



K - ONE YEAR LATER:

CHAPTER 7: NIGHT OF MEMORIES (BY TATSUKI MIYAZAWA)

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K-PROJECT WORLD

A year has passed since then.

The sports store where Misaki Yata is currently working is not a famous store nor is it located in a large shopping mall, it is an old-fashioned two-story community store in a corner of the shopping district.

The store manager is a former professional baseball player and took over the sports store, which is a family business, after he retired. Inevitably, baseball tools are the most substantial, but there are plenty of other sports supplies.

Also, Yata participated in a skateboarding competition, so he was willing to take a break from time to time, and he actively supported him.

In a very understandable workplace, Yata, who had held relatively different part-time jobs, has been working very seriously.

That day, he worked from ten in the morning until night. After getting off work, Yata felt a little peckish, so he ordered a menchi-katsu from a nearby garnish shop, and strolled through the shopping district while he munched.

This shopping street in Shizume has many old-fashioned shops, such as a rare cafe, a second-hand bookstore that has been in business for fifty years, and a fishmonger run by a kind-hearted general.

Among them, Yata found a store that caught his attention. It was a toy store with a retro-toned neon sign that said "Retro Store."

If you look in the splash window, you will find the retro anime Chogokin that aired about 20 years ago and board games that have been discontinued long ago.

Yata was curious and entered the store.

Glass covered shelves act as partitions to form narrow aisles. And on the shelves, monster figures, plastic model submarines, and sofubi dolls that couldn't be seen at all, but the characters were stacked and neatly lined up.

To be honest, young Yata did not feel any homesickness because there were only antiques that were out of reach.

However, Yata, who was looking at it with a feeling of "Oh, there is such a thing.", suddenly stopped and said:

"Wow!"

His eyes lit up.

At the end of his gaze was the hardware and some of the computer game software that had once ruled the world. Those mysteriously increased Yata's heartbeat.

"Oh, how nostalgic."

He said that unintentionally. To be precise, these game consoles were top sellers when Yata's parents were children.

However, Yata had a special feeling for this game console. When he first entered "Homura", he got these games in the retro genre at that time, and he was very addicted to staying up all night.

And the existence of a close friend who kept him company even though he complained about his stupidity.

It was an exciting day for Yata.

When he noticed, he was calling for the bearded manager, who was at the counter.

"Hm, how much does it cost to buy all this?"

+++++

After finishing his shift, Fushimi Saruhiko dressed in civilian clothes and bought chuhai, beer, and some snacks at a convenience store, then headed to a multi-tenant building on the outskirts of Shizume.

It was 9:30 at night.

Stainless steel tenant signs at the first-floor entrance were lined with obscure company names such as "Waraji Specialty Sales Company", "Ponpon Mail Order" and "Goriki Shoji".

Fushimi took an old-fashioned elevator that made him hesitate to go up and went up to the top floor.

"You Law Office" was written on the frosted glass in front of him. However, it seemed that everyone had already left work, and it was completely dark inside.

Fushimi walked up the stairs on the side of the building slowly and with a serious look.

He pushed open the heavy door. Then, immediately, he could see the ceiling covered in moonlight.

"It's still a strange place."

Fushimi laughed.

The rooftop of this multi-tenant building, about 90 square meters, was the entire residence of Yata Misaki. The only space he could really live in was a small attic in the back that looked like a mountain lodge.

Also, a little further away, there was a locker room-sized bathroom and shower, placed side by side.

In the back space, there were benches and old tires that existed before Yata moved in, bus stop signs for some reason, tattered mannequins, heavily-graffitied beach umbrellas, stone chairs, and large foliage plants.

It was too incoherent and a little scary.

Fushimi said:

"Didn't the real estate agent cheat on you?"

Despite what he told him to his face, Yata liked this living environment.

The reasons can be broadly divided into two: One is that the rent is ridiculously cheap.

Another thing is that the ground floor is unpopular at night, so there were no complaints, even if he was a bit noisy.

Therefore, recently, Yata enlisted the help of Kamamoto and Fujishima, who is good at carpentry, to build his own skateboard track and practice tricks night after night.

Fushimi walked up the handmade wooden skateboard ramp (a structure that looks like an ellipse split in two, which allows for tricks like jumping while sliding left and right on a curved surface) to the attic in the back, then called at the door of cheap construction.

Almost immediately,

"I'm going!"

Yata opened the door with a big smile on his face. As he exhaled, his eyes lit up and he beckoned him with a "pon, pon" gesture.

Fushimi laughed a little, thinking that he was like a dog patiently waiting for his master to return.

The attic where Yata lives has about eight tatami mats, but it also has a mini kitchen and a small loft space. Yata usually puts a futon in the loft space and sleeps there.

Inevitably, the space below was the kitchen, dining room, and living room. Eating and drinking is done at a small chabudai. There are two cushions next to it. One had a cool arabesque pattern and the other was elegant with a cat character.

The difference is that both are gifts.

Speaking of gifts, the big screen television that occupies much of this room was an heirloom from Izumo Kusanagi.

The shelf along the wall is made of pipes, and above it is a wide range of items, from laundry baskets to clear jars filled with sweets once collected, a collection of battle-focused manga, and a wide range of skate magazines.

The small refrigerator was decorated with photos of "Homura" members taken at their travel destinations sandwiched between magnets.

The room was messy as a whole, but the room had a somewhat tidy impression, perhaps reflecting the owner's temperament.

Yata has long since grown up, but his youthful mischief still lingers in the atmosphere of the room.

Fushimi thought, "It's still like a child's room."

Yata took the plastic bag that Fushimi gave him and...

"Oh, alcohol? Thanks, Saruhiko. But I don't feel like that today."

He said that while he was putting alcohol in the fridge.

"Huh? So how do you feel?"

He invited him saying, "Let's have a drink party.". Fushimi's face turned a bit sullen. Yata was...

"Hehe."

With a mischievous look on his face, he handed Fushimi a can of juice instead of alcoholic beverages.

"A drinking party is a drinking party, but today is this."

Fushimi took the item that was handed to him and...

"Watercarian? Is there a place that still sells this?"

He couldn't help but laugh.

It was the carbonated drink that Yata and Fushimi had become addicted to when they started living together.

The name of the product is Watercarian and the can packaging has red and green stripes, so it looks like watermelon juice, but the aftertaste is strangely medicinal. A strong sour taste hit his nose.

It is still a hot topic on the internet as a representative of "bad juice". At first, both Yata and Fushimi drank it as a punishing game with each other, but they gradually became captivated by its strangely addictive taste and eventually drank it regularly.

"Well, naturally, I somehow stopped drinking Watercarian."

Fushimi muttered under his breath.

It was before the two entered "Homura" together.

He didn't stop drinking that peculiar juice before he knew it.

"Besides, that's not all."

Yata was in a good mood and threw another snack in front of Fushimi.

"Takoyaki and grilled squid sandwiches, huh?"

That was also a sweet that both of them were addicted to at the same time. The rich flavor of the sauce laced his mouth, and it was an odd combination with the watercarian, which tasted extravagant.

"Finally. Check this out."

Yata then pointed to a retro game console that had already been set up in front of the TV.

"Isn't that great? I've already confirmed that it works properly."

"I see."

Fushimi's eyes narrowed as he realized what Yata had prepared for tonight.

"In other words, let's dive into nostalgic stuff."

"Oh, that's right."

"Tsk."

Fushimi clicked his tongue once.

"What nonsense."

But his tone was never harsh.

Fushimi received a set of jerseys from Yata and exchanged them. Instead of wanting to be relaxed, he didn't want his clothes to get dirty while he ate snacks or juice.

Yata also had a similar appearance.

Now that he thought about it, even when they lived together, there was a time when they spent the whole day casually chatting with each other in casual clothes like that.

"Good. This is the first."

Yata first chose a fighting game. He inserted the cassette into the retro game machine.

After turning on and waiting for a while, an old-fashioned dotted image appeared on the TV screen and cheap electronic sound played on the speaker.

"Certainly, it's nostalgic."

Yata laughed when Fushimi muttered that under his breath. This fighting game is a popular series that continues even now, and Yata and Fushimi were direct hits around the fourth and fifth generations.

He recalled that when he was in high school, he honed his interpersonal fighting skills on the Internet and in game centers.

What is currently being shown on television was the first generation of that work.

"Then I'll take this guy as usual."

A macho character to whom Yata makes thorns sprout from his body.

"Well, according to theory, I'm this one."

Fushimi chose a magical character with complicated moves.

Each of them is a popular character that continues to be used in the current series. The game starts with stage selection and the start button.

Yata leaned forward slightly, while Fushimi corrected his posture and concentrated on the game. Every time they waved their fingertips, the characters flew around the screen, throwing punches, emitting beams of light, and burning their opponents with waves of heat.

"Shit, this!"

"....."

Yata's style of play is attractive. Fushimi is cool, but when he's outnumbered, he frowns a bit.

The arms of the two men were even. Currently, in this fighting game, where the player population is spreading all over the world, it is to the extent that it is a good thing.

However, that was enough for the two of them to enjoy themselves.

Initially,

"Oh, yeah! I won."

Yata narrowly won the auction, and then...

"Fu."

Fushimi took advantage of Yata's silly mistake and attacked everyone at once. After that, he enjoyed the game, winning and losing for a while.

Oddly enough, the victory or defeat of these games has rarely caused a dangerous atmosphere for both of them for a long time.

Both Yata and Fushimi weren't fully trained as humans as teenagers, but for some reason, losing to each other didn't bother them as much.

Yata laughed when an unusual move came out, and Fushimi also shook his shoulders in an unusual way, and the game was temporarily interrupted.

And then they took a break.

They ate takoyaki and squid sandwiches and drank watercarian.

The takoyaki and squid sandwiches were delicious even now, but the problem was that they fell apart and the sauce stuck to your hands.

Fushimi frequently wiped his hands with a damp handkerchief, while Yata once vigorously spilled it on the chabudai, then wiped it with his hand and threw it into the trash can he had brought nearby beforehand.

And the watercarian tasted weird like always.

"It's really bad."

"Yes."

Yata and Fushimi nodded to each other, yet drank their respective portions with oddly satisfied expressions.

After eating and drinking, the fighting game resumed.

The two of them enjoyed playing shooting games, racing games, and even novel-type horror games by replacing the cassettes and forgetting about time.

A few hours later, the two of them left the attic and found themselves under the starry sky of the city.

It's not that they were "tired of the game" or "got tired", they were just "satisfied with the game".

It was a feeling of satisfaction.

On the other hand, they were lounging on the couch, which had been out in the open for some time, and were rambling on.

The drinks were chuhai and beer that Fushimi had bought from a store. The snacks were also changing to something that went well with sake, like a variety of nuts and salami.

"It's stupid, why are we so obsessed with such old games?"

Yata looked up at the night sky and said something a bit strange. Looking back, he felt that the time he was actually working was a very short period of time, around three months.

However, during that time, he remembered staying up all night many times.

"Uh."

Fushimi lightly sipped the chuhai before replying.

"I guess it's the same feeling as if you were making fun of a movie. Because it's cheap, there are several complaints, but on the contrary, it's interesting."

"Oh, I kind of understand that."

Yata said that in a slightly sleepy tone.

"That's why it wouldn't be very interesting to do it alone."

Fushimi didn't reply, but Yata didn't seem to care.

He sat up and looked at Fushimi again.

"By the way, how are you doing lately?"

"Eh?"

"In fact, the store manager is inviting me to become a full-time employee."

Fushimi was silent for a moment. Later...

"Isn't it okay if you do what you like?"

For someone who doesn't know Fushimi very well, he gave an answer that sounded cold.

Yata smiled slightly.

"There will be a big competition next time. Either way, I'll wait until it's over. I'll reply to the manager after that."

Fushimi silently tossed the nuts into his mouth. Next, he looked at the skateboard ramp made by Yata and the others.

"So how are you for the final?"

Fushimi asked.

"Nothing bad."

Yata hit his left palm with his right fist. His eyes had the same glee of a bad boy that hadn't changed since they'd met.

"I'm able to do the part I was stuck on before. I'm going to win."

"Uh."

Fushimi said that without any interest.

"Well, do your best."

"Of course."

Yata smiled and showed his white teeth. Later...

"And what about you?"

Fushimi's face became a bit troubled. However, since Yata was looking at him, he couldn't help it.

"I do what I have to do. But that's it."

He responded very nonchalantly.

He looked lethargic as always. However, deep down there was a will that was cold and hard as ice.

Yata nodded loudly.

"You've always been like this, Saruhiko."

At that moment, Fushimi, who had been looking uncomfortably at that conversation, suddenly realized that it was already there and pointed his finger.

"Look. It's dawn."

"Oh, really?"

Yata headed for the east end of the rooftop. Fushimi also followed him. It was certainly dim, but twilight was slowly filtering in from across the street from the building.

Yata and Fushimi watched the scene in silence. The two of them were fascinated by the process in which the city was filled with power as if by magic, as light hit the gradually dawning sky.

Grabbing the rusty handrail, Yata said a bit embarrassed as he looked ahead.

"Saruhiko. Let's be stupid like that again, okay?"

Fushimi answered in an equally soft voice.

"Oh, that's right. Misaki."

"Yes, let's do it!"

Despite those words, Yata energetically raised his arm. Fushimi also swallowed his small yawn.

After sleeping for about three hours, he finished showering and quickly washed his face, and went down to the back of the multi-tenant building. It was eight o'clock in the morning. The streets were already full of travelers.

Yata had to go to work and prepare to open the store. Fushimi returned to the dorm once, changed into his uniform, and had a regular meeting with Awashima.

When they first entered "Homura", it was common for both of them to fall asleep and stay asleep until the afternoon.

But now it was different.

Even when they tried to recreate a nostalgic night, his eyes were already grown-up and sleepy.

"See you later."

Yata raised a small fist. Fushimi hit his fist with his fist.

"Yes."

Then the two started walking in their respective directions. Because there was definitely something in their hearts and they could trust each other.

It will continue in chapter eight: "The place where I belong".