



「はじまり」にまつわる七つの物語

SEVEN STORIES ABOUT "THE BEGINNING"

CHAPTER 7:

TO YOU, WHO SHALL WELCOME SPRING (MIYAZAWA TATSUKI)

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K-PROJECT WORLD

Although it was a weekday morning, the large hospital, which has several departments, including internal medicine, pediatrics, dermatology, and surgery, was so crowded that the chairs in front of the reception desk were occupied.

Online reviews weren't very good. Some commented that the doctor's explanations weren't very clear, that the nurses weren't very efficient, and that the receptionist got angry when they asked how to use the payment machine. However, it was the largest hospital in the area and the medical standards were high, so many people came.

Especially with the arrival of spring, those who had endured well throughout the winter suddenly began to feel ill, as the ground turned muddy and the hospital became more crowded than usual.

The receptionists, already known for their unfriendly nature, lost what little hospitality they had as the paperwork mounted. The voices calling out patients whose turn it was became noticeably harsher.

The wait drags on, and the expressions of those sitting in the chairs remain somber. Some have their eyes closed, their brows furrowed, and they are constantly moving. Three elderly men look at their watches and ask, "Is it late yet?"

An air of irritation spreads through the waiting room like a gray mist.

The baby, sensing danger, began to cry. The mother, holding the baby in a baby carrier, tried her best to calm him down, but the baby wouldn't stop crying.

No one complains directly, but the irritation grows. Finally, a fight breaks out between a middle-aged man in a suit and a young man in a sweatshirt.

"Hey! Stop it! If you're going to cough, go somewhere else! This is not the place to see a doctor for infectious diseases!"

The middle-aged man complained to the young man. Although the latter was wearing a mask, he had been coughing for a while. There has been an infectious disease outbreak recently, so everyone is sensitive to various things. However, the young man had his own argument.

"What? I only have a larynx allergy! But you're the one who's been playing with the computer this whole time, is that okay with you?"

As the young man had pointed out, the middle-aged man continued to work with a dangerous attitude, the computer in his lap. He was undoubtedly typing loudly, and wouldn't be very well received in the hospital.

"What?"

"Don't come criticizing me!"

The two grabbed each other's necks and stared. The atmosphere began to get noisy.

At that moment,

"Stop it! How embarrassing!"

A loud, scolding voice was heard. The voice belonged to a young man with long hair and black clothes. He had been standing alone against the wall for some time, arms crossed and eyes closed, motionless as a statue. Because of this, many hadn't noticed his presence.

The tall young man nimbly approached and stood between the middle-aged man and the young man.

"Shame on you! This is a hospital!"

He grabbed the two men by the shoulders and pulled them apart. The middle-aged man and the young man leaned back and took a couple of steps back. However, both seemed angry at being reprimanded in public and forced to mediate.

"Who are you?"

"Ugh! Take that. Who do you think you are?"

This time, the two began attacking the young man. The young man looked bewildered and astonished. He never expected them to get angry at him, instead of being ashamed of his actions.

"Unacceptable!"

The young man was about to reprimand them again when...

"Kuro. Sit down."

A soft voice spoke. In fact, it was just a gentle hand on the young man's back. However, that was enough, and the thin but sturdy young man collapsed instantly.

Instead of the young man slumped in a nearby chair, a man of not particularly bulk and unimposing presence appeared on the scene, with an air of a spring breeze.

He wore an elegant Japanese kimono and a stylish hat.

He smiled and walked calmly between the hesitant middle-aged man and the young man.

He leaned slightly and extended his hand with a small movement. No one noticed, but a moment before, the middle-aged man's laptop, which he had left unsteadily, was about to fall from the chair to the floor. The man in traditional Japanese clothing caught it with a minimal movement, as if he had anticipated it.

Then,

"Here you go."

He carefully handed it back to the middle-aged man.

"Oh, ok. Thank you."

The arrogant middle-aged man thanked him without thinking. The man in traditional Japanese clothing continued,

"Your throat must be in trouble. Take care."

He also called to the young man in the hoodie. The words of gratitude seemed to come from the depths of his heart.

"Oh, yes."

The young man nodded, looking somewhat embarrassed. Without realizing it, everyone in the hospital waiting room was attracted by his demeanor. A calm atmosphere, like a clear spring sea, replaced the irritable and gloomy atmosphere from before. Without realizing it, the baby stopped crying and smiled.

The man in traditional Japanese clothing looked at them sweetly and then greeted the young man in black, who had staggered to his feet.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Kuro. Come on, let's go home."

Inviting him, they headed toward the hospital exit. Where they were walking. Beyond the automatic doors.

There, the cherry trees planted on the hospital grounds were in full bloom under the spring sun.

"...It's the perfect season."

A man walked with his hands in the sleeves of his crimson kimono, gazing at the cherry trees in full bloom.

His name was Miwa Ichigen. He was the Seventh King, the "Colorless King", and currently lived modestly in a village, composing haiku and tutoring neighborhood children.

Meanwhile,

"I'm sorry, Ichigen-sama!"

Bowing with all his might behind Ichigen's back, in a valiant stance, was his disciple, Kuro, also known as Yatogami Kuro, who was the King's vassal.

"Hmm?"

Ichigen stopped, turned around, and for a moment looked puzzled.

"Ah, you mean about before?"

He smiled faintly. Kuro raised his face and apologized for his failure with a fearful expression.

"If Ichigen-sama hadn't been here earlier, an unnecessary argument would have arisen. It was all due to my inexperience. Thank you for resolving the situation!"

"Hmm."

Ichigen scratched his cheek with his fingers and laughed awkwardly.

"It's nothing to apologize for... Kuro. You're serious, so sometimes you get too stiff. That stiffness can sometimes be a bit of a negative in situations like this. But..."

At that moment, Miwa Ichigen saw Kuro's gloomy face.

"Well, let me show you."

He smiled gently and extended his hand.

"Kuro. Shake hands. Shake hands."

He slowly extended his right hand. Kuro instantly understood Ichigen's intention, blushed, and shook his hand embarrassedly.

At that moment.

"Uh, oh."

Kuro's body leaned forward. Ichigen didn't exert any force. But even so, he gradually lost his balance.

The same phenomenon occurred when he placed a hand on Kuro's back and he slumped back in the chair.

Ichigen said:

"The human body is a strange thing. It unconsciously synchronizes with the person it's in contact with. If the other person is tense, you tense up. If the other person is relaxed, you do too. I'm relaxing right now, and you're relaxed. That relaxation is being transmitted to you."

"Yes, master."

Kuro replied desperately in a stiff voice. From the outside, it looked as if he was simply holding onto Ichigen's hand and trembling.

But from his perspective, that wasn't the case. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to stand. Ichigen's extreme body movements were unbalancing his center of gravity and posture.

Ichigen continued speaking calmly and cheerfully.

"It requires a bit of practice and skill, but it can be applied to multiple people without contact to a certain extent. That's the technique I used there. And if you change the vector a little more,"

At that moment.

".....!"

Kuro was stunned. His body twisted to the right. He rose into the air as if he'd done a somersault, and centrifugal force flipped him upside down, landing back on his feet in an arc.

His long hair fluttered as he fell a short time later.

Kuro's eyes were wide.

"Th-this is..."

He gasped as he asked his master.

"Is it the power of a supernatural king?"

Ichigen let go of Kuro and shook his head with a smile.

"It requires some training, but it's only human strength. It's the so-called theory of ancient martial arts and its application. I'm sure you can achieve it one day."

It didn't seem like it at all.

Kuro was well aware of Miwa Ichigen's swordsmanship, but his martial arts skills were so divine that his respect for him intensified.

Perhaps sensing Kuro's feelings,

"No, I'm sure you can easily surpass me."

That was what Ichigen said. His words were bright and clear, but that clarity stirred concern in Kuro's heart.

He lowered his voice and asked,

"Umm, Ichigen-sama."

Overwhelming fear and a bit of hope.

"And what did the doctor say?"

Kuro had accompanied Ichigen to the hospital. Ichigen was silent for a few seconds. He clasped his hands and looked toward the row of cherry trees.

With a smile on his face,

"My illness is progressing, and I probably won't see the next spring."

At that moment, the wind blew and the cherry blossoms fell. Kuro couldn't move, for his beloved master seemed about to disappear at any moment behind the fleeting pink mist.

He couldn't even blink...

Ichigen continued to live the same life as before. He woke up and went to bed at the same time in his house, which was simple but had everything he needed.

He raised the children in the spotlessly clean living room, taught Kuro swordsmanship in the courtyard, and wrote haikus in his small room.

He grew vegetables in a nearby field, chatted with elderly neighbors, and strolled by the stream to gaze at the moon.

And from time to time, he went to the hospital.

From spring to summer.

It seemed as though everything would continue this way.

But at the end of summer, when the snowdrops stopped blooming and the mornings and evenings grew noticeably cooler, Kuro felt as if a bucket of cold water had been poured over him.

As Ichigen tried to pull a summer haori over his chiffon kimono, he realized that his body was getting worse by the minute, from the thinness of his arms, the papery whiteness of his cheeks, to his deep, clear blue gaze.

The number of hospital visits steadily increased, and so did the length of each stay. But, oddly enough, Ichigen never remained hospitalized for more than a day.

"I asked the doctor to leave things as they are. I won't pressure him."

Kuro didn't ask for details about the treatment plan he was discussing with the doctor.

His master was already facing the end of his life.

A king of noble character and a clear mind, he determined his own destiny by his own will.

Kuro believed that as a vassal, he could only obey him silently.

Showing no sadness or tears.

Strong, strong.

With each passing day, Ichigen grew weaker and weaker, and he devoted his whole heart and soul to caring for him.

Ichigen was emaciated, had a fever, and sometimes felt unsteady, but he tried to live as calmly as possible. He strolled through the nearby forest, composed haikus, and taught Kuro swordsmanship in the garden.

With the end of his life looming, Ichigen's sword took on a somber edge that was almost frightening.

But his natural personality didn't change, and he remained cheerful and carefree.

One night, lying in Kuro's bed and talking about what he would do after his death, Ichigen had the same radiant and cheerful expression.

"Kuro, there are some assets I've forgotten. I bought stocks when I was in the United States, and if you convert them to today's Japanese yen, it's probably about 500 million yen."

Kuro showed no particular reaction to the confession that he had forgotten such a large amount of assets. Ichigen was evasive, joking, or just naive, but there was something about him that made him seem that way.

Kuro took out a notepad and began writing down everything his master had told him with a serious face, trying not to miss a single word.

Ichigen's will basically stated that he wanted his inheritance to be donated to an appropriate charity working for the welfare of children, and for it to be administered.

"I've already discussed almost everything with my lawyer.", Ichigen explained. "There are just a few minor details left to resolve, so I'd like to ask you to take care of them."

After fully understanding the administrative procedures,

"I'll risk my life."

Ichigen looked at Kuro, bowing his head solemnly, amused. He coughed slightly. Autumn insects were chirping in the garden. Master and student were silent for a while.

Kuro was reluctant to leave. Ichigen sat on the ground, closed his eyes, and listened silently to the insects' chirping.

They both knew very well that their eternal separation would soon come.

Kuro kept his head bowed, his body trembling slightly. He couldn't move.

If he moved...

He felt like something was about to disappear. Ichigen opened his eyes wide and looked at Kuro gently.

"As for me..."

He began to speak slowly.

Unlike when they had first met, his voice was thin and weak.

"As a haiku poet, I love all the seasons in this country. But spring is the best. The new branches sprout and grow radiantly toward the sky. The buds swell, a sign that flowers will bloom. I love to admire and observe these possibilities that will grow in the future."

His voice was soft, strong, and warm, just as it had been when they first met.

Kuro knew it.

Ichigen was telling him that their farewell was near. He dug his nails hard into his palms, desperately trying to hold back his tears.

Ichigen continued,

"My life has been very good. I left something for the dazzling young branches and flowers that will bloom in the future. I feel the same way about Yukari, but I am truly relieved to have been able to entrust my future to you, Yatogami Kuro... your brilliant potential."

He felt joy.

Ichigen let out a deep sigh.

"I don't think I'll be able to see the cherry blossoms next year."

Kuro looked up, surprised. Ichigen held his gaze and smiled.

He said,

"But you'll look at the cherry blossoms for me. For me when I'm gone. If I can think like this, I can be at peace. Please, Kuro. Please keep weaving the future. For a long, long time."

So...

"It's okay to cry when you want to cry."

At that moment, Kuro's emotions erupted.

Overwhelmed.

Kuro clung to Ichigen. Ichigen hugged him lovingly.

The two remained like that for a while.

Kuro's sad, tearful figure and Ichigen's warm, loving face stood out in the dim light of the long autumn night.

Shortly after that night, Ichigen passed away.

A cherry tree blossoms in the courtyard of Ashichu Gakuen High School. It grows near the fence that separates the soccer field from the tennis court.

Right now, the soccer team is playing a red-on-white match, and the women's tennis team is stroking their rackets.

Young cheers.

Voices of determination. Occasionally, laughter joins in.

Fueled by their energy, the cherry blossom petals fall in a frenzy.

Beneath them, Kuro stood.

"Ichigen-sama.", he mentally said to his eternal mentor.

"The cherry blossoms are beautiful again this year. The season you love so much is beginning anew."

A smile spread across his lips.