



THE FIRST STORY
RAIRAKU REI / GoRA

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K – PROJECT WORLD

CHAPTER 11: THE NIGHT BEFORE

Awashima bowed deeply into the command car parked in front of the Gakuenjima bridge.

"I'm sorry. Not only did I let the 'Red King' escape, but I also made this happen... it's all my responsibility."

"The expression on your face accepting such humiliation is not all bad."

Before Awashima seriously apologized, Munakata joined his hands and said that with a serious face.

"Captain."

"Feeling responsible for not being able to stop the 'Red King' is a sign of considerable arrogance."

The apology became an advance and she turned her eyes to guilt, but Awashima lowered her eyes again without saying anything to return to the lines of Munakata.

"Yes."

Awashima received it mysteriously, understanding that it was not an unstoppable mistake, but a reckless attempt to stop him.

Munakata stood up silently and left the command vehicle without further pursuit or mention.

"Still, it was troublesome."

Awashima also got out of the command car following Munakata and stayed a bit behind. Munakata looked towards Gakuenjima in cloudy weather. The panic that might have happened there couldn't be seen from here, and the island beyond the connecting bridge was silent in the middle of the sea.

But now that island is in danger of ending even this country.

Munakata opened his mouth with a sharper light in his eyes.

"The 'Red King' Mikoto Suoh occupies the school island. The purpose remains..."

"Capture Totsuka Tatara's killer."

"That's right... But if that person was another 'King', it would be really annoying."

"You mean the 'Colorless King'?"

Before Awashima, who said that with a firm expression, Munakata continued speaking.

"Unlike other kings, the Seventh King, the 'Colorless King', develops his own unique abilities with each substitution of him. You won't know what he looks like until he appears."

"A trickster who stirs up relations between 'kings'. He's like a joker in a deck of cards."

"Awashima-kun, I hate the joker. That smells like deception... I feel like he lacks justice. Especially when he's out of my hands."

Awashima was a bit surprised to see that he was blatantly thinking that it would be fair if he had the joker. However, even though she thinks he's pretty badass, she doesn't think he's wrong.

Munakata sighed a bit frustratingly, which was unusual for him.

"Well, it would be much easier if he remained secluded in the mountains like his predecessor Ichigen Miwa."

"An unpredictable 'Colorless King' is added to the 'Red King', which is equivalent to a bomb on the verge of detonation. I must say that this situation is extremely dangerous."

"Because we have not been able to capture the existence of the 'Colorless King', we have no choice but to hold down the 'Red King'. A full-scale collision with the Red Clan is inevitable."

By confirming the seriousness of the current situation, she was prepared. Awashima turns to Munakata, lines up her legs and stretches her spine.

"All units are ready for battle. You can give the order whenever you want."

Munakata looked back at Awashima after a brief pause.

"Awashima-kun. Can I make a rather selfish request?"

Awashima was surprised by the sound of the word "selfish" that came out of Munakata's mouth. Before Awashima asked the content of the expression "selfishness", it was not an order, instruction or request, a white thing fluttered next to Munakata's face.

Munakata and Awashima looked at the sky together.

From the heavy cloudy sky, the white shards began to flicker like petals.

"Snow."

Munakata muttered like a soliloquy.

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The amount of snow that began to fall at dusk increased and piled up as if to cover the colors of the world.

Suoh was lying on the clock tower that he had knocked down, whether it started to snow or at night.

When he lay on his back on the rocky shore of the clock tower and looked up at the night sky where the snow continued to fall, he felt that the world had become two colors, black and white. The snow that touched his skin quickly melted and disappeared, but the snow that had accumulated on his clothes and hair was thickening on the board.

From the bottom, he heard small footsteps and the sound of chunks of rocky shore falling.

Suoh didn't move and was listening to the approaching noise.

However, he heard the sound of the rocky shore collapsing and reached out. What he grabbed with his left hand was Anna's hood.

"What are you doing?"

Suoh puts Anna's small body, which he clutched like a kitten, next to him and asks.

Anna blinked on the spot and looked at Suoh with a serious face.

"Because the snow piled up on Mikoto."

"What with that?"

"I'm in trouble if I can't see the color red."

Anna complained, looking very serious.

Suoh thought of the world through her eyes, which only reflected red, for a moment, but he couldn't quite imagine it, so he stopped immediately. Instead, he slightly released the power of red and the heat melted and evaporated the snow from his body.

The white snow that covered Suoh disappeared and Anna loosened her eyes a little.

"Mikoto's red is the most beautiful."

Anna said. It was like trying to give something important. Since Anna has few words, she seems like she puts an invisible power in every single word she says.

Anna lay down next to Suoh. When he reached out, she obediently put her small head on Suoh's upper arm.

"It's cold?"

"It's warm next to you. This is the only warm place."

Snuggled into Suoh's chest like a small animal, Anna closed her eyes silently.

Suoh silently looked at Anna, who closed her eyes as if she was at ease.

When he thinks about it, Anna has rarely asked Suoh for anything. The only thing she asked for was (I want Mikoto's red).

Maybe it was just that moment when she wanted to be a member of Suoh's clan.

Suoh finally heard the wish. He shared the flame with Anna and gave her what she called "red" to make her a member of his clan. He knew it was not the same as doing it to street boys in search of power, but he offered his hand on fire as she wanted.

Since then, Anna has been with Suoh. She doesn't say anything, she doesn't ask anything, she just snuggles with Suoh, she stares at Suoh's red and squints in satisfaction. Even now, even though she can see ahead of anyone, she remains silent next to Suoh.

When he was in the "Scepter 4" detention center, he remembered that Fushimi had come to see him only once. He doesn't know if it was a sweetheart-type action that he used to have in "Homura", or if he just wanted to complain, he came to the front of Suoh's cell, where no one but the members could approach him, and he threw up a few sentences, though he was strangely scared.

(Are you playing the fool?)

Unexpectedly, he thought he was a polite and serious guy.

(I wish I hadn't gathered around you with all your friends.)

He disagreed with anyone because it seemed dishonest to everyone, but he thought it was good to have someone blame him like that.

Furthermore, that revived the words of an irresponsible man who said the exact opposite of Fushimi.

(Your power is not to destroy, but to protect.)

At the very least, he made a dome-shaped shield releasing the red power with a small outlet, feeling like this. The little red shelter was warm and protected Anna from falling snow and chills.

When the falling snow approached the shield, it reflected the light and turned red, and he vaguely thought that he must smoke.

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Yata continued to look around the large school, as he skated on the roofs of the school building.

That criminal boy has yet to be found. Yata was appointed an entire island watchdog due to his mobility and good eyesight, but the job of just looking was frustrating.

Beyond the connecting bridge, "Scepter 4" is waiting. If they attack quickly, they will withdraw it, but they just line up a series of strict armored vehicles and observe this situation, and they do not move easily.

(I wonder if he will always come.)

He thought about it, and it didn't matter! He shook his head immediately.

Fiuuu fiuuu. He heard the sound of a finger whistling from a distance. Seeing that, Yata felt slightly offended. He thought he should use the PDA, and thought about ignoring it for a moment, but in the end he dutifully kicked the concrete on the rooftop and flew between the school buildings with his skateboard.

"What are you doing? I'm not a dog, so I'd like you to stop calling me that."

Upon landing, Yata sighed and looked at Kusanagi. Kusanagi, who was still in the whistling stance, laughed fearlessly.

"You are not a dog, I thought you were a crow with great night vision. What did you observe?"

"There is nothing unusual on the island. There were some idiots trying to escape, but they weren't that damn bastard, so I tied them up and threw them into the school building. Passing the bridge, it seems the Blues have the area completely surrounded."

Kusanagi took out the cigarette and it was probably troublesome to use his lighter, so he moved his finger to make his own flame appear from his fingertips and set it on fire. Yata, who doesn't smoke, secretly thought that the way he used his fingertips like flint was great.

"If we do face it, this time it will be a full-scale war."

"I say let's go get them!"

Yata clenched his fist with all his might at the words Kusanagi spoke as he exhaled smoke.

"I can't wait for it."

Fighting spirit boiled up and the power of red seeped out from the body, enveloping Yata's entire body in a faint red. Kusanagi shrugged and laughed a little.

"Don't get excited. You really do a better job when the blood circulates less through your head."

"It's hard to stay calm at a time like this!"

"Yata-chan, you'd be better off if you weren't such an idiot. But it wouldn't be you, if you weren't an idiot."

When Yata was congested and about to scream, Kusanagi suddenly looked at Yata with a slight smile and seemed to be cheering him on.

"You especially get excited when Fushimi is involved. Well, I can't blame you since they used to be partners."

For a moment, deep in Yata's eyes, he took the hand that held Suoh's flame, accepted Suoh's flame, and the moment he got the mark, the scene flashed.

(Yeah! This is a genuine companion!)

When you pass through the Suoh installation, you will see a tattoo-like "mark" in the shape of a flame somewhere on your body. Yata is proud of it, which is proof of the above.

When Yata graduated from high school, he and Fushimi received the installation from Suoh, and at the same time, they both received a mark under the left clavicle in the same place.

He remembers Kusanagi, who was watching them, saying that it was the first time that someone got the "mark" in the same place where the other's was.

Yata was happy that he seemed to prove that he was a partner of Fushimi.

When the feelings at that moment seemed to revive, Yata bit the surging emotions and said to Kusanagi forcefully.

"No matter how much you say it, it sucks."

Fushimi's finger with flames. A flame that crushed the "mark". A smile that looked at him with contempt.

Yata fought back bitterly, recalling the scenes he wanted to forget in a chain reaction.

"Besides, he was the one who betrayed me first."

Kusanagi glanced at Yata and shrugged a little.

"By the way, since you will be guarding the area for the rest of the night, there is something I would like you to do."

Kusanagi easily changed the story, turned his face to Yata and spoke.

Yata opened his eyes to the content.

"Eh? Why is it like this...!"

"There was a request for a 'personal meeting' in route from the lieutenant over there for me."

"Why don't you get it?"

Kusanagi forgave the yapping Yata with a smile. Kusanagi sometimes showed him a smile that he didn't know what he was thinking.

"The next time we meet face to face, it will be a war without questions. If you want to talk before that, you can't."

"But..."

"It is a violation of the rules to attack the messenger in war... But if other people know about it, I will have the same revulsion as you. Keep this matter here alone."

Kusanagi seemed to accept it and touched Yata's shoulder when he closed his mouth without complaint.

"Trust me, Yatagarasu."

Kusanagi called Yata's nickname and stepped away from the rooftop.

Yata, who was left alone, was silent for a while and then shook his tongue.

(From now on, the "Blue King" will come alone to this island.)

He remembered the words he had heard from Kusanagi and threw them away.

Yata does not like the "Blue King". He just doesn't like him, and he feels like he's going to take important things away from Yata, because he's going to attach a flirtation to Suoh, whom Yata respects more than anyone else.

Yata squeezed his eyes shut.

As he talks to Kusanagi, memories that he did not want to remember came to mind and they did not disappear.

Until a few years ago, Yata and Fushimi were best friends.

They met in middle school and spent their youth together. The two of them were holding something that surrendered to each other, but they could breathe well side by side and they had a great dream if they were together.

Yata still doesn't know where something went wrong.

He was in the back alley in front of the HOMRA bar where he ended up with Fushimi.

"I joined 'Scepter 4'." Said Fushimi. For Yata, it was a declaration of war in his ears.

"Bastard, what's wrong with you now?"

After being stunned for a moment, blood suddenly spilled over his head and Yata grabbed Fushimi's chest and squeezed it. Fushimi didn't move and looked at Yata with icy eyes.

"Didn't you hear me? I joined 'Scepter 4'."

"What for?! Why did you betray me? Depending on why..."

When he shook him hard, he swayed while Fushimi swayed, and was looking at Yata with rumored eyes seemingly distant from him.

He was shaken by Yata's hand and his neck was exposed, revealing the "mark" of "Homura" under Fushimi's left clavicle. The pride of "Homura", who is in the same place as Yata, and a test of Yata's partner.

When he left, Yata put his fist on Fushimi's "mark" and pushed hard.

"This is a sign, probably our pride! Even though I have this on my chest, why you...?"

"Pride?"

He asked Fushimi's voice, which turned wetter. Somehow, it was a voice that pushed through the emotions that Yata didn't really understand.

The fingertips of Fushimi's right hand harbored flames. Yata was confused when he saw the tips of his five muscular fingers emitting red flames. He had often seen red power in his knives during battle, but this was the first time he had seen Fushimi use this type of flame.

Facing Yata, who forgot his anger for a moment and waited for Fushimi's next behavior, Fushimi put his burning fingers on the "mark" below his collarbone and scratched his hard.

He heard a burning sound on his skin.

The "mark" was on fire. It should be hot. It should hurt. However, Fushimi scratched the "mark" up and down with a distorted smile as he sweated.

He drew a red-black burnt line at the "mark", as if it were a strikethrough.

Yata's entire body was bleeding. His limbs grew cold and didn't move well, and his lips trembled. The scent of Fushimi burning his skin drifted to the tip of his nose and he felt the rocking motion in front of him.

"Ah... the pride you say has collapsed, Misaki?"

Fushimi said. Fushimi's voice was slightly hummed with a smile, probably because he was encouraged to endure the pain.

Yata was beginning to lose track of her feelings, whether it was anger, sadness, or despair.

However, even when Fushimi hurt himself so terribly, he was ignorant of the fact that he was trying to destroy "Homura's" pride and Yata's essence.

Fushimi continued speaking with a distorted smile.

"You ask me why I betrayed you? Because this is stupid. Although we have a special power, everything we do is play punks and gangsters. I really suck in 'Homura'."

Yata's emotions, which had been scattered and disturbed, slowly integrate into one. He was angry. Anger rebuilt Yata, who was about to collapse, and gave him some power in his abandoned childlike mind.

Fushimi desecrated what Suoh gave him, which Yata prized above all else. Fushimi imitated spitting at Suoh, who gave birth to Yata's locked world.

"Saru! Even though you were picked up from the street by Mikoto-san, how dare you be disrespectful to 'Homura'?"

In response to Yata's anger, Yata's red power overflowed to the surface of his body and he burned. He dissipates the heat to evaporate the tears that had risen.

He looked into the eyes of the man who once called his partner with the intention of shooting.

Fushimi shook his shoulders and laughed out loud. His eyes glowed with a dark light, but he lifted the edge of his mouth satisfactorily.

"That's right, Misaki. Don't laugh, look at me all the time."

"Damn traitor... I'll kill you...!"

The path between the two was divided.

Unable to understand what Fushimi was thinking, Yata suffered the sensation of ripping out his internal organs over and over again. He wondered why, he went to the place they shared and gritted his teeth.

(But that's okay. If you want me to look angry, I will. If you stand in front of me, I will crush you.)

Shaking off the pain in his chest, Yata took off across the sea.

At the end of the Black Sea, a group of blue lights lit by "Scepter 4's" armored vehicle floated in a row.

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Munakata, who arrived on the island in a small boat at midnight, thanked Kusanagi for welcoming him with a slight bow of his head.

Kusanagi replied with just a small bow and started walking without exchanging words.

Kusanagi took the lead, followed by Munakata. The snow flickered but kept falling.

Instead of going to the school building, he was heading to the shrine at the back of the island in a wooded area so as not to bump into other members.

"Wait here."

In front of the stone steps of the shrine, Kusanagi turned around, letting out only a minimum of words. The fact that he was on the brink of war was taken into account, not himself, but Kusanagi was called from behind when he was about to leave.

"Why?"

Kusanagi stopped and looked back. The orderly "King", dressed in a blue uniform, looked a little different than the usual Kusanagi knew, irreverent man, calm and serene, transcendental. There was even a childish atmosphere that he kept asking why he didn't understand.

"You know what he's waiting for at the end of this rebellion, right?"

When asked directly, Kusanagi did not have an answer. His question was correct, but he thought that Kusanagi would not be convinced when he answered.

"Breathing and living is crazy."

To say that, Munakata had an expression that was the opposite of what he was convinced of, and made an icy voice.

"So you're dying to 'live' as you call it? Involve unrelated students and endanger the lives of hundreds of thousands of countless citizens?"

Kusanagi smiled silently with a slight smile. He wasn't afraid to hear legitimate accusations from him, but he didn't mean to argue, so he chose silence.

Seeing Kusanagi like this, Munakata erased the irritation and discomfort from his facial expression and said in a simple voice.

"If you are so stubborn, why did you accept my offer?"

"Because you came to speak to him as an individual, not as a 'King'. I have neither the right nor the will to reject you, and I prefer that you see him."

Munakata said nothing more. Kusanagi started walking leaving him this time.

Kusanagi broke through the bushes surrounding the shrine and headed toward Gakuenjima's front place, trampling the fine snow. Immediately after entering the gate, where a clock tower was built as a symbol in the square, but it was knocked down by a light blow of fire from Suoh, and now he was lying on his side. The collapse of the clock tower was probably still neglected there.

The menacing threat to destroy the clock tower made the noisy students quieter and easier to handle, but a bit over the top.

(King's flames are too big, right?)

Totsuka said that when he was with him.

Yes, that was the first winter that Suoh became the "Red King", and Totsuka and Kusanagi became members of the clan.

It was a flickering snow night like today, when Suoh mistakenly controlled his power and burned down an entire abandoned building.

After getting rid of the situation, Suoh, Kusanagi, and Totsuka were walking down the snowy night street. Suoh was in a bad mood, but Totsuka said with a smile as usual, "King's flames are too big, right?"

Suoh made a little irony and let out a rarely misunderstood voice: "It was bad." Totsuka laughed in amusement.

"Didn't you say you didn't like it? No one complains that firepower is too strong like the sun."

"I don't want to be like the sun."

"That's right. King is a king, not the sun, so he doesn't just keep burning, but he burns and burns as he wants."

As Suoh thinks. Kusanagi appears to be frowned upon when Suoh, who hides the urge to destroy himself, hides on the back of his chest and behaves the way he really wants.

"I hope you are a little more dexterous. I wonder if the building often burns from the impulse of things."

"King is so clumsy!"

"Hahaha.", Totsuka laughed, and Suoh hit him on the head with a "Shut up."

Then, he practiced using the flames skillfully, and Totsuka turned his palm to the sky. A flame floated on the white palm like a dot and a red pill, which transformed into a butterfly shape and fluttered. The flaming butterflies rising from the palm of his hand flutter in the flickering snow, as if they were actually alive.

"This is an unexpectedly difficult and good practice."

With a red clan flame called the "Flame of Destruction", Totsuka would often do something clean and smooth, like a child enthusiastic about working with clay. They were mostly butterflies, birds and other creatures that flew free, showing off the beauty of the color of the red flames.

Kusanagi and Suoh looked at the red butterflies flying on a winter night with their detoxified eyes. The flaming butterflies that flew while scattering sparks were somewhat blurry and cute.

"But you can do something with a terrifying flame of destruction."

"King's flames aren't all scary. It's warm and clean."

In fact, Totsuka spun a fire butterfly and wagged Kusanagi's nose, claiming it would be hot and clean.

Emerging from the thoughts of the past, Kusanagi exhaled a white breath into the cold air.

It was a snowy day like today, but when he thought that he felt much warmer than today, Kusanagi laughed softly when he found a small dome of warm colors wherever he went.

"Yes, I know. The 'King' sleeps all the time, though his vassals are hanging around."

Kusanagi shouted slightly towards the dome of red light that floated above the clock tower that lay on its side.

The dome of light was formed by Suoh's power. Suoh was lying next to Anna. The inside of the dome was hot due to the power of the red that controls the flames. The broken tiles of the clock tower were decorated white with snow, but there was no snow inside the dome, and Anna, who was lounging outside at midnight in December, did not appear to be cold at all.

"That's what it means to be a 'King'."

Kusanagi shrugged while Suoh was lying down.

"No, I think there is a problem with your image of a 'King'. Well, I'm not saying you have to work with us, but..."

Kusanagi frowned after saying that in a scared voice.

"...You are waiting?"

"Yes."

Do you think it will work?"

"Yes."

Suoh also gave a minimal answer to the questions. Kusanagi sighed with a bitter smile and lowered his eyebrows.

"Well we'll humbly do our best to catch him before then."

When he sat on a cracked tile, he turned his back on Suoh and Anna. Staring up at the night sky where the snow was falling as he felt the signs of him behind, the fluffy heat approached from behind and the fine snow that had accumulated under Kusanagi's feet began to melt. Suoh seems to have expanded the dome a bit.

He was deeply moved by the fact that he sometimes used gentle power, and was reminded of the flaming Totsuka butterflies that he once saw.

As if carried away by him, various memories so far emerged one after another in Kusanagi's head and exploded.

"When I met Totsuka, I wondered if that boy was not enough. I felt it was dangerous for him to get close, but he was happy saying that he would become a servant of the king."

Before Suoh became "King". Although he had a difficult and scary personality, he met Totsuka, a middle school student who called Suoh King and laughed at Suoh, who was just a high school student who did not carry something so troublesome and so big. It seemed like it was a long time ago, and it seems like it was yesterday.

The three of them hung out, hanging out and playing like fools. Eventually, however, Suoh became known as the "King" by people outside of Totsuka, and was chosen by the Slate and became the "Red King".

Kusanagi remembers the first time he saw the sword that appeared above Suoh's head. That day he was cloudy. In the cloudy sky that he hung low, a huge sword appeared while emitting red light. Instinctively it turned out that he ruled Suoh's fate.

Kusanagi thought that the huge red sword, which was shaped like a flame and pointed downward, was beautiful and terrifying.

"Don't put your sword to your head."

Kusanagi giggled and said that. Suoh seemed to be a bit embarrassed or confused, with an indescribable thin smile, causing flames to appear on both hands. He extended his right hand to Kusanagi, who was enveloped in the red flame, and his left hand to Totsuka.

"Would you like to hold my hand?"

The fate of Suoh, who possessed a powerful flame that could burn everything, changed, and the fate of Kusanagi and Totsuka, who held his hand, also changed.

"But you have become a literal 'King' to 'Homura'."

Those were the days of the angry clan. The number of friends and people who thought that the HOMRA bar was his home had increased. Between them, Totsuka always laughed. He kept trying to make the place where his friends gathered around Suoh a fun place.

"I thought you were a bomb that wanted to explode, not a guy who would protect or rally people, but... I guess Totsuka saw something different in you."

Suddenly, he heard Suoh laugh with only his breath behind him.

"You are more right than Totsuka."

Kusanagi also exhaled and laughed. Kusanagi himself believes so too. However, he believed that Suoh was a "King" even though he was not of that type.

"Even so, since you became 'King', you have become a weapon that shoots at enemies to protect what you need to protect, not an explosive bomb. With you and the people around you. At first, I thought that I could have a good time. "

It was fun.

Kusanagi obediently thought about it.

"Don't say that, it's irritating."

Suoh said that with a very irritated voice. Kusanagi laughed lightly this time and stood up.

"I'm sorry. When you're older, you start trying to hold on to the past."

He turned around, changed feelings, and called out to the girl next to Suoh.

"Anna, come with me."

Anna got up and looked at Kusanagi with her red eyes. Just by looking at him, Anna attended and took Kusanagi's hand as if she knew everything.

Kusanagi hugged Anna from the top of the clock tower tile, and Suoh turned off the warm red dome and lifted half of his body.

"Someone has come to see you."

He doesn't ask who he was. Suoh had a slightly subtle expression, but he silently jumped off the rocky shore.

When he told the location, Suoh said nothing and walked silently towards that place.

Looking at his back as he walked away, Kusanagi spoke words that he had never said or intended to say.

"Couldn't ask for a better king."

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He hears the sound of stepping on the snow.

Munakata was on his way to the shrine, waiting for the King of Steps. Looking down from the side, he saw a red-haired man walking through a snow-covered torii gate and up a long stone staircase.

The cold snowy night was horribly quiet, and Suoh's silent footsteps seemed to be the only sound in the world.

Even seeing Munakata, Suoh giggled a little and approached slowly without accelerating.

"I thought sharing the same air as me made you want to throw up."

"Sometimes I want to breathe poison."

Munakata laughed wryly and pulled a box of cigarettes from his chest when Suoh stopped in front of him. Facing Suoh's unexpected face, he added one and offered it to Suoh.

Suoh obediently took out the cigarette and put it in his mouth, and before Munakata reached for a lighter, he lit the tip of Munakata's cigarette with his finger. Suoh's flames turned red in front of him for a moment, and when he realized it, Munakata's cigarette was on fire. While Munakata was puzzled, Suoh laughs with an evil child face, slid down the side of him and climbed the stone steps to the top.

With some relief on his shoulders, Munakata inhaled slowly and deeply the cigarette smoke.

It was the taste of the cigarette he smoked for the first time in a long time. When he was an adult for a while, he first bought a box and smoked it to find out how he tasted, but got no more impressions than that.

He understood how to enjoy the taste and aroma, but it was not enough to balance the disadvantages they gave him and others, and he did not get into the habit of smoking.

But now, he was grateful for the cigarettes. He felt it would be a little easier to get away from his being, letting himself be carried away by the bitterness and sweetness that he felt on his tongue and the sensation that his skull was tingling.

He walked to the top of the stone steps and looked at Suoh, who shook the cigarette from him and for a moment purple smoke glowed silently.

"I'm going to get straight to the point."

Munakata said.

"Peacefully leave this school. I can't overlook the way you're involving unrelated high school students. If you do it now, he could handle this before things got out of hand."

"That's a good idea... is that what you hope it says?"

"It's not an idea, it's an ultimatum. You've gone too far, Suoh."

Suoh didn't seem to move the dust or move, and he was smoking slowly.

"That being the case, let me kill the criminal who murdered Totsuka Tatara, who calls himself the 'Colorless King'."

This time, Suoh slightly moved his expression. He looked at Munakata with a helpless and surprised face, and then laughed wryly.

"It's an interesting proposal coming from you, but... I refuse."

"I am sure you have seen the terrible form of your Sword of Damocles. The Sword is the symbol of a 'King' and manifests its true form depending on its condition. Your sword will soon fall."

"Oh, really?"

"Your deviation from Weismann is already at the limit. If the burden of killing a 'King' is applied here, it will definitely reach its limit, and you could cause a repeat of the Kagutsu crater tragedy. You no longer have any right to be 'King'."

Munakata looked at Suoh and said that out loud. He told him the same thing as in the dark detention center of "Scepter 4" with the urgency that there was no time left. He even felt like praying.

"It's time for you to resign, 'Red King'."

Suoh laughed.

"I never acted like a 'King'."

He smoked the cigarette Munakata had given him. Munakata grabbed Suoh's chest and pushed him down hard. Suoh fell backward onto the stone pavement covered in fine snow and relaxed without resistance.

Munakata bit his back teeth angrily, easily knocking him over.

Suoh was the only man who didn't always turn out as expected. Excluding the reason why Munakata preached, he fought the sword of Munakata with a fiery fist, destroying the ideal order of Munakata with chaotic violence.

Even so, Suoh was never afraid of Munakata and stood in front of Munakata. He now he was being ridden without resistance upon being defeated by Munakata. Munakata did not recall anger under justice, even personal hatred, in his attitude as if he was willing to accept anger for the destruction of sin.

The hand that grabbed Suoh's chest was shaking when he flinched because he was too strong.

"There are ordinary unrelated students here. Your men are here too."

He said to Suoh from a close distance.

"Do you understand?"

Suoh, who had been avoiding the chase with a relaxed demeanor until then, did not look away, did not move his eyes, and looked directly into Munakata's eyes closely.

As he looked at Munakata with a slight immobile eye, Suoh slowly tied his words together as if saying something.

"I'll hang my head. You'll do your job. That's it, right?"

At that moment, Munakata's entire body was struck by a feeling of helplessness that he had never felt in his life.

Munakata relaxed and released the hand that was holding Suoh's chest.

He froze and stood, aware of his emotionally heated head.

"You are a savage. You are beyond my understanding."

"Huh. Did you think you could persuade me? That's not your style."

Suoh also stood up saying that.

Not even at the gala could it be like that. He didn't understand Suoh, but he could tell that he understood him at the same time. At least he knew Suoh wouldn't bend his will here.

However, he believes it would be different if it were his own gala to surrender.

Above all, he would feel bad if he had to hit Reisi Munakata's words as an individual before facing him as the "Blue King" who championed a cause.

"Not really... I just came to see my friend."

When he turned around and said that he wasn't even at the gala, Suoh expressed his most amazing emotions. The expression quickly turned into a bitter and embarrassed smile.

Suoh dropped the cigarette he had just grabbed, and stomped on it.

"Come on."

Suoh turned his back on Munakata and said that in a soft voice.

The two of them, looking in different directions, stared at the chunks of snow falling in front of them for a while.

"Suoh, are you sure you don't change your mind?"

"I'm sure."

Munakata lowered his eyes.

The snow was a little bigger than before, and it fell softly to the ground without a sound and piled up.

The passion he simmered in Munakata had cooled, and the coldness of the snowy night had penetrated to the core of his body.

"Idiot."

The words he would normally never use disappeared as if they were absorbed by the snow.

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The exterior of the connecting bridge in Gakuenjima was surrounded by members of "Scepter 4", and the interior of the campus was guarded by members of "Homura".

However, none of them could see the "King", so by making full use of Neko's cognitive manipulation ability, they were able to reach Gakuenjima's bedroom and the place that was the boy's room without being discovered by anyone. To those who passed near the boy, they just looked like a cat, a dog, and a working garden.

"I returned!"

When he opened the door to the room he was used to living in, the words naturally leaked from the boy's mouth. However, he snuck into a scene far from the family room.

"Ah! What happened here? A thief?"

The boy's room was charred black. There was a large hole from the wall to the floor, and the rebar was exposed, and the churning snow was piling up at the edge of the room. The bed the boy was always lying on, the chabudai where he ate delicious rice with Kuro and Neko, and his favorite rice cooker were charred.

"What world would thieves blow up the wall to enter?"

Kuro said with a rough face. Certainly this high temperature burned mark is likely a powerful explosive, or the Red Clan's job to manipulate the flames at will.

When he was looking around the room, he heard Neko yell, "Nyaa!"

"My cup! She was my favorite!"

There was a broken bowl in Neko's hand. This is the bowl that was used when the three of them surrounded the chabudai and ate Kuro's homemade food. The bowl, which had been filled with white rice, was now split in half and stained black with soot. Neko was staring at the bowl in her hand with teary eyes.

The boy also lifted his tattered shirt on the ground and sighed a little.

"I desperately escaped the aircraft crash, but my homesick home ended like this..."

He was exhausted because he escaped from the helicopter involved in the accident through Kuro's ingenuity, he entered the hotel (it was a love hotel because he was not in a position to stay in a normal hotel) to recover his energy and physical strength. The boy's body was also recovering, but when he saw that this place, which was his base, was destroyed, he was disappointed.

Kuro also lowered his eyes with a harsh expression.

"We heard that Gakuenjima was occupied by 'Homura' and we hurried back, but I never imagined that the 'Red King' would show up."

"And it appears that the Blues have the entire area blocked off. Well, I'll put off looking for my true identity for now."

"This has become serious. At worst, this school could become a battlefield between clans. Perhaps we shouldn't have come here."

Neko, who was trying to hold the broken bowl together, puffed out her cheeks.

"I told you before! This is our house! It's only fair that we go back to our house!"

Looking at Neko who appealed to his claims, the boy was motivated to recover from his feelings of depression. It is not the case when he stumbles in a place like this and cannot escape from here.

The boy stood up with a strong forehead and laughed at them.

"Neko is right. We have to clean our own house. So what should we do now?"

In the middle of the boy's words, Kuro unconsciously touched his chest. The boy knew well what he was keeping there. Kuro's late master, whom he loves from the bottom of his heart. It's a voice recorder that records Ichigen Miwa's haikus.

"Would you like to ask Ichigen-san?"

When he asked him with a smile, Kuro replied, "What?" with a face that he realized what he had achieved for the first time.

"He had the power to look to the future, right? Then he could have given us some advice before our current situation."

When he thought about it, Miwa's words on the tape recorder helped him choose whether or not to kill the boy on the spot and encourage him to search for his true existence.

It was a casual question for the boy, but Kuro looked at the recorder that he took out of his pocket with a serious expression and thought for a moment.

"No, we already know what we have to do."

Kuro returned the recorder to his pocket without listening to it.

He looked directly at the boy and said.

"We have to rescue Kukuri and the others. That's obvious. You don't have to listen to Ichigen-sama's words to know that."

Kuro, who maintained his stance that Miwa Ichigen was everything and should be prioritized above all else, prioritized his own will and decision.

That fact surprised the boy a bit and encouraged him even more.

"Yes, that's right. Let's find out where Kukuri and his friends are. Neko, let's go."

"Huh? But I still haven't done..."

Neko looked down to put a stop to the bowl she was holding, that had the cracks stuck in a dangerous balance.

The boy smiled gently at Neko.

"Okay. We'll be back soon."

"Yes."

Neko still had a sad and lonely face, but she stood up. When she left the room where she lived with the boy, Neko said it was a "house" and looked sad.

"Goodbye."

She said a little goodbye, and Neko closed the bedroom door.