



## **"SIDE GOLD"**

### **CHAPTER 3: OTONO BENJI**

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

"Black market"... an illegal market. In Japan, it mainly refers to a temporary market where transactions were made at exorbitant prices compared to the official price immediately after the defeat of the war. They were crowded together in urban areas and mainly dealt with food and household items. With the revival of distribution and the abolition of price controls, the number gradually declined and, with a few exceptions, was absorbed into the permanent market system.

Otono Benji slowly raised his head in the mist.

(Again "Musikui".) Note: worm-eaten

At first, he was relieved that it was not coming towards them and it crept in the opposite direction. After doing that, he narrowed his eyes at what it was aiming for.

Beyond the thick fog... where two forces collided.

They fought big and fiercely, dispersing their power.

It was crawling around.

(I have a bad feeling about this.)

Otono took his time getting up. As he adjusted the position of the accordion he held, a murmur like a sigh filtered through the bandages.

"Wait, let's take a look... I just have a bad feeling..."

Otono began to walk, with long, thin legs and small steps.

Someone noticed.

"Hey, Ben-san is coming out."

And he called to those around him.

From deep in the mist...

"Oh, my gosh, the pot was boiling."

"Let's all eat right now."

"It's the end of the fire. Hurry up."

"Even if you don't hurry, I'll catch up with Ben-san."

"This backpack will soon wear out."

"Come on."

"Yes."

A buzz and a crowd responded.

Otono didn't look back and walked forward with long, slender legs and small steps.

Relying on something vague that only he could sense, he stepped into the mist.

"Kagirohigumi" and the "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau" clashed in a desolate wasteland at night.

On one side, fierce faces that showed fighting spirit.

On the other hand, they tried to act cool in a lineup.

In the center, two men advanced as if in a duel. Combining oppression and amazement, no one could get in their way, no one could get close to them.

Before long, as they walked,

Unno Yutaka blew hot enough to burn the night air and asked.

"A former officer?"

He didn't even ask his name.

He didn't even ask him about his current position.

He didn't even ask him about the meaning of his power.

He didn't ask anything unnecessary.

Somei Nazumi understood his intentions, but responded calmly.

"Yes. Before the war, I worked in the general staff office."

"Is that so?"

The heat was changing color.

Red, always red, the color of anger.

"That's you, isn't that?"

As soon as he said that, Unno's entire body burst into flames.

Nazumi didn't stop walking and answered while he hid his gaze under the brim of his hat.

"Not exactly, but I am."

The absurd answer, it was not clear to be delivered to the other party.

The "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau" had already completed an investigation into Unno's background.

In other words, Nazumi had taken over all of the opponent's circumstances. Although he himself never belonged to a department involved in kamikaze operations, it is an indisputable fact that he was a member of the General Staff. But concealment, excuses and silence are not his style.

That's why he responded with absurd words based on the facts.

Besides, he had no intention of giving in to guilt.

He had things to do, so he would never stop walking.

Even now, his footsteps were regular and sharp.

"You're the kind of person who can't speak until you get hit."

"....."

Unno did not understand the reasoning.

Or rather, his reasoning was paralyzed by his overflowing emotions.

He stayed behind, but found someone to hit with all he had.

The answer that brings the man back, the opportunity, the power that he had been seeking for so long...

"Ok, untie the sword at your waist."

It was just a request for the outbreak of war.

He had a low posture like a beast, sneaking up.

As the distance between them narrowed, Nazumi naturally placed his hand on his waist. When he took the saber out of its scabbard and picked it up, a crystalline blue glow engulfed his entire body. Among them,

"It's not like I'm trying to take it easy because I feel a sense of shame or guilt."

An extra word was added that surprised even the person himself.

Unno responded with a kind smile.

"Prey what you want... I'm a fist type."

He closed the remaining distance with one foot.

At the tip of that rush, a fist engulfed in red flames collided with the saber and exploded.

In the explosion that colored the night, Nazumi waved his saber and a blue glow spread, restoring calm to the area.

Unno was not in the blue landscape.

The moment he realized that, Nazumi swung his saber over his head.

In the air, Unno's leg, which was kicking as if he was jumping, collided with the saber again and exploded again. This time, without delay, the saber flashed, but Unno returned it.

At the moment when three explosions occurred in the middle, they faced each other.

A battle that exceeded expectations, with Unno smiling ecstatically.

An expressionless Nazumi hid his eyes under the brim of his hat, perhaps dodging the exploding flames.

The red power and the blue power collided, but they never mixed and burst.

As if regretting the distance that they had taken, they collided again.

Unno scattered red flames, turned them into cannonballs, and threw them at Nazumi.

Nazumi clothed himself in blue crystals, knocked down the cannonballs, and returned to tranquility.

The opposing forces strengthened each other, filled the space and finally saturated.

Red and blue lights spread out in the night, enveloping the "Kagirohigumi" and the "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau" who were watching the battle.

And, the power saturated from him became a spark that split the night sky, revealing it in the blink of an eye.

A show of power with an overwhelming presence.

A manifestation of terror with the tip of his sword stuck in the ground.

Two giant swords, red and blue, with both sides.

In order to avoid a series of explosions, both the "Kagirohigumi" and the "Fourth Legal Affairs Office", who had descended to a corner of the plaza, were engulfed in the light of their respective "King". The surprise passed quickly, replaced by confusion at a sudden surge of energy.

Tamataro Okuma opened and closed his palms to fully enjoy the feeling of power.

"I see."

He took a big step forward and fired a flaming punch at a nearby blue suit.

Iyoda, who had his fist thrown...

"Uhhieh?!"

As he raised a pathetic voice, he drew his sword in an instant and received the attack.

He was well below his "King", but it was enough to shake the air.

Both parties, who were thinking of their own changes, came to their senses.

"Idiot! What are you doing?!"

First, Hoizumi yelled and drew his sword.

Then Rokugo and Toneyama attacked.

"Hey!"

"Ha!"

As Okuma jumped back, Nizuka and Hentani came closer.

"Are you safe, Iyoda-san?!"

"I, well, you accepted it, just now."

Hakizawa, unable to draw his sword, helped Iyoda, who was on his buttocks, to his feet.

"Hey, get up~"

"I-Iyoda, unharmed..."

Adding Iyoda, who was muttering out of habit while rolling his eyes, the "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau" formed a line.

On the other hand, the "Kagirohigumi" also gathered around Okuma and showed their overflowing power with their fists and weapons.

His step to join the battle of the "King" that was still going on.

"That's all!"

"Guys, stop!"

The scolding of the two people in front of them stopped them.

Somei Chika stalked out of the center of the formation.

"Now is not the time for such fights!"

Todokoro Suwako pushed through the bastards and stepped forward.

"That guy is really on a rampage, it's not a stage for little people to appear!"

The two women collided in the eyes for a few seconds.

Without even expecting that, a red stray bullet flew out.

Chika immediately hit the ground with the butt of her naginata and screamed.

"Below!"

Regardless of the faction, everyone in the place complied.

A blue barrier developed around the naginata and stopped the stray bullet's explosion.

A few seconds after the flames finally died down, Chika's knees relaxed.

Just one shot, just a few seconds, it was too strong.

Suwako stood up and said:

"Here!"

She purposely yelled so that even the blue clothes could hear her. While she was at it, she grabbed the wobbly Chika's hand and ran.

They all followed her and barely escaped the fierce battle.

"Oh, thank you."

Suwako didn't look at Chika as she thanked her. She cursed the man who made her do it and she just ran.

"That bastard will be terrible later!"

After a few seconds of tightrope walking, they slipped into a barely comfortable spot, behind a bench at the end of the lot. Suwako and Chika exchanged smiles after checking each other's clothes.

"You're doing it, right?"

"No, not yet."

Chika responded with sincere remorse and sat down on the ground. She put the naginata next to her, straightened her back, and saluted again.

"You're Suwako Todokoro from "Kagirohigumi", right? My name is Somei Chika."

"A pleasure."

On the contrary, Suwako carelessly stretched out her long legs and asked pretentiously.

"Are you the lover of the Somei who is fighting with us?"

Chika responded firmly.

"He is my husband."

"Uh, how nice."

"Hey."

Okuma inadvertently rushed towards Suwako, who collapsed without thinking.

Chika ignored him and kept talking.

"As for my work, I serve as an underboss to help him. We are the "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau". It is an organization that cracks down on what you call Ichigeimono."

"Hmm, you cleaned the guys on the rooftop, so that's the suppression."

"What? Is that true?"

Okuma was surprised by Suwako's unexpected testimony and asked.

Chika nodded calmly and honestly without showing off.

"That is also my task. I came here with the intention of fighting you, so the current result is a matter of course."

"Hmm, well, it doesn't change that I was saved, and I'd like to thank you for protecting me at that time. Thank you."

At this point, Suwako didn't show off and thanked her honestly.

Such a personality made Chika feel good and she smiled slightly.

"I'll guess."

Okuma, who was deep in his thought, opened his mouth.

"Is it related to the movements of these guys that you guys came?"

His gaze went to Thomas Colt and "Ebisu no Kunizo" lying at his feet. Realizing that Unno was about to go insane, he brought the gang with him as he fled.

Okuma is quick to act and quick to think. From Colt and Chika's environment, he had a rough idea of the situation.

"These guys said that we should join the Occupation Army. The reason they seemed strangely impatient was because they were competing with you."

"It's going to be a political story, so I can't talk about it carelessly."

Chika's explanation lacked clarity for the first time.

"Honestly, I didn't think the conversation would go this far. I don't know if it was unexpected for Nazumi..."

Suwako didn't answer immediately, but looked over the bench. A glimpse of Unno's expression in the midst of the war, his expression clouded with danger overflowing with joy.

"It's been a long time since he felt like this. It's a dark laugh that seems to be possessed by something when you guys arrived at my house."

After saying that, little, weak...

"Finally, here with everyone..."

She expressed her emotions.

Okuma, who had the same thoughts, asked with a slightly heavy voice.

"Your husband is strong, right?"

"Yes. He won't break easily."

Chika affirmed that.

Beneath the two swords, the two "Kings" collided.

The wait and see was over, and they continued to increase their powers.

This attack was blocked, so let's hit it with a stronger blow.

If he also pushes this defense, then let's defend it even more firmly.

Switching between attack and defense, taking a surprise attack and hitting him head on, as he repeated this, Nazumi realized that his timing was out of step. He noticed it and was very offended.

"I see... I understand why even with the power of the "Blue King", I can't do well, I can't help but slip."

A pleasant voice laughed at the displeased voice.

"What are you talking about?!"

Nazumi explained as he repelled all the fist attacks with his saber.

"There's always the fluctuation that the devil suddenly appears and rages, so it can't be done perfectly."

"If you are going to speak, so that the other party can understand... Say it!"

With more force, he drove his fist.

Several barracks behind the locked fist were torn off in a shock wave accompanied by flames. The area where they were fighting and the adjacent market were already empty. When it became clear that they were going back and forth with the boss, who was also a formidable opponent, they were all gone. It was already customary, it was treated as a disaster, and those who had dispersed to other compartments were only preparing to extinguish the fire while holding their breath. Fortunately, Nazumi's power extinguished all the subsequent flames, so there was no concern about the fire.

As told, Nazumi uttered words that the other party could understand.

"Because there is a person like you..."

He struck with his saber.

"My calculations are going crazy!"

Unno was dragged and pushed back.

"Ha! I'll teach you words that can be said in one word!"

From there, he pushed back, hit it, and proceeded.

"You're in the way!"

Nazumi turned around and prepared for the next attack.

"So, take my word for it... I'd like to say it, but there's a real problem."

"Eh?"

He did not understand the position of the suspicious Unno. He stayed alert for a conversation.

"Finally, I have "this time". After all, we couldn't talk until we'd hit each other."

"You are a bastard who speaks in a tiresome way."

To keep the mood of the blue clothes (he didn't remember his name) in the fight, Unno continued with his words.

"I don't have ears to listen. I don't even want to ask questions."

"What was that?"

The two, who never clicked, crossed paths forever.

"I just took a deep breath... to gain even more power!"

As he said, the flames that engulfed Unno's body gained momentum.

It was misunderstood, Nazumi became more offensive.

"I have no intention of interfering with you. Rather, it is the opposite."

"If you turn into a corpse, I'll listen to you! After crushing me, speak by yourself!"

"You really are annoying."

Nazumi was even confused by Unno's unwavering fighting spirit.

This was his first battle with the "King". He didn't want to admit it. Still, he was optimistic at the start of the accident. Assuming that he was an opponent of the same rank as him, he guessed the skill and saw through the peculiarities of the movement in the crossover. As always, a shogi game that charts the winning streak.

However, this "Red King" completely destroyed his board and his calculations.

Nazumi's guess and insight weren't wrong. Nazumi was far superior in skill, and Unno never changed his movement pattern. His sophisticated martial arts skills which trained from Chika were forced to leave neglected gaps many times.

However, Unno never gave up. He even gained heat and strength with each powerful blow. Like a cauldron from hell leaking enough lava to crack. Nazumi began to push slowly.

Unno approached with a crazy smile, Nazumi recognized him as a serious threat.

"Not yet, not at all!"

"It's not something to carelessly say "so it will be"."

However, he did not believe that he would be defeated. As he fought, he continued to analyze opponents who exceeded his expectations. He was convinced that there was no way that as the "Blue King" he couldn't do it.

This man, Unno Yutaka.

"If it's you, the red that overflows from me will be dyed a single color with blood, flames, and the sun of this day!"

A kamikaze pilot who survived.

Emotional outbursts stemming from suicidal thoughts.

If he were to interpret the phenomenon before his eyes lightly, that would be the case.

(However, there is a sense of incongruity.)

It should be easy to deal with someone who's been dumped.

It's just that he was moving forward without thinking about self-destruction.

Unno was clearly different.

When he jumped, when he was attacked, when he burned with power, none of it had the lazy peace of a death seeker. On the contrary, he felt a strong desire to be inspired.

(Yes, his will is there.)

In the midst of his thoughts, Nazumi took a key.

(His acts aren't based solely on emotion... they are mediated by a strong will.)

At first glance, it appeared to be a runaway race left to the emotions, but deep down there was an unshakable core and strong will. Otherwise, it would be impossible to master the power of the "King" and compete with Nazumi.

Nazumi tried to figure it out.

(Isn't it the other way around? He Aroused intense emotions with a strong will...)

He cut off his thoughts in half.

".....?"

The first thing he noticed was his strength.

There was a hole in the ordered blue space.

"Eh?"

A bit later, Unno also noticed.

There was a distorted dent in the red power that was dispersing like a raging wave.

Both of them involuntarily directed their gazes towards the hole, the dent, at the disgusting sensation they felt for the first time.

Then they stopped.

That direction was none other than the embankment where the "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau" and "Kagirohigumi" hid behind. It seemed as if it could be confused with the row of houses in the crude barracks, full of holes.

A tall body swaying in the alley, wrapped in a black robe, something like that.

Otono Benji had nothing to brag about to others.

He was nothing more than a mediocre soldier whose only merit was his bulk.

Due to his large complexion, he was easily detected by the veteran soldiers and group leaders, and being scolded for every incident and beaten for no reason, his companions around him were happy to say, "Thanks to you, I'm saved."

On the battlefield, he went with others, withdrew with others, that's all he did. So at least they wouldn't let him die. The only memory he had on the battlefield is that he was running blindly with a loud voice.

Except for the final battle.

One night, a night raid was ordered against a US military port facility that appeared to be located beyond the dense forest. That night the clouds were thick and it was very dark and he couldn't see anything. That is why the order to attack was given.

By the end of the war, all units were running low on ammunition. Commander told them to save it, but no one from their side told them how to fight. He didn't want to ask again and get hit again. His sole purpose was to prolong immediate life.

In dark night raids, the policy was to sneak up on the enemy camp until the last minute and return fire after the enemy opened fire. The veteran soldier stated, "Enemy forces will lose their nerve when under covert action.", but everyone knew it was just a matter of conserving the bullets until the enemy fired on them.

And in the dark.

Otono's squad advanced while stepping on the muddy ground.

They decided the direction from the starting point of the assault, and they should all have advanced together. Though they couldn't even see the tip of their own nose, nor could they confirm their position by calling out to each other.

If the approach to the US military post was discovered, the US military, which had no problem with bullets, would rain down machine gun rounds, or even shells from tethered destroyers.

When he thought about it, it had already started.

Gunshots flashed in the distance, and the sound came later.

He didn't want to hear the shrieks of machine guns and the screams of his allies.

There were voices of gunfire and death, and there were also voices of fighting spirit to charge the enemy camp. Relying on those little flickers in the distance, the first thing Otono did was check if there were any squadmates around him.

But he couldn't see anyone.

He was hidden in the dense forest and was not visible? Was he the only one who took a long step? Did he fall behind by being a coward? Or maybe he went in the wrong direction. But still, he couldn't see anyone.

Otono was caught in sudden fear as the iron rule he had relied on until now was violated in the middle of the battlefield. Searching for another person's figure, he inadvertently raised his hunched body.

At that moment, the sky was filled with pure white light.

The US military fired flares.

If that happens, the "covert action" of the Japanese army will no longer make any sense. Snipers and gunners could shoot whatever they wanted... even the idea was naive.

An airfield was attached to the port facility, and the US military had already offloaded a corps of fighter jets there. They assumed that the purpose of the night raid of the Japanese army, which had no other motive than to retaliate, overestimated it would be operated by elite flying squadron they kept it for "trump card". The angry squadron launched a counterattack and began dropping bombs in the jungle with the intention of hitting the Japanese fleet.

After that, it turned into hell where the Japanese army was driven out.

The US military, which did not even confirm the position of the target one by one, kept throwing bullets, artillery shells and bombs in the direction, or rather in the area, where the enemy was supposed to be. A series of battles in the Pacific had taught them that the Japanese army would charge, even if it was a single soldier. There was no way to be careless or forgiving.

The memory of Otono after the depression was vague. Nothing dramatic would have happened. Survival itself might have been a miracle, but it was also the result of paying a heavy price.

When he came to, he was lying next to a corpse.

No, they put him to bed at a first aid station for wounded and sick soldiers.

It was just the result of the surrounding soldiers turning into corpses.

Otono couldn't move his body properly. Severe pain shot through his entire body even when he was still, even if he moved even a little. It wasn't the kind of gunshot wound he'd received several times. It was excruciating pain, more torturous.

He wondered what he would look like now that he was carelessly wrapped in cloth. He knew it when he saw the arm he raised with resistance.

His arms were dotted with severe burns.

The same severe pain from that arm covered almost his entire body.

Even if he tried to scream, his body wouldn't allow it.

Even the tears he shed leaked out of the corners of his eyes, hurting himself.

Otono's consciousness fell back into darkness.

That was the only thing he could do now.

Otono was sent back to the mainland, and while he lay dying in a sanitarium, the war ended.

Neither the burns, nor the high fever, nor the weakness could take his life.

But that was it.

They quickly threw him out of the sanatorium because he was not missing any limbs. He barely paid his pension as a wounded soldier, but his permanent address was lost in the air raid along with his family.

The war was over and they would no longer be led to death.

But that was it.

All that was left was a large burned body covered in bandages.

That body couldn't do anything.

He couldn't laugh out loud with the joy of being back.

He couldn't even cry bitterly with the sadness that he wouldn't come back.

Even if he had emotions inside him, he couldn't express them.

A sharp, convulsing pain continued to grip his entire body like a torture tool.

The world left him like that without mercy.

Immediately, the word "postwar" came to be used as a synonym for the future to be pursued, while "before the war" was used as a synonym for the detestable past.

The world was desperately trying to get rid of the traces they risked their lives for... Otono could do nothing but watch such a spectacle.

(I am not complaining.)

Yes, Otono thought. Everyone wanted to get rid of that past. Instead, now you have to live, and there is also a place to live. It was great.

However, he could not go on. In the pain of the past, all he could do was snuggle. It was just sad and frustrating.

"I have no intention of complaining..."

Yes, Otono spoke.

He spoke slowly so as not to irritate his sore skin.

Then slowly, as time passed, one day he saw an accordion on the black market. Judging from the soot-covered boxes and items lined up, it looked like they were excavated from the burnt-out ruins.

(How do you play this thing?)

Before being drafted into the army, he was a banquet entertainer in a hall.

Jester enlivened the atmosphere to the sound of the geisha sisters playing the shamisen. He was forced to improvise a lot. He deliberately played awkwardly on the shamisen to make the sisters stand out. He smiled in pain as he remembered the days when he was rebellious and unruly, when he would step foot in a rogue

"How much is this thing?"

Before he knew it, Otono was speaking loudly.

He recalled stories of other wounded veterans playing instruments on the street and at fairs. Hand games that can be done alone, such as harmonica, guitar and violin, or earn pocket money.

As an act of pity, he turned a blind eye to them, but since he had obtained them, they were of no use to them. Not knowing how to play, he held the accordion in his arms. Sized for a Westerner's physique, it was perfect for a large frame.

(Isn't there someone in Shinbashi who has touched this?)

Seeking a posture that would cause as little pain as possible, he stretched out his arm unnecessarily and pressed down on the keyboard appropriately as he began to walk.

There was no need to rush, just take his time.

Anyway, there's nothing else he could do.

"I wonder if I can touch it too..."

For the first time since he was injured, Otono felt like giving it a try.

Otono ended up on a certain black market by chance.

The shops were lined up and people were gathering over most likely his hometown, there wasn't even a trace of town road left. Now that he was in that form, he would either sneak into the crowd or wait for the moment when the number of people had decreased, but he

had nowhere to go. He stopped because it hurt a lot to keep walking, that was the only reason.

It was right after the defeat in the war, so there was no store that looked like a store.

A blue-roofed amateur market with stalls where you can put straw mats on the floor, or if you don't have any, put leftover door panels, and sell and buy goods on top of them. Even so, it was still bustling, and the people coming and going were full of the vitality of life, living in the present and connecting with the future.

At first, unreliable cables were used for a small amount of light, and there was no room for the radio. Or rather, there was no radio on this black market. Instead, Otono performed the popular song.

It was an accordion that could only be taught the basics of the basics, and it was a clumsy playing that only traced the scale, but everyone wanted the sound. Otono also reminisced about the old days and played folk songs, if not lightly, then at least with joy.

(I don't know what will make me happy.)

The electricity was soon turned on and a radio installed, transforming the shop into a simple stall, but Otono remained the same, sitting on the edge of the black market and slowly continuing to play the accordion.

"It's nice to have something to do..."

The people who had opened the store in the beginning were long gone. They found another job, went home, or drowned. Either way, the black market was no place to stay. All the products they handle violated the official framework. There was no limit to the amount of frustration caused by the postwar chaos. The capricious repression often drastically made the face of shops changed.

Even so, there were some exceptions. The old man who supply wheat flour, the boy who carried the load, the old woman who cared the fire, the older brother who was the bouncer. Otono, who played the accordion on the other side, was one of them.

They were all people with nowhere to go, they were homeless.

They had no place to return to, no one to trust, and no new life. These were people who could not keep up with the "post-war" that was changing at tremendous speed, and were caught between the past and the future.

Keep me confused a little more.

Until I decide something.

Until I find something to decide.

These were their weak appeal, not even able to say as a hope.

However, the "post-war" vitality did not have time to worry about them. Those who stood still were left behind by those who moved, and it seemed like an even bigger obstacle. There was no way to complain to anyone.

The time was still 1946 (Showa 21), the year after the defeat in the war. One late autumn day when the row houses were drowning in an untimely mist.

Several trucks entered the black market. It was loaded with workers; whose purpose was to demolish the black market. Without any proper explanation, the demolition started as if it were a matter of course.

It was not illegal.

The lawless side was the black market, and there was no legitimate reason to protest. He found himself an owner of the land, built himself a building, moved to another place, and when told to do so, he had no choice but to obey in silence.

Nobody resisted.

Even the bouncer couldn't help if the other party was a worker. If it is not a dispute between members of the yakuza, the small security mechanism will intervene, that is, the police or the Occupation Army.

Everyone on the black market was lost. The barracks that had finally been built were torn down with sledgehammers, the rubble was piled up and transported. The people there stared at the scene, unable to do anything.

His place of residence, which had been turned into a vacant lot, stretched out like a vision with its edges vaguely dissolved in the thin mist and pale afternoon.

Otono stared at this sad wasteland,

(And nothing can be done, everything is gone.)

Slowly, with long, slender legs, he began to walk with small steps.

He tried to hold on to what he had left behind, even a little.

With long thin legs and small steps, the best he could do at the time.

"But... just a little bit, it's not right..."

It was not his intention to lead.

Even so, the people left behind followed him out of nowhere. In the thick fog, in the haunting fog. They were protected, they were hidden.

"I just wanted to stay there for a while..."

For the first time, the sound of the accordion, which until now had been played happily, took on a sad tone. They disappeared into the evening mist, where it was not even clear whether there was light or darkness.

They did not notice the gigantic gray sword that was floating in the sky before it disappeared.

Before long, rumors began to circulate.

On a day with thick fog, a black market appears right after the defeat.

A famous urban legend in Tokyo has been whispered about for a long time.

The so-called "Kirinoichi Shopping Street".

There was nothing definite about the awakening of Benji Otono, the "Grey King".

Nazumi and Unno felt it regardless of their knowledge of the gossip.

A tall body swaying in the alley, wrapped in a black robe... it was dangerous.

As usual, Unno...

(Suwa! In the distance...)

He realized after he screamed.

The thread with Suwako, who was always connected to him when he went in and out, was cut that day. The one who cut it was none other than himself who was in a frenzy.

(Damn!)

Before regretting it, he ran.

Kicking the ground with explosive power, he towards something that was behind "Kagirohigumi". He turned his back on Nazumi that he was supposed to hit with all his might, completely selfish.

Unno's apprehension was correct.

Okuma who has quick eyesight was the first to notice something in the alley.

"What?!"

At the same time that he was shocked, he turned his body backwards to punch what he felt was "dangerous" with his fist. His action...

"Stop, Okuma!"

Unno, who flew like a cannonball, barely got ahead. He repelled a large body. At that moment, he inadvertently faced something from the front...

(What is this guy?)

He caught him wide-eyed, but he couldn't understand it.

Only the "nothing" that seemed to sink into the depths of the world was blurred, with no end in sight. The illusion of the black clothes was due to the blurring of the "nothing" that not even light could bring back, shining vertically. And there was one more thing that affected his perception, albeit slightly, it made him think that he was a human being.

"It's a row of teeth wriggling."

"i yo wo."

Several chipped and dirty teeth spilled out fragments of words out of "nowhere".

A rebellious anger welled up within Unno, who was shot through with an indescribable chill.

(Screw you, man!)

Just before he raised his voice and fisted him, a pod unfurled over his shoulder.

The blow that pierced through the teeth without the slightest hesitation came from Nazumi who was standing behind him. Without moving his expression, he hid his eyes behind the brim of his cap and the "Blue King" slowly stabbed his saber without pulling it out.

Adding to the anger of being left behind, Unno also struck out with his fire fist at the "nothing". Slightly below the row of teeth, at the place where a person's stomach would swell, a powerful and uncontrollable punch from the "Red King" exploded.

The "nothing", which had received the combined power of the two "Kings" that had shaken the heavens and the earth until now, did not tremble or move. On the contrary,

"Kuh?!"

"Ah, bastard?!"

Both Nazumi and Unno were attacked by a strange sensation. From the scabbard stabbing, from the clenched fist, the force did not disappear, but was absorbed by the depths of "nothing".

For the first time since they became "Kings", the two of them shuddered inside and out at the sense of weakness they had first felt. With their remaining strength, they drew their scabbard and fist, and jumped back together.

Then Chika snapped.

"Nazumi-san!"

She had everyone in the "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau" form a tight formation. A few days ago, Kanta Chiezaki told them about the "monstrous black cloak", so they avoided carelessly placing themselves. The voice that called was a scolding in the form of asking the director for instructions.

Nazumi, who was receiving everything to the fullest, gave instructions with a smile.

"As expected of you, Chika-san, wait with caution!"

On the other hand, Suwako tied a red thread to Unno and yelled out loud.

"Yutaka-chan, look around you!"

"Eh?"

Unno, who had regained her spirit, looked around without hesitation and understood the meaning.

From the junction of the row houses and the narrow alleys to the spaces between the rows of houses, the "nothing" seeped in as if surrounding them. Even darker than the darkness of night, they gave the impression that they were about to overflow.

"Okuma, gather the bastards around Suwako!"

"Oh, come on!"

Beside him, Okuma, who was on his buttocks, jumped up and ran towards "Kagirohigumi".

Unno looked straight at the rows of writhing teeth.

"te te da."

Like a nightmare, it was still spilling bits of words out of "nowhere". The wobbly posture of him seemed to be about to jump, or it seemed that he was shuddering.

In the middle of the vacant lot, the "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau" and "Kagirohigumi" gathered to stay away from the leaking "nothing". There was no space to show the distance between each other. For the first time, they saw an opponent they couldn't get through with the headmaster's flash or the boss's fist.

Chika, standing in the front row in her blue clothes, raised her voice so that both sides could hear it.

"According to the rumors, the "black cloak" shouldn't come out of the alley, but it's not a situation where you can let your guard down."

"I guess there's a party here that would drive a creepy passerby crazy!"

Suwako, who was surrounded by her minions, yelled back.

Everyone who gathered suddenly thought of the "party" that matched the voice.

Or rather, they intuited it as the nature of "vassals" who were authorized by a "King".

What happened to the psychic who disappeared in the alley?

What if what he had just seen was food?

Fear gripped them.

Nazumi, who was still facing the rows of writhing teeth, called out to him.

"What do you think?"

After a moment's hesitation,

"About what?"

Standing side by side, Unno returned without looking back.

Even at that stage, Nazumi continued his analysis calmly.

"About the identity of this monster. A real ghost or an intelligent artifact? Or a physical phenomenon, or a psychological hallucination? Or is it the same as us?"

"I'll beat him, so see for yourself later."

Likewise, Unno didn't even try to listen.

Furthermore, Nazumi calmly pointed.

"After experiencing the above phenomenon, are you going to continue the reckless resistance?"

"Shut up, just hit harder."

Also, Unno got hotter and blocked him.

Suwako threw a rock after him.

"Hey! If you're doing that, you're an asshole!"

"It's not like you, Nazumi-san!"

Even Chika chided.

There was another person there.

"That's right. It's better, to stop."

A relaxed voice sounded out of place.

"It is going to eat, all and all."

Someone's unknown voice came from quite opposite side of the row of teeth wriggling.

There was no intensity to the extent that it resonated, so discreetly you could hear it.

Chika, Suwako, and Okuma looked around, but they couldn't find the owner of the voice.

"Soon, it will gather its strength in front of you two and push you..., you know, so I guess you are all holding on, but..."

He took a moment to catch his breath.

"The people in the back will also be swept away by their stupid eating."

".....!"

At that point, Nazumi finally lowered his stance by half a step and looked around.

A square with few lampposts.

The "nothing" sprang from the gap.

Another mysterious spectacle passed on the edge of his vision.

It was the night mist that vaguely obscured the twilight of the streetlights.

"Come here, run away."

A voice came from beyond the mist.

"If you coming in my mist, I can dodge you from it."

Nazumi made a quick decision.

"Chika-san, please follow that person's voice!"

"I understand, everyone, stands down! You too."

Chika also carried the naginata on her shoulder and ordered the surroundings, and urged the people who gathered.

The "Kagirohigumi" who was urged to do so also knew that it was the correct answer.

She knew it, but she couldn't move without orders from her boss.

Even if Suwako told him along the thread...

"Yutaka-chan."

"....."

Unno remained silent and did not reply.

Even if Okuma asked the boss in a rough voice.

"Unno!"

"....."

Furthermore, Unno stubbornly stared at the squirming teeth.

In his heart, he muttered in frustration.

(I know he is not this monster...)

The change in the situation did not keep pace with the excited emotions. Even though it was a long overdue open fight, it was botched by adding an extra thing or two.

(Why should I flinch for it?)

Better yet, he would go on a rampage so everything would go crazy.

Such a temptation to balance things that were set on fire.

"You should be able to withdraw."

Nazumi calmly splashed water on his mind.

Beside him again, he pointed his saber at the writhing teeth and continued, hiding his eyes behind the brim of his cap.

"You are feeding your emotions with the power of your will. Because you decided to throw everything at me, that I am a perfect enemy, so you have put your whole body and soul into this, right?"

"...In my belly, you willingly try to make sense of it."

Unno muttered as if he was squeezing him.

"As I thought, you a bastard who doesn't like you anywhere."

Nazumi was unapologetic and answered honestly.

"I am also very, very reluctant. Reason and intellect are meaningless when you make that decision."

"Who knows."

Even as he spat that out, Unno felt a thread connect him.

Suwako no longer said anything.

She waited behind him.

"....."

He looked ahead again. It was extremely doubtful that he could feel anything when he brought down that squirming teeth out of "nowhere" and was hit. Even the disgusting blue next to him wouldn't hit him head on in that situation. He missed the opportunity to do it.

"....."

Just a few seconds to make a new decision, with burning anger and frustration. Unno easily turned his heels to the sidelines. Towards the corner where the night mist swayed, he ran like a hare.

"Bastards! Run!"

"Good grief."

Nazumi also slowed down and gave chase.

With Chika jumping fearlessly, the "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau" followed, followed by Okuma, who led Colt's group, and Unno, who led Suwako on his back.

Finally, Nazumi who was guarding the rear rushed into the mist.

"ko ta de."

All that was left in the open space was the murmur of gnarled teeth.

When the swords of heaven were eliminated together, the slime of "nothing" soon melted into the darkness of the night.

Shock, frenzy, chaos, all without a trace in the wind.

"Kirinoichi" is found, as the name suggests, in the night mist. He could dimly see the stalls with straw mats spread out on the floor, a rarity these days, and people milling around them under the bare hanging light bulbs. The voices that came and went swayed, disconcerting the visitors with an ambiguous sense of distance, as near or far.

In such a city, in a plaza that could be the inner part or the edge, the "Kagirohigumi" and the "Fourth Legal Affairs Office" divided into several groups, surrounding a pot placed on a charcoal brazier. Everyone was dipping their chopsticks into the town's self-proclaimed specialty, "Nan-yara-nabe" (short for "What's on it?"), to replenish their mental and physical fatigue with nabe.

Otono was in one of these relaxation circles.

Or rather, they were mixed.

The attitude of the people surrounding the pot was completely transparent.

"I became the "King" right after the defeat, when I finished taking care of the remaining business of the General Staff Headquarters. When I was having breakfast, I said to Chika-san who was sitting across from me: "As promised. I survived the war. Let's get married."

Not to mention Nazumi, who talks bluntly as if he's giving a sermon.

"What are you talking about, stupid?"

Unno with a face of chewing bitter bugs that were not in the ingredients of the pot.

"So, did you get it!?"

"Yes, because I promised. It was the best condition for us to survive."

Suwako, who lashed out at the conversation, and Chika, who responded calmly.

"If you don't want to fight, you might eat as well."

"....."

Okuma, who calmly handed over the bowl, paid no attention to the appearance of Otono, who was covered in bandages. Only Colt received the bowl as it was given to him, it may be because he was so depressed that he couldn't even afford to do like as everybody...

(After seeing such a monster, maybe I'm not a big deal.)

Even he looked down on himself, they were all so natural.

Nazumi continued.

"Yes, that kind of consent..."

"It was always exactly the same "yes"."

Chika's correction followed.

"The moment I got permission, I came into contact with that "Slate"."

Unno vomited in a bad mood.

"So what are you talking about? You want me to call you a lucky bastard?"

He looked at Otono as if he was asking for his consent.

Nazumi also ignored Unno.

"The good is the good... I think that the "explosion of desire to build a new time" that I sustained caused the "Slate" to react. It is also said that the other "Kings" are the reason for his mental image."

He looked at Otono as if asking for an answer.

Otono himself did not react to any of them. Or rather, he didn't know how to react and remained silent. Originally, he had no intention of being this close to them, nor did he intend to have a complicated conversation.

Right after he helped them to escape from that "nothing".

Before he knew it, he was able to use the mysterious mist, guiding the group to where "Kirinoichi" was, which he had established nearby.

He would hide them in that hiding place until he was sure the "nothing" that was crawling around was gone. But he had nothing else to do with it.

With that thought in mind, he sat with his back against the city gate post (it was just a wooden stake left in the vacant lot), playing the accordion with a casual look on his face.

"Oh, Ni-san. Thank you for letting our boys escape."

"You are the "King" of the Gray Sword. Nice to meet you."

Otono, who did not want to reveal his true identity, was shocked, but his legs did not have the strength to immediately escape. All he could do was remain seated and replied with a confused manner.

"Oh, why do you know?"

"Well, somehow."

"That's because everyone is a "King"."

The group that was supposed to let them pass also stopped around the three of them, so he had no choice but to lead them. It was out of desperation that he decided to spend the time waiting around the hot pot together.

As the townspeople prepared the pot, he received an explanation from Nazumi, and learned that he was apparently the "Grey King" Benji Otono.

However, the impression...

(It's also quite pretentious.)

That's what it meant.

Regardless of the facts, Otono thought that his capacity (what he could do, what he wanted to do, what he could hold, and what he wanted to retain) was "very small."

Even if he knew it was just a title, it was terrifying. He couldn't even think it was a joke to stand shoulder to shoulder with youngsters who could boast of themselves as "Kings", let alone fight against anything.

For him, the mist was not a weapon of war. All he needed was a modest fence to protect the people who connected their days here in "Kirinoichi".

The young people treated Otono as something normal.

"What about that "mental image"? It's a story that neither I nor this Ni-san knew about."

"That's not enough, so I'm going to explain. I hope you don't break the story."

He rushed into the refereeing of the gaze.

"Ok, ok, you two."

It wasn't his style at all.

After thinking about it, Otono rethought:

(Is that so?)

Suddenly, he remembered the old days when his voice and his body bounced, and he felt a pain in his chest.

Instead of a bitter smile, he asked with twitching cheeks.

"I have something to do with it too, you say?"

"Yeah, I wouldn't say it's irrelevant. That monster called "Black Cloak" is based on the same laws as us... it's one of the 'Kings' who was born according to some kind of mental image."

Hearing Nazumi's words, the movement of the chopsticks around the pot stopped for a moment.

Unno snorted and stuck his chopsticks into the pot, and the piece of carrot got caught.

"Eh, is that the same as me? What kind of joke is that?"

Nazumi dipped his chopsticks into the pot and found a piece of corned beef.

"You should also "somehow" understand that your power was absorbed. Judging by the passion in his voice, he also has a will. That... is someone..."

Okuma, who picked up a mochi-like object, and Suwako, who filled her mouth with potatoes, looked at the chief with a grim expression.

"A monster that eats people, is it a person?"

"It's scary that I couldn't put my fists through it."

"Don't worry, I'll beat you next time."

Groundlessly, but firmly, Unno promised.

Next to him, Colt was muttering to himself as he held a bowl that had piled up unnoticed (everyone was pushing stuff they didn't want to eat into the pot) in his hand.

"What we've dabbled in... how far away is the "King" ... isn't it beyond human control?"

Chika, who bit into takuan, asked her husband with a sense of crisis.

"In other words, someone started targeting not only Hagure, but also the "King"... Do you have any plans to counter it?"

"No, nothing."

Nazumi reluctantly gave in to his wife, but it's not like there wasn't a plan.

"However, I believe that by exploring the mental image I mentioned earlier, we will be able to identify the characteristics of the "Black Cloak" monster and how to deal with it. So..."Grey King" Benji Otono."

His gaze turned and he caught Otono head on.

That force made Benji's big body cringe.

"What...?"

"You were able to lead our retreat. In other words, capture the movement of the "Black Cloak", right? If you don't mind, I'd like you to tell me the reason."

Nazumi took off his cap and bowed his head.

"What? After all you depend on Ni-san for that measures?"

Otono gently accepted Unno's sarcasm.

"I don't care that much."

"Please."

Saying that, Nazumi took a calm listening stance.

Although he didn't want to follow his example, Unno's sheer interest silenced him.

Everyone's attention was focused on the circle of the pot.

Otono flinched, his lips cramping as he prefaced.

"Because I'm like this... I can't speak fluently."

This time Chika bowed her head next to Nazumi.

"Take your time."

"....."

Even with such courtesy, Otono began to speak.

"...This mist is like a part of me. It seems to be a convenient thing that I can sense the movement of the person who entered and confuse them."

Seeing is believing, the mist gathered on the bandaged palm, forming a ball of pure white.

In the air of astonishment, Nazumi analyzed the phenomenon.

"I see... So, the power of the "Grey King" is detection and disturbance?"

"Well, I wonder if that's what it is."

Nodding, Otono literally scattered the ball in his hand.

"However, it must have been around autumn, on the edge of the mist... "Musikui" began to appear. It eats my mist as it passes, leaving holes in it."

"If it's like our "power", it'll eat anything..."

Unno remembered the feeling of being sucked in and clenched his fist.

Otono nodded again.

"Every time I get bitten on the edge, I run away in a hurry, but... "Musikui" writhes all over Tokyo like a snake, so it's really scary to find it again and again."

Then he looked at the two young men.

"But tonight, I felt like a huge mass with great force was flowing into... I think it also felt the two of them collided."

"It tried swallowing us in a big chunk?"

"The first event, that happened today, was a clash between "Kings"... the time when you woke up as a "King" but no sword appearance was seen, because that was nighttime?"

He slowly nodded three times.

"That's all I can say... Did I help you?"

Nazumi and Chika once again expressed their gratitude with a beautiful bow.

"More than enough information. Thank you for your cooperation."

"Thank you for taking the risk and helping us."

Otono couldn't take it straight.

"Kindness, no."

He lowered his eyes as if he regretted it.

"What would happen to him if he ate a power as big as you two? I got scared, so I came to check on him. That's all."

Then, Unno spoke with a warm voice of goodwill.

"If that's all, don't bother saying "Come here, run away"."

".....!"

He raised Otono's line of sight.

His eyes were a little more stern than his voice, but he was still smiling. If the other person hadn't been hurt, he could have hit their back.

Both Suwako and Okuma smiled, bowed their thick bodies, and thanked him.

"Well, actually, I was saved... Thank you."

"Don't forget your kindness."

Finally, after confirming the appearance of his subordinates, including "Ebisu no Kunizo", who seemed to be uncomfortable with other circles, Colt murmured something into his mouth.

Otono, who couldn't stand the things that sprouted anymore, decided to separate.

"We are fine now... it seems to be gone."

"That's right, Gosso-san!"

"PAHN", making a sound and join his palms together, Unno stood up neatly without regretting any remnants.

Seeing that, the "Kagirohigumi" also left their seats.

In response, Chika said, "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau."

The Colt team also secretly tried not to stand out.

Finally, Nazumi stood up and handed over a business card.

"With your power, you should be able to deal with it, but if you have any problems, contact the "Fourth Legal Affairs Office" here. If you want, we can put you in public protection, along with the people who live here. Honestly, in a time when that is lurking, it is more dangerous to stay away."

Otono received the business card, but did not stand up.

"Thank you."

While he was sitting, he slowly shook his head.

"But I... will protect these people who can only stay here."

No one denied the way of life of the "Grey King" there.

The mist melted in the morning sun.

They were released in an unknown open space.

As if waking up from a dream, or having passed through their throats, "Kagirohigumi" and the "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau", who grasped the situation, immediately faced each other as if they were breathing. The "Red King" and the "Blue King" standing in front of each other also collided with each other's gazes.

But it did not lead to a confrontation.

It was a big problem for both sides to lose their tempers in the fog, but in this case, it was because there were people physically getting in the way between the two camps.

It was the Colt group sent from Nanakamado.

The tense tension lasted only a few seconds.

"Give up, don't."

"Ebisu no Kunizo" was the first to raise his voice and sit down.

Then the other people sat down one after another.

"I quit too."

"Oh, that's enough."

"Not worth it."

Some took off their characteristic coats before sitting down, others sat upright as if waiting for an intervention, and others went out into the open. All of them had lost their composure from the night before and have reverted to their original form, the bodyguards who run tricks on the outskirts of the city.

Among them, there was a person who was stunned.

The American who led them was Thomas Colt. The deep, wrinkled smile that still floated on his head gave him the impression that it was just that kind of shape, and he could tell at a glance that it was painful bravado.

Nazumi stepped away from the formation and stepped forward to speak.

"So, I'll take care of you here, ok?"

Colt was facing the day after tomorrow.

"Go ahead, as you wish. The losses due to the inability to counter the "King's" strength are within the assumptions of the plan. Nanakamado will switch to another option."

As he spoke fluently, he shrugged. His expression, particularly stern, was still distorted by the gloomy tone of his voice.

Nazumi guessed, but he didn't say anything and kept talking.

"Do you want me to send you back... to the commander who caused the disturbance, to the intelligence agency?"

"It would be troublesome if I, an American, were detained, right? Nanakamado is now politically cornered and has lost his composure... The "King" that they have been so afraid of for so long that they did not touch him..."

Colt looked at Unno.

"It's completely reckless, to the point of ramming him. On top of that, if they found out that I was also detained by the "Fourth Legal Affairs Bureau", it would be a nuisance to everyone and they would pull a lot of desperate tricks."

Unno, who received the gaze from him, caught the gist of the indirect conversation.

Colt wasn't threatening to escape alone.

Rather the opposite...

Thinking about it, Unno took a step closer to the person he was impressed with.

"Even if you go home, you won't be fine, Colt-san."

"Still, I can't help but go home."

His fake smile was mixed with a touch of genuine emotion.

"If someone who faced the situation had to report it in detail and make an appeal... as expected, we shouldn't interfere with the "King". And, above all, the danger of that "Seventh King"."

Seeing how determined he was, Unno smiled at the other person with the same level of depth, but with genuine emotion. He puffed out his chest and said proudly.

"Yes, then do your best."

"Thank you."

Colt put on his dirty floppy hat and gave a little bow.

Nazumi let out a breath.

"I wish you wouldn't decide for the two of us."

Unno looked at the rude person.

"Are you saying that you are against it?"

"No, Nanakamado is more likely to listen to Colt-san's explanation than a warning from us, a hostile organization."

"Then don't be stupid and useless."

"No matter what you do, confirmation is necessary."

Among them, Colt, who had a wry smile on his face, began to walk slowly.

"I'm sorry I wasted your time."

He sent his repentance through his back.

"I return to Nanakamado because, as an American who has awakened to power, I have nowhere to go. Because I work as an intelligence agent there, I am exempt from being mobilized for a spy war against the communist bloc...all my actions are of self-protection."

However, Unno does not tolerate condescension.

He patted his back as he left with a sonorous voice.

"You have a life in front of you to regret or burn it, you can do what you want."

Colt stopped for a moment.

"....."

However, he walked out into the morning sun without looking back.

Lastly, he lightly waved his hand in embarrassment.

### **A MAN WHO WANTS TO BECOME A CROCODILE.**

Oh.

I will become a crocodile.

My mother told me and my brothers.

Crocodiles usually hide in the dark and deep bottom of the water.

Shut up and do nothing.

When it goes down, it floats to the surface and eats things around it.

Anything you can get your hands on.

When it is full, it sinks back to the bottom of the water and sleeps.

Shut up and do nothing.

Don't piss me off

Do not hurt me.

When he gets angry, he rages at the bottom of the water and summons a storm.

They're all screwed.

Due to his tenacity, when he suffers, he goes after the person who hurt him.

From sea to land, anywhere.

Don't piss me off

Do not hurt me.

That's why everyone is afraid to get close.

So I'll turn into a crocodile.

Silently, do nothing, eat your fill.