



## **GROUND ZERO: FRAGMENTS**

### **CHAPTER 4: THIS SUMMER BEGINS**

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

Many people remember "that day" in 1999 as a special moment.

For some, a shocking disaster that suddenly hit them. For others, the moment when an extraordinary catastrophe was felt through distant rumors.

The sun shining from above. A cicada screech they can't even talk about. Sweat running down the cheeks. Some will remember such a scene.

But that was a little further.

The temperature had already started to rise every day, but it was still far from summer production.

In a fate similar to high pressure magma that swallows everything and burns it, the daily life of thin skin remained, that is the history of that time.

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It was awkward getting on the train after a tough event.

A black suit with holes here and there and fraying. Burning smell. A soot-smeared face floated on a crowded station platform.

Just a few hours ago, "Purgatory" was attacking a gangster headquarters, a few miles away from the area where it was approved to live.

Number 2 splitting the plan, what Soma calls "room hunting". At a minimum, to get a place to live in the land where the infrastructure is alive, he said, "I have a star in the correct yakuza", but in reality, there may be strategic reasons such as expanding the territory of control, threatening the security system and secure a bridgehead.

However, such a "room search" failed due to the outburst of the "Red King" Kagutsu Genji, and ended in vain enough to destroy the unlucky gangsters.

The large car used on the outward route was also wrecked, so clan members procured their return journeys locally. Specifically, it was decided to divide into several vehicles and motorcycles that were stolen from the owners through threats, but it happened that two young people were run over by the number of members.

The baby-faced boy Kyoji and Takuya Choya. They didn't care if they had a license or not, but they didn't know how to drive either.

"No, Jibun and the others are going back by train."

In response to Soma's amused instructions, the boy was in a bad mood and Choya bought the ticket with a nihilistic mood. At that time, the transportation IC card service had not yet started.

"It's better to go home... than stay and die today."

As he waited for the train, Choya said that.

"Why, will we live long? No way."

And, the boy answered that on the train platform.

In the battle that day, some members of "Purgatory" also died.

Most of them were influenced by the power of the "Red King", and their bodies exploded due to a leak of different abilities, but there was only one man who died when he was hit by a yakuza's ammunition.

Yusuke Kadota. He looked to be in his early thirties, but he still looked like he was in his early twenties due to his baby face and hip attitude.

About a month ago he had entered "Purgatory". Immediately before, he killed 13 members of the antisocial organization he belonged to and got out. The case was registered as a normal criminal case, not an extraordinary case. Before the installation and manifestation of dysphoria, the man caused a mass murder with a single gun.

"Uh, I don't think he shot. The yakuza and the police often shot, bang bang."

The boy liked the "newcomer" Kadota. Unlike other members of the clan, he did not treat children lightly due to their age and appearance.

"Hey, how does it feel to shoot and kill a person compared to doing it with extraordinary power?"

Faced with such an unscrupulous question, Kadota did not seem offended and replied politely.

"Here we go... what's up? I haven't had a chance to compare. I've never killed a person with this power."

Kadota extended his right hand and showed it. His index finger was missing and the cross section glowed red like a flare.

"I can't shoot with this finger anymore."

As you could see, Kadota's stigma was that he was "missing his right index finger," probably because one of the guns was traumatic. The power of extraordinary power was the "bullet" emitted from the missing finger, but the extraordinary power of the bullet was rarely used after only a few test shots.

"Then let's shoot the yakuza in that area the next time we go in and out."

"No, that's a bit... what do you think?"

"I don't care. He who hits and dies is bad!"

Kadota smiled a little embarrassed at the boy's laughter, and today he was hit by a bullet and died. He wasn't killed by the power of an extraordinary skill, he died like a normal man by mere ammunition.

"He could have shot, but he didn't. He didn't prevent it, even though he could prevent it. That was suicide... I think he chose to die like a normal person. I'm sure that's what he wanted."

"What is that? I don't understand the meaning."

The boy had a sharp mouth. Every time he was told a complicated story, he was in a bad mood. And...

"I think that old man was a bit tough, maybe he was too nice."

He said it lightly.

"That's right. I'm sure his personality was calm."

"Whatever way you hit the weapons, which way, the guys above will disappear the weak guys."

"Well, that's right. I'm sure that's correct. The train has arrived."

Choya tried to round off the topic by saying that.

"Most of all, that old man was..."

The boy was eating even more.

Miscellaneous words about Kadota continued for many train stations after that. He was feeling a little upset, but he knew it was a shame for a child.

In everyday life, the children sometimes talked about people close to them and sometimes said mean things.

Mothers who couldn't live with them, grandmothers who raised them, local childhood friends, etc. None of them were in the world now.

According to them, they were bulls. They were angry. She was a careless woman. She was a messed up slap. It was heartless shit, and the fight was weak. In this way, the children enumerated the reasons why they had to die. This is how he was trying to convince himself.

Choya's idea was different. The outlook on life was simpler.

There was no meaning to life or death.

— So you don't have to say bad things to someone you like.

He thought would say that, but he stopped himself.

Emotions, souls, life, life that has no meaning, he believed that it was not correct to think like that. In that way, he who lived as a zombie was meaningless and unnatural. That's what he thought.

The boy lived in a slightly better world than himself as a dead person. He just stared through the glass at his sparkling emotional displays.

When five train stations passed after the criticism of Kadota began, the topic broke and she was supposed to be the grandmother of a child.

That grandma, she put a candy ball in her pocket and walked over to her and gave it to a kid in her neighborhood. That's why the kid could lick it and also look at the bad guys. Even though she said that, he couldn't hear it.

The train stopped at the station and a large number of students entered. It was the closest station to a famous private high school. Boys and girls in English-style blazer-style uniforms filled the seats, chatting like a flock of birds.

— It is bad.

Choya wondered about the boy's situation.

Student, rich, nice guy. The boy hated "hanging out together and seeing their own faces".

It was a complete alienation; it would be a source of fire if the stalemate turned out to be extreme.

"Smells like burnt?"

"Funeral... Coming back from the crematorium?"

"No, he's a yakuza."

He heard such whispers that they were exchanged.

"Kyoji... do you want to move to another platform?"

Although he tries to say that calmly so as not to irritate him, the boy's line of sight was already fixed on a point ahead.

"Hey!"

The boy screamed. It was a loud voice that echoed throughout the vehicle.

"Sorry! You're sitting there!"

Several male students sitting in the priority seats at the front of the vehicle looked at each other.

"Give your seat to the elders!"

"Uh..."

Choya finally caught on. An elderly woman, in her 80s, boarded through the vehicle entrance. Her waist was bent and she used a cane. The step was small and she was swaying a bit.

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"Please, Grandma."

The students who hurriedly stood up bowed their heads to the boy and urged the old woman to sit down. There was no need to shout. It was easy.

Rather, the old lady suddenly made a noise and attracted attention, and she stood still.

It would be a problem if she was told to sit cross-legged in the middle of that situation.

The door closed and the train began to move while the situation was awkward and stuck.

"Hmm... I'll be by your side."

"Uh..."

At least if they were out of sight, the old woman would be able to sit down and the students would be quiet.

That was the world of ordinary people, and they were the obstacles. He was aware of that.

When the children were about to start walking...

"Uhahahaha! What is it?! What is it?!"

From behind, he heard crazy laughter.

Looking back, there was a strange girl there.

The girls in the vehicle were all girls who were wearing uniforms from prestigious private high schools and seemed refined. It wasn't just about appearance, but behavior. They were elegant creatures carefully bred in a greenhouse.

On the other hand, the one in front of them was a completely wild species. Poor pedigree or poor growth, short, old-fashioned body shape. Her skin was dark, her hair was coarse and she laughed with bad makeup like a dark circle. The teething was also terribly bad. Her clothes were the same as the students, but she was also poorly dressed. She loosened her collar, tucked her skirt in, and loosened her stockings on one side. It was almost a costume from a fairy tale.

In a word, she was like a raccoon dog that failed to become a young girl.

"Mika-chan, you can't do it. It's rude if you suddenly laugh."

"And they're a little scary. They might get mad."

From among the animal-like girls who were worried and whispering, the raccoon dog took an open step and stood in front of the boy. She was even smaller than a toddler.

"Fufufu, you're weird. Aren't you the kind of person who secretly picks up a kitten on a rainy day?"

"What... what the hell are you saying?!"

"It's a waste to make a loud voice. I don't know if you're a good guy."

"Ku..."

"She's not your grandmother, right?"

"What did you say?!"

— If he thinks she's just a stupid woman, he'll be looking at her unexpectedly. No, were she listening to the conversation?

"You..."

Choya intervened.

"No matter what this guy and Grandma are, it's not something that others should make fun of."

The Tanuki laughed with a "Hehehe." unafraid, and she put her hand in the pocket of her uniform.

"Sorry, do you want candy?"

Her palm, which was filled with individually wrapped sweets, was presented in front of the boy.

"Hm... I don't need such a thing!"

"Hahaha, don't hesitate."

The Tanuki leaned towards the boy and put a piece of candy in the pocket of his black suit.

"What... what are you doing?!"

When the boy tried to push her away, the Tanuki quickly reached down, sat in the priority seat and touched the empty seat next to her.

"Bah, come on, it's free here! Come on, sit down!"

It was a strange behavior, but when he noticed it, the tense air inside the vehicle was loose.

"Thank you..."

The old lady bowed to the boy and the boy gave up his seat, and with the help of the raccoon dog, she slowly sat down.

"I'll get off next station, Taku."

"It's not the station to get off yet..."

"We can get on another train."

When Koji and Choya spoke in a whisper...

"Haha, it's a TV store!"

The Tanuki pointed at him.

Finally, when the train stopped and the door opened, a loud voice was heard from the back of the two descending.

"Bye, Kyoji, Taku, bye! Take care of yourselves! Stay together! Bye!"

Even after the train left the platform, the reverberation remained for a while.

After that, the two of them walked out onto the street from the station. They had to walk for more than an hour to the base of "Purgatory", but they did not complain, they chose to go home on foot. It was so awkward that they couldn't wait a few minutes for the next train.

"Hmm... who the hell is that woman?"

"I don't care. We won't see her anymore."

"She's like a raccoon dog."

"Oh, I thought that too."

"She asked me if I wanted a candy? Damn."

The boy reached into his pocket, pulled out a piece of candy, and handed it to Choya.

"Eh?"

"Look, I'll give you half."

Saying that, he peels off the packaging and throw it in his mouth.

— Oh, you eat it...

"Eh?"

When she noticed Choya's line of sight, the boy looked intimidating and...

"I can't turn it into a poor morsel!"

"That's how it is."

Choya also put the candy in his mouth. He couldn't turn candy into food. He thought so, even if he said that, the boy would not be convinced. On the contrary, he would think it rude to refuse the food served.

"I see, Grandma..."

"Oh?! Grandma doesn't matter!"

The boy was poisoned again. However, since he had the candy in his mouth, he didn't spit it out.

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The two met the "Tanuki" a few days later when they went out into the city as messengers for Soma.

In the post-processing of the gang attack case, there were some things that he had to talk about "Tokijikuin". As a return to that, he delivers the documents to the nearest branch.

Order and deviation to "Tokijikuin" which represents law and order. Soma from "Purgatory" was always kept in the gray zone and as a result behaved freely without social or anti-social restraints. It was just a devilish twist.

"Wow, it was easy, right? I'm just a middle manager. My general and my junior boss, and the politicians and citizens, somehow, while they push me here and there, I managed to put him in a circle. I'm on his side. I am working for everyone. You can get a salary from your country."



It was a man holding a poker card in his left hand, lighting a bomb detonator in his right hand, smiling a bottomless smile, and distorting his mouth.

Contact with "Tokijikuin" was often made by the boy and Choya. Among the mischief makers in "Purgatory", he had an appearance that was exceptionally close to the general public and was rarely noticed in the city. He was a rare human resource in "Purgatory", who could act as a courier without causing any trouble.

"I really don't like this kind of use of children."

That day there was no driver, so it was a train movement. As they headed to the nearest station, on the way, Koji told Choya.

"Soma-san says that he believes in us and leaves it to us. We have to live up to expectations."

"No... that person wouldn't wait for others. If we were wrong, we would just use it as a source to move another plan."

"Huh? You're like that."

At that moment,

"Oh, Kyoji! Kyoji!"

A loud voice came from behind.

"Eh?"

Looking back, some kind of raccoon was constantly running and stopped in front of them. It was the raccoon dog from the other day.

"Oh, Kyoji and Taku!"

"You... don't disrespect people."

"Oh, sorry, Kyoji and Taku."

"I'm telling you to put the "kun" on it."

"Hahaha."

"You were called "Mika-chan" by your friends."

Choya yelled from the side.

"Looks like the uniform is different today."

"Oh, that's right. Taku-kun, are you a person who knows about this kind of thing?"

That day, the Tanuki was wearing a uniform from a local public school. She wasn't as floaty as the prestigious private uniform from the other day, but after all, she was in disguise somewhere.

"What is that? What do you mean?"

Choya answered the boy's question.

"Maybe she's walking around in another school's uniform. I don't know if it's private or public, but I don't know if she's actually enrolled..."

"I will hit you!"

When the Tanuki said that without being afraid,

"Hey, Somekichi."

Across the street, high school students in the same uniform and various men and women waved their hands.

"What are you doing?" "Are you going to karaoke?"

Thereafter,

"Oh, right~"

The Tanuki turned to the students as she said...

"I'm going to work part time!"

"Oh, I'm sorry." "I'll call you later." "Do your best at the part-time job."

The students started walking again.

"Part time job?"

"What is Somekichi?"

When Koji and Choya asked her...

"Huh, are you interested in that? It's me."

Saying that, the Tanuki smiled. As usual, the alignment of her front teeth was poor.

"Somekichi Mikako, part-time worker, 17 years old.", the Tanuki called to herself.

Although she did not go to high school, she wore a uniform and went in and out of various schools, and she had many friends.

"Are you a fake student?"

"Well, it's the value of the Joshi Kose, that's why it's in demand. Fufufu."

"No way, you're doing suspicious work."

Before the boy, Tanuki-Mikako slammed the palm of her hand against the large cardboard box that had been strapped to the mamachari's loading platform.

(Note: Mamachari is the shortened expression in Japanese for mama no charinko (mom's bike). These types of bikes are equipped with a basket in front or behind, and a special seat can be placed on them to carry a child and circulate safely.)

"Fufufu...money to watch? It's my job."

The contents of the box were tightly packed pocket tissues. The phone number was printed on the package.

"Tissues distribution?"

Looking around him, there was a part-time job handing out similar tissues in front of the busy station. She will take a long time to complete the quota for a large box, as passersby often ignore her.

"Well, it's okay to work seriously, but... it's a normal job for a while."

"Although my work is futuristic, "Puri" is different, "Puri".

"What is "Puri"?"

"Fufufu, look at me, look at me."

Perhaps it was a part-time job uniform, Mikako put on a fluorescent cap that shone on her uniform, reached into the box, and held a bunch of tissues in her left and right hands. And...

"Love & Peace!"

"Eh?"

As she ran through the crowd in front of the station at full speed, she hugged the waist of a middle-aged office worker in front of her.

"What?!"

Several tissues swirled in the suit pocket of a salaryman who made a strange voice and stiffened.

"Uhahahaha! Uhahahaha!"

"Hey, peace, peace! Thanks!"

Mikako ran towards the children as she one-sidedly thanked the clerk who took it away.

"How about? A part-time job I thought up."

"No... no matter what you say."

"What is this 'part time job'?"

"I call it 'Aggressive Free Hug'. Fufufu... With this trick, the tissues will be sold 10 times faster and there will be no conflict in the world. Imagine..."

"It's far from a Tsukkomi."

"It's a technique or an eccentricity, it's almost the work of a youkai, that's all."

"Oh? I don't know either."

Mikako filled her hands with tissues again and...

"Fufufu, there is a secret in the low pass when tackle."

"Don't ask. She just said tackle. It's not a hug."

"So, next time I'm targeting that onichan, take a closer look."

The target was a tanned young man in a tank top. He maybe he went to the gym, he had a good physique and was muscular.

"Come on! Love & Peace!"

Mikako ran towards the man and...

"Gak!"

The next moment, she rolled onto his back.

"Eh?!"

The boy hurried.

"Hey, Mikako, are you alright?! Wow, there's blood coming out!"

"Uh..."

Mikako pointed at the man.

"I was able to adjust my knees to the tackle..."

"Hey, hey!"

"Wait."

Choya stopped the boy who was about to activate his fire power towards a man.

Then, turning back to the confused man, he said...

"I was watching. Do you practice martial arts too? Something jumped out like a strange animal, so I tried to lift my leg and stop it. It came running out of his face."

"Oh, yeah... Hey, Mikako, show me where did you hit... Oh, your front teeth are messed up!"

"That... isn't that..."

"Oh, this is a row of teeth. Did you hit your nose? The nose isn't crushed either. Does it originally look like this? You just had a nosebleed."

"Sorry, I got involved in something strange. It's okay, go away."

Choya urged him to do so, but the man left at least 5,000 bills for medical expenses.

And...

"Hehehe, I made a profit."

Mikako, who covered her nose with a tissues, looked at the boy and Choya.

"I have cash, maybe I'll have some tea. I'll treat you!"

"Tea... what about your part-time job?"

"Well, it might not be a job if her nose bleeds..."

Mikako paced back and forth with a large box as the boy and Taku said so. And when she hit the side of the box and draw the attention of passersby...

"Hey, hey! Attention, free tissues! Free tissues! Take them away!"

She left the box in the middle of the street and came back.

"It's finished. Let's go!"

"It's not finished. I'm going to get sick when I do technical work."

"First of all, I'm not saying I'll find you."

"Hehehe. Don't hesitate."

While saying that, when she tries to pick up the mamachari parked on the side of the street, the ringtone of the mobile phone sounded from the pocket of Mikako's uniform.

"Oh, the phone."

The clamshell mobile phone was a type of clamshell that was common before PDAs. Many pets were hanging in the leash hole.

"Hello, this is Some-san. Eh, Nanisore, really? Ah... yeah, that's fine. Thanks for helping me out. Hahaha. See you soon."

She closed the mobile phone.

"Sorry, I have another part-time job. Maybe next time we'll go for tea!"

"You don't have to apologize. Go on your own."

"Hmm...?"

Mikako stopped and looked at the boy's expression.

"That's right. Well, I'm glad Kyoji has recovered."

"Ah? What are you saying all of a sudden?"

"Actually, I was a bit worried. When I met him on the train, he surprised me."

— She look closely.

Choya thought.

It is true that the boy that day was depressed about Kadota's death. That's why he constantly said bad things about Kadota and his dead family.

"Shut up...! What are you saying?"

Mikako suddenly hugged the boy who turned red and denied it.

"No..."

"If you feel sad again... wipe your tears with this."

"You..."

The boy grabbed Mikako's shoulder and pulled her away from him.

"That's how you put your used tissues in the pocket! Also, you got a little blood from your nose! It's dirty!"

"Uhahahahahahahahaha!"

Mikako jumped on the bike and ran off.

"Love & Peace!"

After that, on the train back, the boy was slandering Mikako.

Later...

"What's wrong with that chibi?"

"Raccoon dog."

"Gnashing teeth and laughing."

"I don't know... I can't forgive her, a woman without manners."

— Oh, this is... a lovable boy every time. If you are a little nice, you can understand immediately.

Choya thought that.

— I wonder why.

He also thought the same.

In a life where you see a dead body three times a week, how can this guy not be dead?

How can he grieve over people, get angry over irrationality, and people like him?

How can the light of the soul be kept forever as a tiny spark?

"Well, we won't find her anymore."

The boy leaned against the exit door and looked at the scenery outside the window. The setting sun shone red on his cheeks.

"I could be dead tomorrow... right, Taku?"

"Come on...what was that?"

Choya looked away with a dazzling sensation and at the same time a small backlash.

"Hey, what are you asking with that?"

This time, the point was directed at Choya. The boy said, narrowing his mouth as if he was sulking.

"Oh, you know, that guy is crazy, really crazy."

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Boys meet girls.

This is that summer story. It is the story of three children who shone and disappeared like sparks that summer.

One of the three did not wait for "the day." The other was right in the whirlwind of "the day."

And the last one is...