



K - ONE YEAR LATER:

CHAPTER 2: THE ABSENCE OF THE KING (BY TATSUKI MIYAZAWA)

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K-PROJECT WORLD

A year has passed since then.

Reisi Munakata disappeared from "Scepter 4" and almost two months have passed.

For the members, except for a few executives, it was a completely overwhelming event, like a mist in the blue sky.

One morning, in front of the members who were summoned, Munakata said in the same simple tone as always.

"I'll be out of here for a while. After that, Awashima-kun will take over as acting director. Fushimi-kun will be deputy general manager. I hope you continue to serve in their roles."

The content was so sudden that the place fell silent.

Awashima and Fushimi standing to Munakata's left and right had worried faces and sulky expressions. Finally, Akira Hidaka, a person with common sense, raised his hand and asked.

"Does that mean you're taking a vacation?"

At that question, Munakata just smiled.

"Yes. In a sense, that is correct."

The members looked at each other.

Although the director is strong as steel, he has consumed some paid vacations for reasons such as his niece's birthday party and the university synchronization party.

What was the point of declaring a break now?

"So how long will you rest, Captain?"

This time, Daiki Fuse asked with a relatively calm demeanor. Munakata kept his mouth open.

"That's right. At least a month or more. Half a year or maybe a year."

Shock ran through all the members. There was a crack.

Munakata stood silently.

"Reason!"

It was Andy Domyoji who made a strong voice. He raises his hand to the front.

"What's the reason?! It doesn't matter how long it is!"

Everyone thought it was a break of about 10 days, from a week to a long time. Currently, "Scepter 4" is in charge of their duties by appointing a few former Strain to increase their strength.

Although the Slate has disappeared, their responsibilities have not diminished at all. Under such circumstances, it could no longer be an ordinary situation for the head of the organization to be absent for such a long period of time.

Munakata replied in a low voice.

"Framework."

"Eh?"

Munakata responded to Domyoji.

"I'm thinking of removing the frame."

Domyoji opened his mouth and everyone else looked confused.

They just didn't understand the meaning.

What was the Captain saying?

Wrapped in such a sign, Awashima's embarrassed expression and Fushimi's grumpy face grew stronger and stronger.

At that point, Himori Akiyama and Yujiro Benzai looked at each other slightly. Like Awashima and Fushimi, the two of them had been talking to Munakata about this matter for quite some time.

Akiyama confirmed on behalf of the two.

"Captain."

"What's going on?"

"You can come back one day, right?"

"....."

There was a gap for a moment. Eventually...

"That's how it is."

Munakata closed his eyes and answered.

"I want to do that."

Everyone in attendance felt that there was no clear conviction in Munakata's words, and the place calmed down as if he had touched water.

That was what happened two months ago.

Then one day, Munakata disappeared. They didn't know where he went or what he was doing.

However, due to careful transfer of work and division of labor by business class, the "Scepter 4" role continued to operate without being significantly affected.

Fushimi, on the other hand...

"Is it a journey to find yourself?"

Although he was ironic with his boss, he took the initiative to make up for Munakata's absence.

However, the agitation at work was minimal, but the feeling of each member was not.

Some felt uncomfortable and others were angry.

Awashima was trying to answer questions from various members, such as:

"Why did the Captain disappear?" or, "What the hell is he doing now?"

Of course, Awashima was properly convinced and supported Munakata. She believed that he understood Munakata's intent and purpose.

However, she did not know how to convey it to others.

In short, Munakata's reason for leaving was no doubt "a journey to find himself", as Fushimi mentioned.

However, the fate and future of this country may depend on the "journey to find oneself". Fushimi knew this too, so he followed Munakata's decision, even though he complained.

Awashima, on the other hand...

"The director has a deep thought. We will continue to protect the cause as "Scepter 4" so that he can return at any time."

That's what she said to inspire everyone and fulfilled her duties as interim director.

Actually, there was a mountain of things to do. Though the Slate's influence has waned, Strain's crimes have not gone away.

Negotiations with the public authority and supervision of the members. She went places she hadn't been before. She realized the greatness of the man named Reisi Munakata once again. Still, there were talented men like Fushimi, Akiyama, and Benzai as Awashima's assistants.

It was not painful to do the hard work every day due to the skill of the staff.

Just one point.

It was a small event, but there was an event that made Awashima very upset.

Namely...

She gained weight.

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There was no doubt that Awashima got on a scale every morning to manage her physical condition. There were fluctuations in the numbers that had not changed in the last three years.

The rate of increase was a few percent, but it was a terrible situation.

At first she thought it was temporary, but there was no sign of the increased numbers slowing down at all.

What was the reason?

Was it due to changes in functions or increased stress?

It was not unthinkable, but Awashima herself immediately denied that possibility. She said it herself, but it wasn't that smooth. There was nothing wrong with that amount of work.

Awashima thought about the athletic club, so she decided to tighten her body right away.

She went to the "Scepter 4" dojo, she took a bamboo sword and sweated with the members during training. Since she meant it, Zenjo was there as a teacher.

"That's a good lunge. You've put your weight back on your foot."

She was praised, but...

(What's wrong with this person? Rubbing? Or rather, did I get fat enough to understand Zenjo-san?)

In Awashima's mind, such an idea seemed paranoid. She did the best she could for about two weeks, but the results were not very good. She had gained a bit of weight.

At that stage, Awashima was beginning to feel a bit impatient.

She reviewed her life in various ways. She especially examines her eating habits.

Awashima has been a frequent drive-thru since she was a student. She adhered to her parents' teaching that diet is important for physical and mental health, and she tried to get a good balance of nutrients like protein, fat, vitamins, and carbohydrates.

One night, Awashima remembered her day. First, she got up at 6 o'clock. After light exercise, she ate brown rice, vegetable soup, pickled bran with bacon, and egg in the dining room attached to "Scepter 4's" bedroom.

After that, she went to work and bought Cobb salad and tomato juice at a convenience store around 1:00 p.m.

She returned to the bedroom at 7:00 p.m. and ate corn and brown rice stew. A small amount of meaty potatoes and Chinese-style noodles. She roughly calculated the calories in her head, but she didn't think there was a fat factor.

Awashima took a shower, put on a bathrobe, and returned to the living room with a towel around her head, then pondered various things.

She didn't feel like there was a catch somewhere.

"Hmm."

It was the only time in a day that she could feel relieved.

She got a good bean paste, so she enjoys freezing it a bit to make anko ice cream with a crunchy texture.

Awashima thought as she poked the huge bean paste ice cream into the bowl with a spoon.

Where is the calorie well?

Although she was restraining herself every day.

And at that moment, Awashima's brain finally reached the answer. Her face was tight.

"Maybe..."

She brings a spoon full of red bean paste in front of her and looks at it.

"Is this the cause?"

It was a cruel truth.

Anko has calories.

That's pretty good too.

Awashima completely forgot about the fact that even elementary school students can understand it.

For Awashima, red bean paste was air and water. It was a necessary item to be ingested as a matter of course, and she was unaware that it contained such impurities as calories.

When she was still little, she ate an anko rice cake made at her parents' Japanese sweet shop and opened her eyes to the delight. Since then, she had been flattening a large amount of red bean paste. The anko was always with her when something was difficult and when she was happy. The anko was a friend, a healing and a life.

Namely...

That had calories!

What an unreasonable act!

Awashima suffered for almost a day, and her feelings for a diet exceeded her desire for red bean paste, and she decided to give up red bean paste for a while.

The daughter of a long-established Japanese sweet shop, she boiled red bean paste and brought it to school with her lunch when she was a student. Currently, she continues to consume more than 100 kg of red bean paste each year. One day, her mother said with a sigh.

"In your body, surely bean paste flows instead of blood."

Awashima, an elite of that genuine bean paste, rejected the bean paste, so the reaction was intense.

Her head and shoulders weighed more than they were, she didn't feel well, and the whole world looked confused.

Fortunately, the situation still hadn't hampered her work, but she was afraid of making some serious mistakes.

Anko?

Was it because of her weight?

One night, when Awashima, who was suffering from withdrawal, finished her work, she headed to the HOMRA Bar. When she noticed, she rang the doorbell and entered the store, but she was probably subconsciously trying to quench her thirst for red bean paste with alcohol.

"Oh, Seri-chan. It's been a long time."

Kusanagi, who was cleaning a glass on the counter, recognized Awashima and smiled.

Recently, they hadn't seen each other much because she had been busy with work, but sometimes as a place to gather information, sometimes completely private, Awashima visited this bar regularly.

After the final battle with the Green clan, the Red clan and the Blue clan did not have any particular conflict on the front or the back.

There's also a part where the clan members were able to talk to each other due to the experience of establishing a joint front, and probably the important thing is that Reisi Munakata and Anna Kushina aren't in a relationship where they bump into each other in the first place.

Both sides now have a sense of polite distance that draws a line. Between them, Kusanagi and Awashima continued in contact in a slightly special standing position.

Kusanagi is serious and sometimes asks Awashima out on a date with a tone that she doesn't know if it's serious or joking. Awashima also handled it well, and in some cases offered serious consultation.

They were the number two of each clan, they were the owner and guest of the bar, and they still had a relationship that they couldn't express themselves.

So, Awashima knew immediately.

"Kusanagi-kun. Are you a bit tired?"

She asked as she sat down on the stool in front of the counter.

"Yes."

Kusanagi smiled bitterly.

"Do you have a perspective, Seri-chan?"

"What happened?"

Awashima asked carefully. Kusanagi hesitated for a moment. So he looked a bit shy.

"No, it's not a big deal. I'm trying to quit smoking."

Awashima was slightly surprised.

It was a strange situation.

It didn't seem possible that Kusanagi wanted to leave something like "his favorite thing".

"It's funny. A good-aged adult acting like this... You may think it's just a cigarette, but after you quit, you get a weird feeling."

"No."

Awashima responded with a voice that killed her emotions.

"Yes, I understand."

Actually, she wanted to tell Kusanagi everything. That she was having bean paste withdrawal for a reason. However, that mysterious relationship with Kusanagi prevented her from saying so. Awashima clenched her fist tightly.

Kusanagi felt strange for a moment seeing Awashima's situation, but immediately asked cheerfully.

"Then what are you going to want? Somehow, Seri-chan, I felt that you would come today, so I bought anko right now."

Awashima bit her lips hard.

What a cruel temptation!

She really wanted to scream.

"Anything! Anything with red bean paste!"

However, Awashima, a strong-willed adult woman, replied:

"I'm not feeling like that today, so can I have a regular martini?"

Was it just a little?

It was completely self-controlled, except the ending wobbled just a bit.

Kusanagi had round eyes.

"Yes."

What's the matter? Is it bad for your body?

He believed that she wanted to hear that. However, Kusanagi immediately swallowed the word.

"I understand."

He smiled kindly.

Maybe he guessed the reason why Awashima didn't order red bean paste momentarily.

And not at all, pretending not to know or notice, he silently began to make the cocktail.

Kusanagi's side was a bit hateful and a relief.

Before long, Awashima drank the translucent liquid in the cocktail glass placed in front of her in almost a breath.

After all, that day, there were no customers at the bar, and Awashima spent time with Kusanagi one on one. It was a gloomy and strange space where the master and the client had few words and alternately sighed.

It was the moment when Awashima paid the bill and tried to leave the store at the right time.

Anna Kushina, the "Red King", walked up to Awashima and looked into her face.

"Ah, "Red King"."

Awashima nodded, but Anna was looking at Awashima with a frown that she was worried about.

By the way, she was behaving strangely earlier. The footsteps gently descended from the second floor, but as soon as she saw Awashima, she turned around, turned right, and went back.

She was wondering if she avoided her because of the heavy atmosphere with Kusanagi.

"What's going on?"

Awashima got suspicious and asked:

"Seri."

Anna said in a slightly scared voice.

"Did you go to a strange place recently?"

"Eh?"

Anna said like a tongue twister.

"You'd better go to the shrine. As soon as possible."

She could leave it as it was. No, she was running away.

Awashima opened her mouth and stiffened her back.

Kusanagi, who couldn't hear the exchange between the two, was sighing again at the counter.

Awashima knows that Anna Kushina has a special power.

What did that mean?

If she were to take the words at face value, Awashima would now be in a state where purification is necessary, meaning "something is possessed".

Could it be true?

Anna shook her head with a frightening face, no, to be exact, she was looking at the back of her face.

Actually, she didn't even remember.

In the last two months she visited an abandoned house where about three people died and a forest famous as a psychic place, depending on the circumstances of her performance.

It is true that after she went there, they took her away in the middle of the night.

She felt a strange signal when she was taking a shower.

Above all, her weight began to increase.

Fear in various ways began to dominate Awashima's head. But where should she go, what would the purification look like?

It was when she was thinking about it in the "Scepter 4" break room with so much trouble.

"Oh, Lieutenant, can we come in?"

A member called out with a loud voice. Looking at them, Goto and Hidaka stood up.

"What happened?"

There was still time on her original shift. Was it also a query?

"What happened?"

The worrying thing was that Goto was holding something like a strange machine.

The basic shape was a cylinder, but many colorful wire-like lines were twisted on the metallic surface. Should she call it a cutting edge object?

Also, a meter-like thing was embedded in the center, and it rotated all the time.

"What's that?"

Awashima frowned and asked.

"Oh."

Hidaka made a voice that seemed to be in trouble. Goto answered categorically.

"It's a ghost detector."

"Eh?"

Awashima made a harsh voice. Hidaka inserted the explanation as if he was in a hurry.

"No, sorry. Actually, Gotti... I was in Goto's room with two people, but all of a sudden this started working without permission."

Goto explained at his own pace.

"This is a device that detects and tracks spirits. I bought it at an antique shop in Shizume."

"So, if you follow the direction this machine is pointing..."

Hidaka looked at them with a complicated line of sight. Awashima was convinced.

"I was there."

The two replied with the same voice, "Yes." Awashima thought. She knew well that Goto was collecting mystery show goods and hidden goods.

It was suspicious no matter how she looked at it, and it smelled like dust.

Nevertheless...

(Maybe it really has some power?)

She casually touched the protruding wire-like tip.

At that moment...

A shock that made static electricity hundreds of times stronger with a ridiculous noise that could not be described as bachin, tomo, or zuban pierced through Awashima's body.

"Lieutenant?!"

"Now I'm acting as director!"

Hidaka and Goto hurriedly approached Awashima. At the end of the reflection on the retina, Awashima's consciousness cut off.

Since the conclusion, Awashima had been crushed for about 10 seconds. Awashima got up after checking on Hidaka and Goto, who were worried and apologized.

From that moment on, she felt as refreshed and lightened as she had never felt before.

After that, she asked her GP to see her just in case, but there was no problem.

Awashima had a premonition.

After work, she came home and got on the scale. And the feeling of relief, joy and omnipotence when she reviewed the result was indescribable.

Her weight was completely restored.

Awashima dropped to the ground, hopped on her toes, and did a pirouette. She then went straight to the fridge, took out the red bean paste that had been sitting in for a long time and enjoyed it to the fullest.

It was so delicious that tears came to her eyes.

Honestly, she wasn't sure what happened. Awashima was obsessed with something, and she weighed more by that. And, as a result, she was exorcised by touching Goto's spirit detector.

She could imagine that, but the facts were not very important to Awashima.

The important thing is that her body had been restored to eat red bean paste again.

By the way, it seems that the ghost detector on Goto was destroyed by that impact.

Awashima generously offered compensation, and instead she made Goto afraid.

And one night when she was visiting the HOMRA bar, as soon as she sat down at the counter,

"Kusanagi-kun. A Martini with anko. Anko. Twice as usual!"

She declares that. Kusanagi was still trying to quit smoking, with a face that didn't have much courage.

"Haha, Seri-chan. I think you're fine today."

Hearing that, Awashima clearly laughed.

"Yes. I am very happy to eat what I love to my heart's content."

Kusanagi smiled a bitter smile and closed his eyes.

It will continue in Chapter 3, "Kusanagi's Smoking Cessation and the Days of Homura".