



RED CASE FILES: HOMURA IN LAS VEGAS

CHAPTER 1: "HOMURA" DIES IN A SCORCHING HEAT!

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K-PROJECT WORLD

California, United States. Death Valley National Park.

This place, called "Death Valley", however, despite its name, has many lives. Coyotes that roam the wild in search of food and water, bats that avoid sunlight deep in caves, kangaroo rats that need little water to live, of course all creatures can adapt to this harsh desert that has evolved over thousands of years. For creatures that are not prepared for anything, like Homo sapiens who came from Japan, a country full of forests and water, this is literally a "valley of death".

And now, there are five figures walking down State Highway 190, swaying in the heat.

They are all dressed as stubborn. One took off his knit cap, a sweaty giant trembles, the sunglasses have a broken lens, the brown hair sticks to the skin, and the hoodie has several holes. They walk under the scorching sun, like a beggar or someone who came out of a crazy party.

The main members of "Homura", Misaki Yata, Rikio Kamamoto, Saburota Bando, Yo Chitose and Eric Surt are in a sorry state.

"Yata-san... Las Vegas... Is there still a long way to go...?"

Bando asked, as if out of breath.

"You're stupid... a little more... we should be able to get there in a while..."

Yata responded the same way.

"Water... anything... even muddy water... water..."

Chitose lost his vacant gaze in the dry desert.

"Oh!"

Kamamoto suddenly yelled.

"Yata-san, please look! There's a watermelon!"

They all had no energy to react, and only vaguely saw Kamamoto's back running towards the "watermelon" as if he were rolling. Kamamoto jumped on the "watermelon", but the next moment it hit him with intense pain.

"What?! What kind of watermelon is this?! The thorns grew densely?!"

"Kamamoto... it's not a watermelon, it's a cactus..."

Yata pointed out with a pitiful voice. Kamamoto returned their gaze as if he had woken up from his dream, he looked back at the cactus and turned his gaze towards Yata and his friends.

There was a limit to Eric.

He collapsed to his knees and fell to the ground. As expected, everyone responded dramatically to that. Chitose picked Eric up and Bando quickly punched him in the cheek.

"Hey! Eric! Be firm!"

"Don't sleep! You will die if you sleep!"

"No... that's... water..."

Eric's face, moving his dry lips and burying his face firmly in the ground, showed a clear phase of death. Chitose and Bando looked at Yata as if the same thing was happening to them.

"No, Yata-san! What are we going to do?!"

"At this rate, Eric will be...!"

"Well...!"

Yata clenched his fist and looked up at the sky.

Until now, he had passed through many dead zones. He thought that he could defeat any enemy with that power and the red bond.

But now, they weren't fighting something they could swing their fists at and beat them to death. Dry land and bright sunlight, the environment itself, are his enemies. No matter what kind of talent they use, they won't be able to escape from this dead land.

Yata could only crouch down next to Eric and scream desperately.

"Remember, Eric! Didn't you show it to Kusanagi-san and Totsuka-san, who betrayed us?"

Chitose and Bando took a breath. Eric also rolled his dry eye and stared at Yata. Kamamoto kept looking at the cactus and wondering if he could separate it somehow.

"That's right...! If those people hadn't done that, we wouldn't be about to...!"

Yata remembered what had happened and hit the ground with a clenched fist.

Yes. The whole betrayal started a month ago. It was an event at "Bar HOMRA".

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"I'm back."

"Oh, Anna. Welcome back."

It was a white-haired girl and a red-haired young man who rang the doorbell and entered.

Anna Kushina and Mikoto Suoh. Kusanagi sometimes asks them to buy the daily necessities of those who live in "Bar HOMRA". It is up to Anna to choose the items exclusively, and Suoh's role is to accompany Anna and carry the luggage. Suoh was still holding a cigarette and hanging a grocery bag with green onions in one hand.

Suoh put a grocery bag on the table and sat on the couch. Anna carried the bag to the counter. Kusanagi, who smiled "big", suddenly noticed that Anna's appearance was different from usual.

Totsuka, who was helping with the preparation, came out from behind the counter and pointed at that.

"That? Anna, is your face red?"

As Totsuka said, usually the white-wrinkled expressionless expression seemed to blush a bit. Anna shook her head to anticipate Kusanagi's concerns that she had caught a cold.

"I understand."

"Eh?"

"Ticket. Tour."

The shredded words seemed to indicate Anna's emotion. She looked cool and calm, but she was just a teenager. Whenever something happy happened, the tension rose, and Kusanagi and Totsuka had spent too much time with her to understand.

The two looked at each other, turning their necks at the same time.

"What kind of tour?"

"Anna, do you have a favorite place?"

"No. It's this!"

It was frustrating to talk; Anna took her hand out of her pocket in front of them. The wrinkled envelope, which had been held for a long time, had the following letters on it.

"Invitational ticket for a 10-day trip to Las Vegas, USA"?!"

"What?! What's wrong with this?!"

"That's why! I understand!"

Anna shook her hands and appealed with a look as to why he didn't understand. When Kusanagi and Totsuka were about to be confused, Suoh, who was smoking a cigarette on the couch, spoke up.

"Fukubiki. Anna figured it out."

Finally, understanding had caught up.

It is a regional promotion event held by a nearby business district. If you collect 10 stamps that you can get for every 100 yen you buy, you can try it once. Since it's a shopping street, the prizes are just tissue boxes, salad oil, and daily necessities, but for some reason the special prize was the Las Vegas tour.

Anna picked it up, the moment she realized that, Totsuka smiled at her and praised her.

"That's amazing! You're lucky to have a special prize! Anna, you can be a great player in the future!"

"Hahaha."

"No, it's strange how a praise... Anna, can I open this?"

Anna nodded in response, Kusanagi opened the envelope with a letter opener and began examining the contents.

At that moment, the doorbell rang and several members entered. Yata, who was at the beginning, bowed to Suoh, who was lying on the couch.

"Oh, Mikoto-san! Good afternoon!"

"Good afternoon!" said the others.

The people behind him, Kamamoto, Bando, Chitose, and Dewa, also greeted him. Suoh abruptly waved his hand to respond, then smoked again.

"Hey, Yata, listen. Anna is amazing!"

"Well, what did you do?"

As he listened to Totsuka's explanation that had a smiling face, Yata and his colleagues were also excited. Yata gave Anna a thumbs up.

"That's amazing, Anna! I wonder if there's a once-in-a-lifetime tour of Las Vegas!"

"Yes, thanks."

Anna smiled and answered that, suddenly shaking her head.

"By the way, where is Las Vegas?"

"No, I was happy without knowing it!"

"Las Vegas is a tourist city in Nevada, USA. There are casinos everywhere in the city, and anyone can play at any time. If you look at it, it seems that you can enjoy not only gambling, but also various shows and attractions."

Dewa got the information about Las Vegas from his PDA and showed it to Anna. Anna was engrossed in the PDA, looking at her innocent expectations.

Adults, on the other hand...

"Big money in the casino, overflowing money... It's spreading, the American dream!"

"This is a tourist town, so there is likely to be a lot of good food. How nice!"

"America... Girls Show... One night stands with a beautiful blonde...!"

"They should calm down a bit..."

Dewa muttered to the three people, Bando, Kamamoto, and Chitose, who talked about their naked desires without shame. Yata hit his back happily.

"Well, it's a little better! After all, it's 'Homura's' overseas debut, right? Let's decide here!"

"Hmm, that's impossible, Yata-chan."

Kusanagi, who was reading the brochure on the counter, unfortunately muttered that. Yata looked at Kusanagi with a question mark.

"Why, Kusanagi-san? It's impossible..."

"This tour seems to be for families. Only 4 people can go."

At that moment, something similar to an electric current ran through everyone.

"Four people?"

"That means..."

A suspicious look went back and forth between Bando, Chitose, Kamamoto and Yata. It was only natural that Anna, who won the award at the Fukubiki, would fall into that frame. There were only three spots left available, and there were seven adults there. With the addition of other key members, the opportunity will be even tighter.

Now, they had to confirm it. Who would outsmart his friends and kick them out, using any dirty hand to get the remaining three tickets to Las Vegas!

"Well, thinking normally, King and Kusanagi-san will come in, right?"

Totsuka had a delicate tone, and the remaining two seats filled up quickly.

"No, please wait a moment, Totsuka-san! Why is it like this?!"

"Huh? You can't let Anna go alone, right? Anna's guardians are those two, so it's a natural choice, right?"

"Uh... no, yes, that might be the case..."

Yata glanced sideways to see Kusanagi and Suoh. Kusanagi examined the brochure, and Suoh curiously lit a second cigarette.

"Hey! Kusanagi-san runs a bar, right? Can't you rest for 10 days?!"

"Then I'll leave the interpreter to you, Yata-chan."

"Eh?"

Yata rolled his eyes and looked at Kusanagi, and Kusanagi smiled and shook the brochure.

"If you go there, you'll need an interpreter. Well, Mikoto can speak a single word and Totsuka isn't enough to communicate."

"But there are various troublesome things, like passports and exit procedures, right? Including such things, I think it's better to be accompanied by a bean, Kusanagi-san."

"Well, that's right. It would be like burnt miso, but I think it's fine."

"Gah...!"

Yata was startled by the too honest opinion and backed down. And from behind, a trio of desires pushed at his back.

"No, Yata-san! Don't lose!"

"That's right! Our frame will shrink!"

"Please do your best, Vanguard Captain!"

A bond was a bond, even if it was lugubrious interest. Yata then nodded slightly and encouraged his voice.

"So what about Mikoto-san? I don't think he's interested in abroad."

"Mikoto."

Anna tugged on Suoh's sleeve and asked an innocent question.

"Mikoto, aren't you interested in Las Vegas?"

"....."

The cigarette in Suoh's mouth turned red, exhaled smoke, and he responded.

"What happened, Las Vegas?"

Anna blinked several times as if suddenly caught. It just preceded the exotic sound of "Las Vegas," and she probably had no expectation of what would happen. Still, she looked at Bando, Kamamoto, and Chitose in turn, and then back at Suoh.

"Money, food and the blonde beauty?"

Kusanagi looked at the three with slight annoyance, and they shrugged. But surprisingly, Suoh suddenly laughed.

"Do you want to go?"

"Yes."

After nodding her head, Anna added as she remembered.

"I want to go with Mikoto."

"....."

Suoh inhaled purple smoke again, then muttered.

"If so, shall we go?"

That way, the remaining two boxes were completely filled.

Yata bit his back teeth. He couldn't help but admit defeat. He was ashamed that he backed down when he lost, and he couldn't give up. Yata also wanted to go to Las Vegas. Or rather, he wanted to go abroad. Anna wasn't the only one with a childish longing abroad.

Of the four places, three slots were filled. There was only one place left. Everything slipped into it. Yata hardened his fist with that determination.

"So, there's only one more! Let's decide! Because we're not convinced at this rate!"

"Oh, it's true!"

"It's just like Yata-san says!"

"You guys..."

Kusanagi said as he weakened, but Totsuka still had a smile on his face.

"That's right. We have to decide fairly, right?"

"That's right! We're friends! It must be the same between friends!"

"If so, then rock-paper-scissors is fine, right?"

"Huh?! No, that's..."

"Come on. If it doesn't come out, you'll lose, Rock, Paper..."

"Uoooooooooooooooooh!"

Scissors.

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And Yata, Kamamoto, Bando and Chitose were walking along the path to get home.

The sunset illuminated their faces. His facial expressions, full of sadness and regret, were like those of a lost dog. Some looked up to the sky, and some looked down, and no one tried to look at each other. If they looked at each other's faces, they couldn't help but feel their own defeat.

Eventually, Bando muttered.

"Well, isn't that a suitable place? Anna will go with Mikoto-san, Kusanagi-san, and Totsuka-san."

Chitose smiled to follow him.

"That's right. Since they're our top three, it's natural for them to go, right?"

Kamamoto nodded.

"Oh, yes. Rather, I think it would have been awkward if we went. You can't go abroad with Kusanagi-san and others!"

"That's right! Hahahaha..."

A dry voice rang out on the way home, further emphasizing his misery.

However, there was only one person who did not try to blend into the conversation.

It was Yata.

The careless footsteps gradually slowed down and finally stopped completely. Kamamoto looked back and patted his shoulder sympathetically.

"Yata-san. Let's give up and hope that Mikoto-san brings back souvenirs of Las Vegas."

"Shut up!"

Yata squeezed his hand. Bando and Chitose jerked their bodies startlingly at the volume of his voice.

"You guys, isn't it pitiful?! We must have been friends! And yet, why should we be forced into such injustice?!"

"No, it's unfair, I lost at rock-paper-scissors, so it can't be helped."

"Don't say that! I'm talking about feelings! I can't forgive my feelings of waiting for them and burning in Japan!"

Bando gritted his teeth at Yata, who raised the flames.

"Then, what are you going to do?"

"It's decided; we're going to Las Vegas too!"

The words took a breath.

Go to Las Vegas. They assumed that it would not be possible without Anna's ticket. The losers had to go home and "wait" until the winners came back.

But it is different. Las Vegas is certainly real. That place was not a dream land that could not be reached without a dream ticket, but in the United States on the sea. They remembered it in Yata's words.

Flame lit up in Yata's eyes. The flame of "Homura" was determined to burn without leaving blood, bones or ashes. Against that amount of heat, the Pacific Ocean, which is 10,000 km away, was just a puddle. He pointed to each and every one and gave precise instructions.

"Bando! You're good at detailed calculations! It's usually fine, so pay the travel expenses!"

"Well, oh, you, got it!"

"Chitose! Find out what we need and get it all! Send the money to Bando! We'll split it later!"

"Oh, I get it!"

"Kamamoto! Prepare passports for everyone! I'll find a good part-time job!"

"I was disappointed!"

As if Yata's enthusiasm flared, the other three began showing motivation before he knew it. They could go to Las Vegas, no. The firm will to "go" brought them back to one clan: "Homura".

"We're going to Las Vegas too! Travel expenses aren't a big deal, if you win a lot of money at the casino, it's such a big flatulence! I'll double it, no, I'll pay it back, 100 times! Come on guys!"

"Oh, yes!", replied the others.

"Oh! He's putting on a good face! So, that's the usual, finally!"

A red aura lit up from the hardened fist and Yata thrust out his right arm. Similarly, the other members put their glowing red arms over Yata's and yelled all at once.

"No Bone! No Blood! No Ash!"

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After that, the difficulties they experienced became a story in itself, but they took action on it.

By having a number of jobs that bridged the gap between black and illegal, they were able to earn as much travel expenses as they needed in two weeks. Much of their motivation was to "prove it to Kusanagi and his friends", so they kept it a secret from the other members, even Dewa, who was with them. Akagi, Dewa, and Fujishima didn't show their intention to go to Las Vegas, so they weren't invited.

However, there was only one member they needed.

Namely...

"What? Vegas? I'm not interested."

It was Eric Surt.

Born abroad, he was the only bilingual in "Homura". When traveling abroad, where you don't know right or left, you need someone who can understand the language. Eric wasn't much interested in gambling, food, or blonde beauty, but was caught on the condition that "half of the travel expenses would be borne by the members" and he would eventually tag along.

And they successfully completed the exit procedure, and triumphantly left Japan.

Currently, they suffer from dry death in the "Valley of Death".

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"Damn, what is this?!"

Yata endured the tears that swelled with regret. There was no such thing as a drop of water that they could obtain. To survive, they shouldn't even shed tears.

And, when Eric fell down, he pointed his trembling finger at Yata,

"No, it's all your fault...! How could you confuse "Las Vegas" and "Los Cabos"?!"

"Oh."

The cold gazes of the other members turned to Yata.

That was the case. Yata arranged the ticket, but it was not destined for Las Vegas, California, USA. It was Los Cabos, South Lower California, Mexico.

He notices it only after leaving the airport, but it was already too late.

They stepped on Mexican soil, not the United States.

Yata quickly apologized.

"Well, can't I help it?! I can't read English!"

"Then don't make arrangements from the beginning! Usually, there were two immigration procedures, didn't you find it strange?!"

"I don't know because it's my first time traveling abroad! If so, Bando would be responsible too!"

This time Bando shivered. His sunglasses had broken lenses, and the eyes behind them swam. Chitose murmured, looking at him.

"So is. I have found a Mexican who can enter the United States cheaply saying: "Travel expenses are wasteful"..."

"He was a smuggler, right? Thanks to that, we were chased by the border guards!"

"Well, everyone was happy to say, "Cheaper, better!" Isn't it strange that I'm the only one to blame?!"

"We've become illegal immigrants because of you! If they find us, will we be deported?!"

"Now that you mention it, Yata-san, you had to fight the driver of the car that stopped after that!"

Under the brightly shining sun, "Homura's" friends began to fight with each other. With death imminent from dryness, the time and calories they spent surviving should be limited, but they didn't realize they had blood on their heads. Only Kamamoto, holding a cactus, directed his vague gaze across the road.

Kamamoto muttered.

"It's a shadow."

No one in "Homura" noticed that comment. They decided that it was not worth listening to the gossip of those who were beaten by the heat.

But, the comment had a more important meaning than any words that had flown out there.

"The shadow of a car."

Chitose, who heard it for the first time, stopped arguing and looked at Kamamoto. The others also lowered their fists and looked at Kamamoto, then turned in the direction Kamamoto was looking.

There was a car approaching from beyond the horizon, beyond the bright haze of heat.

"It's a car."

"It's a car!"

"Help has arrived!"

Shit fights vanished in an instant and returned to a fateful community to sustain life. Everyone took off their jackets and shook them to appeal to their existence. Yata and Bando stood in the path with their arms outstretched to stop it.

"Hey! Hey! Help me!"

"Please help!"

"Water, water! Help!"

They were desperate. Literally, if they missed this opportunity, it was only death that would be waiting for them. The boxy white vehicle slowly slowed down and stopped in front of them, perhaps because of the heat, or because they had no intention of running until they met a fool.

They all took a breath. Bando and others were crying. They could finally get out of that hell, that thought relaxed their hearts.

Between them, Yata stepped forward and looked at the driver's seat with a tired smile.

"No, I was saved. Well, I'm sorry, but we're headed to... Las Vegas..."

The voice suddenly became smaller.

The face in the driver's seat was a familiar face.

The blue uniform that was worn. Black framed glasses. Beyond that, the dull eyes were stagnant, but now there was a light of joy. After taking a closer look at Yata's awkward appearance, shirtless and even without his knitted hat, he said with a teasing tone.

"Are you asking me? If so, is there a certain way to say it, Misaki?"

Saying that, Saruhiko Fushimi laughed happily.