his chair and faced Iwafune.

"Listen, Iwa-san. It's a great achievement. We've found the current location of the "Silver King"."

"You say it was a great achievement... The occupation of Mihashira Tower failed, right?"

"I never intended to continue the occupation. It's rational to abandon it once everything necessary has been done. It's true that we failed to capture Kushina Anna, but now that we know the location of the "Silver King", there's no need to obsess over her."

His tone was as calm as ever, but it was clear he was quite excited. Iwafune, who was cleaning the secret base, stopped the noisy vacuum cleaner and shrugged exaggeratedly.

"You're still as obsessed as ever."

"I agree. As Yukari just said, as I always say, I'm a fan of the "Silver King"."

"But that doesn't mean you have to drag this retired old man along, does it?"

"I've explained this to you many times. I want him to listen to my plan. I'd also like to build a cooperative relationship with him."

"If you get too carried away, he could become your enemy."

"I've already explained this to you, but I designed my plan with that possibility in mind. I know it's not necessarily a necessary factor, but this is, so to speak, my selfishness."

Iwafune sighed as Nagare stated this in a cheerful tone. His appearance has evolved and his expressionlessness has intensified, but his personality hasn't changed since they first met, and he still retains that childish side.

"The selfishness of a king is useless."

"I deny it. Selfishness is the very essence of a king."

"Apologize to the kings of the world."

"I don't know about the royal families of the world, but the King of the Slate is like that."

"When you say that, everyone... it's a bit annoying to deny it."

A few faces came to mind, and Iwafune gave a bitter smile.

In fact, he's often puzzled over the Slate's choice. Of course, what bothers him the most is Iwafune's choice. After all, he's a failed king. Why did the Slate choose him then? And what does it think about him being here right now?

"Well, if it was a success, we should celebrate. We also have to give Sukuna some fun, since he couldn't participate. Let's start preparing."

Iwafune put away the vacuum cleaner.

Iwafune opened the refrigerator to check the contents, and Nagare stared at him.

"Everything will be fine, Iwa-san. The "Silver King" is the "King of the Beginning". He will certainly bless us, as we are about to begin a new world."

"I hope so."

From the bottom of his heart, Iwafune responded without turning around.

This time, he would keep silent, deep in his heart, the sinister words he had spoken back then.