



GROUND ZERO: FRAGMENTS

CHAPTER 1: THAT DAY, THAT TIME, THAT OUTSIDE

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K-PROJECT WORLD

That day, at that time, Izumo Kusanagi was having tea with his sister at their home in Kyoto. Kusanagi was thirteen years old.

"Izumo, make tea."

His sister was a third-year high school student, but she was relaxed without being desperate even in the summer called Tennozan. Like all of Kusanagi's siblings, she was smart and credited with being able to achieve results without despair.

However, because she was an examined, she behaved as if her younger brother should take care of her, preferring to treat Kusanagi to tea and dinner.

Kusanagi was the younger boy who was loved and good at it, so even at that time, he obediently brewed black tea with the tea leaves according to his sister's order. Due to the quality of the bean and the brewing, he learned the technique of brewing a delicious black tea that was unlikely to come from a high school boy.

"What about sugar and milk?"

"Leave it. When I use my head I don't want sugar."

"Don't study for a long time."

As he said that, he took out the box of cookies and served it with the tea. He sat at the dining room table across from his sister, drinking tea and biscuits while having a friendly conversation. He didn't turn on the television. So at that time, Kusanagi, who was having a quiet time in the Kusanagi family's living room, did not know what had happened to the world.

The house phone rang. His sister looked at Kusanagi. Feeling the pressure to "get out" of that line of sight, Kusanagi silently stood up.

"Yes, I am Kusanagi."

When he answered on the other end of the receiver, the impatient voice of his older brother, who should be away from the sea, hit his ear.

"Izumo?! Is Japan alright?!"

"Eh?"

His older brother, ten years older than Kusanagi, was studying abroad in the United States. Kusanagi had rarely seen his older brother, who was smart and unfriendly, he was confused by the voice that seemed to be impatient as if it was a joke.

"What are you talking about? It's midnight. Are you drunk?"

"Nothing happened in Kyoto? There was news that a huge explosion occurred in the Tokyo metropolitan area, but no detailed information came through."

"Hey, sister, turn on the TV."

Kusanagi told his sister as he held the phone to his ear. Although his sister looked suspicious, she immediately grabbed the TV remote no matter if she sensed anything unusual about Kusanagi's appearance.

The channel that was supposed to be doing another show at the time was broadcasting urgent news. As the older brother said, there was a large still screen of "a large-scale explosion in the southern Kanto region".

It seems that the news landscape was also confused, behind the scenes, there was a voice reporting something as if the staff were yelling at each other, and the commentators seemed to be upset and talked while rubbing the paper on their hands. They called for people not to approach the scene, they were urging the neighbors to quickly evacuate and to remain calm and save their lives, as they would be informed of the detailed situation as soon as information was available.

"What...?"

His sister muttered in a confused voice.

Kusanagi was confused, but he wondered if a large factory had blown up.

It was a video of the disaster site. As far as he could see, debris rising in the dust was spreading, and it was hard to believe that this was a modern view of the country. It seemed that a war had occurred.

It wasn't a mistake in the sense that a war had occurred, but Kusanagi at the time naturally didn't know that.

"The scale of the explosion appears to extend throughout Kanagawa Prefecture, and strong seawater inflow appears to be occurring in coastal areas."

As Kusanagi was watching television in a daze, his sister approached him and leaned in. Kusanagi seemed to have dropped the receiver before he knew it, and his sister picked up the receiver that was dangling from the cord and told her older brother that he was worried.

Nothing bad had happened in Kyoto so far, it seemed that the southern region of Kanto was swallowed by the explosion centered on Kanagawa, but the Japanese news had not given details yet, and the safety of the second brother in Tokyo had to be confirmed urgently. She hit the hook switch with her finger and immediately called back.

The second brother of the Kusanagi family was attending university in Tokyo. There was no denying the possibility that he was involved in the huge explosion in South Kanto.

It seemed that his second brother's cell phone was not connected. His sister bit her tongue and hung up the phone.

"This is not good. The phone line is out of service."

His sister couldn't seem to sit still, so she took the key to her bike.

"I'll run to see how the main family is doing. I'll get your phone, Izumo."

"Yes, I understand."

Kusanagi stared at the TV screen, holding his heart that was making a pounding noise.

He had no idea what happened. It could be an incident, an accident or a natural disaster.

Kusanagi wondered if there was a "criminal" who caused this ridiculous situation.

If there was "someone" who caused that, what kind of person was he and what was he thinking?

As he was thinking about it, the phone rang.

Kusanagi jumped a bit and immediately picked up the phone.

"Hello?!"

"That voice is Izumo's. I'm Mizuomi."

The person that called was Kusanagi Mizuomi, Kusanagi's uncle who had a bar in Tokyo. Although he was an odd uncle among his relatives, Kusanagi loved him ever since he was a child.

"Uncle, are you alright!? Just watch the news..."

"Oh, Tokyo is in a panic. But your brother is safe."

He heard that his second brother was at the bar "HOMRA" run by Mizuomi. When he was outside, an explosion happened in the southern area of Kanto and he tried to send a

safe report to his family who might be worried, but he couldn't use his cell phone, so he went to borrow a phone from the Mizuomi store that was relatively close.

The phone was taken by his second brother, and he heard that there was no direct damage in Tokyo and that he was safe, and if the Shinkansen worked, he would return to Kyoto.

The phone was returned to Mizuomi, and Kusanagi spilled his thoughts of him from his mouth, nodding vaguely asking him to say hello to everyone.

"Man, I wonder if someone caused this explosion?"

"I don't know."

Mizuomi replied as if he couldn't say anything else.

"Recently, I've heard some horrible incidents from time to time. I had a feeling that a tumultuous time had come, but... I didn't think this would happen..."

Kusanagi looked vaguely at the calendar hanging on the wall. July 11, 1999. He thought it would be an unforgettable day for many people.

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That day, at that time, Kuroh Yatogami was playing in his garden in Saitama. Kuro was five years old.

"Kuro, look!"

Kuro caught the ball thrown by his brother. This time he threw the ball at his sister. The ball flew straight and landed in his sister's hand.

"Kuro, you are better than the boys in your class."

His sister in the second grade of elementary school laughed. His third grade brother also proudly said, "Kuro has fine motor skills."

It seems that the reason why he is called Kuro by his family is that when he was born, his younger brother and sister couldn't call him "Kuroh" but instead said "Kuro, Kuro".

The mother was sitting on the porch looking at the fan while she watched the three brothers play in the garden. The suspended wind chimes made a chilling sound every time the wind blew.

Because it was a house where the air conditioner could not be turned on unless it was a very hot day, the sweeping window was open, and the sound of the television in the house could be heard as far as the garden.

"Oh, this is good. Would you like to take your children with you when you go into summer vacation?"

His father, who seemed to be watching a travel show on TV with his grandfather, said that.

His grandfather murmured.

"It's nice to play in the mountain stream, but it seems to be a place famous for autumn leaves."

"Hmm, it's hard to pull off the fall leaf hunt."

It was a quiet vacation.

The ball thrown by his brother flew towards Kuro again, and Kuro reached out to catch it.

At that moment, there was a low noise and the ground shook. Kuro lost his balance and threw the ball with his hand to get a mochi.

"An earthquake?"

His mother raised her hips and said that, but unlike a normal earthquake, the tremor was just a big tremor that seemed to push upwards at first.

Kuro stood up, picked up the ball and said, "Keep throwing the ball."

Kuro and his brothers started playing with the ball again, but his mother was uneasy, probably because the earthquake was suspicious.

"Oh."

His father who was watching TV made a weird voice.

"Earthquake bulletin?"

The mother on the porch leaned into the room.

"No, I switched to the news channel, but it's a bit hectic. Why isn't the news on right now?"

"Isn't it strange? It's really confusing..."

Even if the adults started running, the children continued to play without worrying about it. It was common for adults to make serious voices while watching the news, and that was usually followed by stories that children didn't really understand.

When he got tired of throwing the ball and his sister taught him to play with the ball under her feet while she sang a song, his mother made a little screaming voice.

Amazed, the children watched television and saw their parents and grandfather with astonished expressions. In particular, his mother seemed to be in severe shock, covering her mouth with both hands and trembling a little.

"Mom?"

When Kuro got worried and came closer, his mother jumped back onto the porch and hugged Kuro tightly.

"You guys go into the house too."

His father also came out on the porch and called Kuro's brother and sister. The two of them were confused and entered the living room through the sweeping window, and the father hugged his shoulders with both arms. Even though he wasn't old enough to be hugged, his mother picked him up and brought him home. Her feet were walking around with her shoes on.

"Was it an attack by a new weapon from a foreign country...?"

"Suddenly..."

"But if not, why would this happen?"

Grandfather and father were talking tensely. Kuro squirmed in his mother's arms and looked at the television.

A super large explosion in the southern Kanto region. It seemed that there were many dead and missing. They were asked to please be calm and save their life.

The discomfort in the room that could be heard was transmitted to the young Kuro.

The mother held his head and pressed his face against her shoulder to take his gaze away from the television screen.

"Okay. I will definitely protect you. I will be with you forever."

Kuro didn't really understand what was going on.

However, he wanted to cheer up his mother who was still trembling a bit, so he patted her mother's shoulder with his small hand.

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At that time that day, Seri Awashima was eating a rice cake in the back of a Japanese sweet shop run by her parents in Tokyo. Awashima was eight years old.

The store where she was "Sweet maker Awashima", it was a long established Japanese confectionery that existed since the Edo period. In particular, the bean paste was reputed to be exquisite, and the simple botamochi remained the most popular product.

Awashima loved red bean paste for as long as she could remember, and would go after any sweet that had it, she also liked to eat anko just with a big spoon.

For such Awashima, the botamochi of her parents' house was the starting point and the pinnacle.

"How is it?"

The older brother presented the black letter rice cake and she put it in her mouth. After carefully chewing and swallowing, Awashima smiled.

"Delicious."

"Yes!"

"But the bean paste is a bit tough and astringent. I think it was a bit early to throw out the broth."

"Uh..."

The mother who was listening to the exchanges of the brothers laughed.

"Perhaps the tongue for bean paste is more than my father."

That day, she was tasting a rice cake made by her older brother, a high school student. Her father's policy was that "the sooner you start training, the better", and her brother was forced to make sweets on his days off. He may have wanted to play, but it seemed that he already intended to take over the store as his eldest son, and he was seriously working on making sweets.

Although it didn't work out, the impression that it was delicious was no lie, and Awashima loved any bean paste. She brought the rest of the rice cake to her mouth. "Damn. Even though it looks delicious."

"There is no such thing as anko that is not delicious."

"Damn."

"Fufu, even if you make a mistake, it's fine because she will eat everything."

When her mother told that mocking her, the earth suddenly trembled.

Awashima was surprised and swallowed the last bite of Ohagi without chewing. "What? An earthquake?"

Her mother frowned and walked out of the tatami room in the back towards the store. She was talking to a customer who was choosing candy at the store and was saying, "Are you okay? It surprised me."

"Isn't that strange for an earthquake?"

It was a creepy and big tremor. Her brother nodded, "Oh..." to Awashima who was confused.

Awashima also went out to the store and noticed that the main street was noisy. She thought was suspicious and went outside. Looking in the direction the people on the street were looking, Awashima saw something like a red pillar of fire standing in the southern sky across the heavens and the earth.

"What's that?"

Awashima muttered in astonishment.

Her chest made noise. She was sure something unusual was going on.

Awashima continued to stare at the southern sky with a strong expression until the ominous red light disappeared.

From there, spent some time before the situation was understood.

When it was reported on television that a huge explosion had occurred in the southern Kanto region and the city around the site turned into a heap of rubble, a woman who worked in the shop suddenly screamed.

"Are you okay?!"

The mother quickly knelt down, sat on the floor and held the shoulders of the crying employee.

"Wow, I... my parents' house..."

She squeezed her voice out from under her painfully tear-wet breath.

It seems that her parents' house was in the south direction of Kanto. Farther south than the debris-laden area in the news, a location that seemed closer to the center of the blast.

Cold, heavy, muddy air fell into the tent.

No one had a word for the crying employee. Her mother was still rubbing her back in silence.

Her brother bit his lip and quietly headed to the store to close up shop. Awashima also silently follows him and turned the sign around "open" with his brother who lowered the curtain.

Awashima, while listening to the clerk's crying voice, looked at the "Sweet maker Awashima" curtain, looked at the older brother who lowered it, and looked at her parents in the store.

If that store, her home or her family were lost.

Imagination made Awashima shiver, and then anger began to rise.

It was stronger than the feeling of pity for the clerk's crying, instead of the fear, the irrational childish anger aroused why she had to cry like that.

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That day, at that time, Misaki Yata (who didn't have that last name yet because his mother wasn't married yet) was playing with his friend Rikio Kamamoto in the Shizume shopping district in Tokyo. Yata was five years old.

Since it was Sunday, the nursery was closed, but his mother was not working.

Yata was five years old, but because his mother was busy as a single mother, he went out to play alone before breakfast. That day too, he headed to the nearby Shizume shopping district with a familiar step.

There was a friend of Yata's at "Kamamoto liquor store" in the Shizume shopping district.

He attended the same kindergarten, graduated slightly earlier than Yata and went to elementary school, but he was weaker and less trustworthy than Yata. Yata, who was small, but was stronger than anyone in a fight, took control and turned him into a boy.

"Kamamoto. Ah, come here!"

When Yata yelled at the Kamamoto liquor store window, Kamamoto's mother laughed, "Oh!".

"Rikio! Misaki-chan came to see you."

"Don't call me by my first name!"

Yata insisted that he was tired of that name. It looked like a woman's name. After being teased, Yata hated his name. When they called him by his name, he felt like a fool. That's why he told Kamamoto to call him by his last name.

However, Kamamoto's mom smiled, "Because Misaki-chan is Misaki-chan.". He wasn't satisfied with the fact that he looked like a woman when he was called that.

Kamamoto came out of the shelter at the back of the store, shaking his round body and laughing happily when he saw Yata. He was a cute boy who would become attached to Yata without any selection, even when he became an elementary student.

"What are you going to play today?"

When asked by Kamamoto, Yata took out a white stone from his pocket. It was a stone that he had picked up on the path that he traveled before arriving there.

Yata and Kamamoto crouched down on the street surface and wrote graffiti and collected stones on the asphalt surface. People in the shopping district were quiet, and although Yata and his friends were doodling in the street, they laughed and looked at them.

He got tired of drawing from the beginning, and when he was playing with many circles on the street surface, suddenly there was a terrible noise and the ground shook.

It was more like a big monster jumping and landing, rather than an earthquake.

Kamamoto, who had been making a sickle with one foot, suddenly screamed and rolled on the ground like a ball, and Yata also jumped a bit and looked around hurriedly.

"Oh!"

In the distant sky, he saw a red light that connected the sky and the ground like a great pillar. The sky there was dyed red like burning.

"What's that?! It's great!"

Involuntarily, Yata said so and pointed at the red light.

He didn't know what it was at all, but the pillar of light like a bright red fire felt flashy and powerful and looked cool.

Of course, Yata didn't know what was going on under that, and what he imagines was an alien invasion, the gate to the demon world opening, the superhuman hero's super special move, etc.

Let's go under that red light! Yata tried to say that. Running home and picking up his bike... and so on, all around Yata's head.

At that moment, Kamamoto screamed. Yata looked at Kamamoto in a hurry. Kamamoto, who was still in a fallen position, burst into tears.

"What's wrong? Did you scrape your knees?"

"I'm scared..."

Kamamoto said in a thin voice.

Yata didn't say he was a queer.

When he was facing Kamamoto, who was crying because he was scared, he somehow got irritated and hurriedly hardened his expression and extended his hand towards Kamamoto.

"Okay! I'm here!"

Kamamoto looked at Yata with teary eyes. He takes Yata's hand, intimidatingly. Yata made a great effort to help Kamamoto, keeping his hands on his chest.

"Kamamoto, when you're in trouble, I'll always help you! So it's alright! I'll help if something happens!"

Kamamoto looked at Yata and obediently nodded, "Yes.", he pressed his hand back tightly.

Yata, that time, saw a pillar of red light in the distant sky with a somewhat mysterious feeling.

Still, the red light reflected in Yata's eyes in a cold way.

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That day, at that time, Fushimi Saruhiko was walking alone through the gate of camellias in Tokyo. Fushimi was five years old.

As usual, his parents were not at home. He wasn't happy with them at all, so he was quite happy that they were absent, but it was annoying having a housekeeper.

Being a housekeeper and not a babysitter, if Fushimi had an attitude that she would ignore, she wouldn't have to take care of him more than necessary, but she said it would be bad if something happened to her employer's son when she was there. That's why she told Fushimi to tell her when he wanted to go out and play.

But of course he didn't want to hang out and go out with a housekeeper.

Fortunately, the Fushimi family was uselessly large, so it wasn't easy for the housekeeper to leave the house while she cleaned another room.

Fushimi walked out of the red brick Western-style house and headed for the camellia door. "Tsubakimon" was the name of that place, but it was also a common name for a building with a magnificent gate.

During the past few days, a large number of armored vehicles came out of "Tsubakimon" and passed in front of Fushimi's house, and people in blue uniforms like "Tsubakimon" staff were running. Fushimi was curious about what was happening and turned his foot towards "Tsubakimon".

"Tsubakimon" seemed calm. The door was closed and the building over there was also thin.

Fushimi grabbed the grille on the door, stretched, and looked inside.

It seems there were no cars parked at the time. Maybe they hadn't been back since they were dispatched.

When he thought that, there was a shock and tremor that pushed up from the bottom of the earth.

Fushimi was a child with little emotional fluctuation, but he was really upset and clung to the door grate he was holding.

However, the shaking did not continue and ended with a big pitch.

Fushimi looked up and saw a red pillar of fire in the southern sky.

"That's..."

Unintentionally, his voice leaked out.

Fushimi looked at the southern sky as if he was going to bite into it. He didn't know if the red pillar of fire originated from the sky and burned the ground, or if it originated from the ground and went up into the sky, but the unrealistic sight caught Fushimi's attention.

"Like the destruction of the world."

When he tried to express his impressions of it, his heart fluttered a little.

There was a change in the building that was quiet up to that point. The door was flung open and several people in blue uniforms jumped out from inside as if rolling.

They directed their eyes straight to the southern sky, and when they looked at the pillar of fire, their expressions were tinted with despair. It seemed like they were talking about something, but he couldn't hear the story because there was a big front yard between the gate and the building.

One of the blue uniforms suddenly knelt on the spot and groaned.

The roar, which was a mixture of pain and anger, reached the place where Fushimi was.

Fushimi was shocked at the appearance of a large man screaming and thought that the world would really be destroyed.

There was no particular fear in Fushimi. There was no one Fushimi wanted not to die, and he had no child-specific attachment to his own life.

Rather, he even felt that the event of the world's destruction was better than his daily life.

However, he got tired of seeing adults moaning from the start, and Fushimi turned his back on "Tsubakimon" as he walked out the door.

Fushimi went home alone, imagining what it would be like to destroy the world.

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That day, at that time, Miyabi Ameno came to a picnic with her parents in a park near her home in Kanagawa. Miyabi was two years old.

The picnic was fun both to go and to prepare.

While her mother was preparing a side dish for lunch, her father was preparing rice balls. Miyabi's parents were a close couple who hung out in the kitchen during the holidays.

"Miyabi, it's a fish!"

Miyabi insisted on that, standing next to her father, who was lining up rice balls on the table.

"Yes. There are salmon and tuna mayonnaise as fish ingredients."

Her father held out a small ball of rice so that it would be easy for even Miyabi to eat.

He found it amusing to make a round shape out of rice, and on the way, Miyabi insisted that she do it, and even let her squeeze the paper-wrapped rice with her small hand.

They left home with a full lunch box. With Miyabi in the middle, the three of them walked hand in hand. It was a nice sunny day.

Miyabi sang a song in a good mood. A song about a lost kitten and a guard dog.

"Miyabi is good at singing."

Her mother praised Miyabi's singing.

"Miyabi may become a singer in the future."

Her father also said that with a happy voice.

Miyabi continued to sing proudly. Both of her hands were firmly connected to her parents. Unlike Koneko-chan, Miyabi wouldn't get lost.

The destination park had a promenade where you could enjoy seasonal flowers and a large grassy square, and it was a place where many families gathered during the holidays. As soon as Miyabi arrived, she rolled around on the grass and played, and when she was a little tired, her lunch box was open.

Her father grabbed the salmon rice ball, chewed on the sweet omelette her mother made, and Miyabi said that the distorted rice ball was delicious and ate it.

The lunch box was empty, when Miyabi was filled, she lay on her back on the grass.

"There, shine!"

Miyabi pointed to the distant sky and said that.

It shone in the distance and was as small as a bean, but the shape of the sword was clearly visible in Miyabi's eyes. However, Miyabi didn't know the word sword, so she used the word shine.

Her parents always praised her when Miyabi pointed to the sky and she said "Ohoshi-sama" or "Otsuki-sama", so she hoped they would praise her again this time.

However, unlike the stars and the moon, it was an object that her parents didn't even know about.

"Hmm? What is that...?"

"No, an unidentified flying object?"

Her parents looked at each other and fell silent.

At the point where Miyabi was looking, the red glow fell.

The red glow fell to the ground.

As soon as it hit the ground, there was a roar that seemed to tear at the back of her ears, and there was a shock as Miyabi's body who was lying down rose up a bit.

Her father raised Miyabi's body like a reflex.

Miyabi saw a column of red light rise up into the sky from where the red glow fell on her father's shoulder, and a tsunami of light rush from there.

Her mother got up like a fight, pushed her father's back and they started running together.

The people around her were running to escape the tsunami of light.

Miyabi opened her eyes and looked at the light that was chasing them.

The light swallowed the city.

A person running behind her hit her father's back hard. Her father, who had Miyabi, lost his balance and fell, but he protected her so she wouldn't be crushed.

The mother who was running with them also stopped and knelt beside her father.

The great wave of light was right behind.

The mother, realizing that she couldn't escape, covered Miyabi with her father, using him as shield.

For Miyabi, who was only two years old, the world was full of surprises every day, so the light that she swallowed them was taken as a surprise.

However, she thought that the light was the most dazzling and beautiful she had ever seen.

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That day, that hour, everywhere, every person acknowledged the incident with every emotion.

The children who would eventually carry the same sword above their heads received the incident where a huge sword floating in the heavens fell and scattered the ruins, with their own emotions.

Or they just looked at the light of destruction as they were without having a specific feeling.

Or, thinking of who he must be to prevent such ruin.

Or, as he was impaled on debris, he swallowed the fact and thought about the future.

On that day, even the fate of those who were not within that time, the only sword that had fallen to the ground moved silently.