



RED CASE FILES: HOMRA IN LAS VEGAS

CHAPTER 12: MADNESS, ILLUSION, AND HIS FUTURE

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K-PROJECT WORLD

Ed took a step forward, planting his feet firmly on the grass.

Suoh looked at Ed with eyes that showed no emotion. He looked at the kicking steel giant and jumped from there to face Ed. He put his hands on the back of his neck, cracked his joints and asked.

"Who are you?"

Ed responded with a flash of hate.

"I am a member of the "Purgatory" clan, Edward The Red. I have come to eliminate you."

Suoh tilted his head. It is possible that he did not understand what he said to him in English. Either one would do. Ed hadn't come to chat.

His right arm burned with a roar.

Edward's "stigmata" were supposed to be on his right hand. The four fingers torn off by the Kagutsu installation, and the flames that spewed from them, were his proof and weapon.

Flames were now engulfing Ed's right arm. Even the heat pain that was driving him crazy at the moment was numbing and he couldn't feel it. No pain, no sensation, but the burning arm moved as Ed intended. It was hot, strong and fierce, incomparable with the flames of the past.

Ed interpreted it as gospel. It was given to him by Kagutsu in Hell to punish the one he pretended to be the "Red King".

Clenching his fiery fist in front of his face, Ed muttered.

"You will die."

Then Ed swung his right arm out to the side.

The distance between them was about 10 meters. Rippled flames spread out like a snake's neck and attacked the sides of Suoh's head.

Suoh slightly widened his eyes and raised his right arm.

With a dull sound, the flame attack was blocked.

Ed smiled.

Using Suoh's arm as a fulcrum, the flame arm extended further. The same movement as a throwing weight ball that entangles the prey. The rope-like flames wrapped around Suoh's body, blocking his movement, that was supposed to be the case.

This time Suoh laughed.

He was blowing a hot wind. A hurricane of auras containing destructive power ripped away the fire rope and hit Ed from 10 meters away. Ed reflexively blocked it with his meat arm.

When he lowered his arm, he saw Suoh's face in front of him.

Something exploded around his plexus. Heaven and earth spun in his field of vision, and intense pain, fierce nausea, and acceleration attacked him at the same time. It was as if the shock of being hit by a car a while ago had been multiplied tenfold.

Before long, Ed landed on his back in the street, bounced, and landed face down. Unable to contain the gushing out of him, Ed sprayed the area with gastric juices.

"Gah, uh..."

Supporting his body with his bare arms, Ed sat up.

Suoh didn't go after him. He just looked at Ed curiously.

If he had wanted to, he could have punched a hole in Ed's stomach.

He was taking it easy. Those words made Ed's hatred boil even more.

"Damn! This must be a joke!"

With a cloudy and angry voice, Ed raised his flaming arm.

The arms of flames spread out in a parabola and rained down on Suoh. Suoh stepped back a bit to avoid it, but the fist exploded as he crashed to the ground, spreading flames all around him.

However, the exploding flames were drowned out by Suoh's overwhelming aura. Let alone the skin, even burning down downy hairs did not come true.

Suoh raised his leg and stomped on the fiery fist.

The sensation of his own aura being eroded by someone else's aura, Ed gritted his teeth at the pseudo-severe pain. As he did so, Ed forced the fire fist to regenerate. Five flaming claws tried to dig into Suoh's ankle.

Suoh took a step forward.

It wasn't even an attack. It was like putting out a cigarette that was dropped on the ground, crushing it. With just that action, the fiery fist flew out, creating a crater in the grass with a loud sound.

With sweat dripping from his face, Ed raised his eyes and looked at Suoh.

Elephants and ants. Hawks and winged insects. "King" and Clansman.

The difference in strength between them was so overwhelming that there was no place to think about it. Genji Kagutsu and Jin Habari. Ed, who had witnessed the two "Kings" before, knew this very well.

If Kagutsu was his opponent, there wouldn't even be dust left.

If Habari was his opponent, his neck would already be completely severed from his torso.

The fact that he was still alive made him angry more than anything else.

"GAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

With a roar, Ed stamped his feet. He hardened his fiery fist and punched right.

He was blocked with one hand.

Suoh's eyes were far from the strain of battle as he looked closely. Discomfort and suspicion. The look in the eyes of a lion chased by a fly seemed to disgust him.

Suoh's fist hit Ed's side.

"Guh..."

His toes kicked into his face, and he groaned and looked down. The sensation disappeared from the neck up, and Ed wasn't quite sure what was happening to him.

Before he knew it, the night sky was reflected in his field of vision.

Looking towards the distant "Sword of Damocles", not even a fragment of it floated.

Walking slowly towards him, Suoh stared at Ed's face. The disgust was gone, and only doubts appeared on his face.

Moving his bloody lips, Ed tried to curse Suoh.

"....."

He could not. Like a dying goldfish, he just bounced and no voice came out of his mouth.

Even so, it seemed that Suoh understood his intentions. He bowed his head and said...

"Do you want to die?"

Ed's bloody lips gave a slight smile.

"That's right."

Ed wanted to die.

He didn't want to survive, he just wanted to die. Not once in the last 10 years had that thought disappeared.

He traveled to the United States, fought countless mobsters, and reigned as the anonymous king of Las Vegas. The whole thing seemed meaningless to Ed. There was nothing quite like it when he went berserk as a member of the "Purgatory" clan. There were no chills like when he faced the strong men of "Scepter 4". He just lived... That was it, life was like coals.

That's why he wanted to end all of that quickly. May all life shine like them, and fall spectacularly against the false "Red King".

Ed focused all of his attention on his missing right arm. A small amount of flames escaped from his charred shoulder. A weak flame that was less than the flame of a lighter. Still, that was all Ed could do at the moment.

Suoh narrowed his eyes.

The aura gathered in that fist. A glowing red symbol of power.

Suoh finally got it. Ed would never stop. As long as he lives, he will always target Suoh and spread destruction and chaos.

Ed stared at the glowing red fist, signaling the end of himself.

A shot rang out.

Suoh widened his eyes slightly.

Of course, the bullet didn't hit Suoh. Due to the probability deflection field, normal weapons are not effective against psychics. Also, if the opponent is the "King", then a mere bullet is meaningless.

Suoh calmly turned his face away. Ed also looked at him unintentionally with only his eyes.

A woman with long black hair and brown skin trembled as she held a gun.

She was Maria.

She was shaking, tears welling up in her blue eyes. It must be terrifying. Despite being a lover of the mafia, she had never tasted chaos. She was the type of woman who was afraid to even touch a gun, even though she was given a gun to defend herself. Cowardly, obedient, just a woman. Even if she was wrong, she was not a good person to be in that place.

She pointed her swinging muzzle at the "King".

A voice filled with fear issued from Maria's mouth.

"Y-Y-Y-You... Get away!"

Contrary to that resolution, Maria's appearance was comical. Her presence made no sense here. Pointless resolution, pointless weapons, pointless threats. He wondered if Maria knew.

If he hadn't been crushed, Ed would have been huffing and puffing. Turning his gaze to Suoh, he finally made a voice that he could do.

"Keep going."

Suoh also looked at Ed again. Suoh must have been aware that his existence was meaningless. Raise your fist and lower it. With just that, all the troubles that bothered Suoh would end.

A series of shots rang out.

All the bullets flew in the same direction.

Although he was on the verge of death, Ed was stunned. Even without the deflecting probability field, Suoh would not have been hit even once. It might be unavoidable if it was shot by a woman he had never trained and was shaking with fear.

But...

The aura disappeared from Suoh's fist.

".....?!"

After that, Suoh seemed to have lost interest in both Ed and Maria. He turned around, crossed the golf course, and walked slowly toward the trees in the distance.

Ed distorted his face and put all his strength into getting up.

As he tried to stand up, his legs lost strength. With both knees and one hand on the ground, he barely supported his body. Maria ran over, but Ed didn't even look at her and yelled at Suoh's back.

"Wait!! Hey, where are you going?! Aren't you going to kill me?!"

Suoh didn't even stop walking.

He just took his hand out of his pocket and waved it around.

A dark killing intent grew inside Ed. Kill. He did what he did. Thinking so, he tried to run, but his legs didn't have enough strength. Like that dream trying to catch up with the funeral procession. There was a back in front of him that he really wanted to reach for, but his body wasn't listening to what he was saying.

"Damn it, damn it, damn it!"

Slamming his forehead into the ground, Ed screamed as if he was vomiting blood. The night wind blew like a fool, and the scattered grass brushed his ear.

A woman's tearful voice could be heard mixed with the sound.

"Ed, stop it, Ed!"

The swollen killing intent found a place to go.

As Ed watched, Maria wore an unmistakable expression of fear. As if facing a monster, she placed her buttocks on her back and stepped back.

It was a distance that he could reach if he stretched out his arm. A woman's thin neck can be tightened without using special powers.

There was a good reason to do it. That woman got in his way. She botched the fight with Suoh and wasted the precious opportunity. That alone was worth dying for. He should have killed her and he wanted to.

Five fingers bent into hooks were about to reach for Maria's neck, but stopped halfway.

He heard a voice telling him to kill her.

Would he kill his own woman for his revenge because he was no match for the "Red King"?

Is that the meaning of not being able to die and having lived until now?

The trembling fingers finally lost their strength and fell.

"Guuuuh!"

Covering his face with his hands, Ed crouched down and let out a bloody sob.

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Mizuchi was crawling in the dark.

The eye chamber was broken a long time ago, and he didn't know what was happening around him. The ground, which had been grass until a while ago, now had the feel of wet

earth. Could he escape through the trees? It would all be over if Suoh chased after him, but that was no reason not to run away.

In the darkness, Mizuchi muttered.

"Fufufu... Thank you, Mr. Edward... I appreciate it..."

He did not despair. The "golden" dream he pursued, the "king-slaying" dream, glowed brightly even in the dark. Survive by crawling or drinking muddy water. Then he would move towards his goal. Mizuchi knew that repetition was the only way to make his dreams come true.

Brilliant wisdom and talent. The only way to polish it was with his bare hands.

(That's right, master! Do your best!)

(You're almost there! Survive!)

(You do it for us too!)

In his ear, "Grasshopper II", "Fireworks Master II" and "Piercer Mark II" encouraged him.

"Oh...! Thank you, thank you all... I'm sure I will...!"

Even as he climbed up the tree roots and buried his face in the mud, Mizuchi was still smiling.

Someone would find Mizuchi, if he could just crawl to the main street. Since America is a civilized nation, an ambulance would come to help a person who is covered in blood and falls. If that were to happen, the headquarters of operations should eventually pick up Mizuchi.

He couldn't beat the "Red King". On the contrary, he couldn't even kill one of "Homura". That is the result of a study that does not lie.

However, regardless of whether top management could understand it or not, failures were inevitable in the investigation. No, the accumulation of failure data was the very meaning of the investigation. The fruit of success was on top of that accumulation. That result was just one of the many failures that are necessary if you want to kill the "King".

Mizuchi must have conveyed that. Through his own mouth, to the people above him. That is the reason why he came to this country.

At that moment, his fingers reached out in front of him and touched something.

Hard, cold and slippery: someone's shoes.

"Mizuchi."

The voice coming from above was unmistakable. Mizuchi's lover... was Jane.

"Uh... oh, Jane. Thank God it's you. I was worried."

"What?"

With his half-destroyed face raised, Mizuchi smiled.

"I received a message from headquarters that you betrayed me, but I understand. It's a ploy to trick them, right? We are comrades with the goal of "killing the king". You can't betray me."

"....."

"Come on, take me to the headquarters. Let me explain. And then, the next strategy! It might be good to do it in Japan... I'm also interested in the "Silver King". When you say "unchangeable", how much "unchangeable"? is? If I can catch him... I'm sure I can do all kinds of experiments... Fufufufu."

A metallic sound echoed above Mizuchi, who was laughing to himself.

He didn't know what it was. The next thing he heard was Jane's voice.

"I wonder if Doctor Frankenstein felt that way."

Unable to understand the meaning, Mizuchi turned his invisible eyes towards Jane.

Jane was lying.

"It is definitely us who turned you into a monster. Your superiors may not admit it, but I do. I am definitely responsible for that."

At that expression, Mizuchi smiled.

"Huh, "Monster"... I see. Maybe that's the case. I'm sure I'm a monster."

"....."

"But, Jane. As you know, the "King" is also a monster. To kill a monster, you have to become a monster yourself. Isn't that right?"

"...That's how it is."

After sighing, Jane muttered.

"So I'll be a monster too."

And then a shot rang out.

After that, Mizuchi's consciousness, the shining "golden" dream, the most valuable battle data against the "King" that had been accumulated in the main device, all disappeared into eternal darkness.

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Tanaka glanced at Erin as she returned from the golf course.

He didn't dare question the meaning of the shot that rang out earlier. He guessed that she did it because she said: "I'll draw a line.". And there was only one line that Erin had to draw.

Erin looked at Tanaka. They were tired eyes. Right next to the minivan parked across the street, she sat on the railing and breathed out deeply.

"It's over."

"Yes."

That's what Tanaka replied. He could only answer yes. Even with his shared interests, Erin was still an agent of another organization. The words that could be spoken were limited.

So Tanaka took a cigarette from his pocket, put it in his mouth, and lit it.

He offered the box to the surprised Erin. Erin smiled and took out a cigarette. She turned it on, inhaled and exhaled.

And so the two spies breathed in the purple smoke for a while.

"What's going on over there?"

Tanaka answered while he smoked a cigarette.

"A while ago, a Japanese diplomat contacted us. The United States said that they had no idea what was happening in Las Vegas, but said that they would do everything possible to calm him down."

Erin raised her eyebrows. She must know the meaning of the sign.

"Isn't that "investigation"?"

Tanaka chuckled slightly.

"Since the silence of the "Punching Machine Mark II" was confirmed, the United States has responded to our communications. Perhaps destroying it was their... apology, their breaking point."

A weapon to kill the "King" with a supernatural person. That's what America thought, Tanaka's icy side thought. Superpowers are always suspicious of being toppled from their thrones. The "superhuman body" that the Third Empire once envisioned was literally the "Sword of Damocles". It was kind of an instinct to look for ways to prevent it.

However, it ended in failure.

In the end, the supernatural weapon created by Mizuchi was useless against the "King". He did not know what conclusions the United States would draw from that failure. By holding them accountable, they might interfere a bit with that conclusion. That was the job of "Tokijikuin" and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Everything he could do there was over.

Tanaka looked up at the night sky at the sound of the rotor. A military helicopter crossed the night sky diagonally. Looking at that, Tanaka asked.

"What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know."

Erin looked at the light at the end of her cigarette and responded with those words.

"There are not many paths for a traitorous agent to choose. If you stay like this in the country, you will be persecuted in the near future, and at best you will go to prison, at worst you will be eliminated. If you don't like that, why don't you change your face and name and fly abroad?"

"You mean me to go to "Tokijikuin"?"

Erin's blue eyes looked at Tanaka.

Placing his cigarette in the portable ashtray, Tanaka continued calmly.

"I knew that other countries viewed the existence of supernatural beings as a threat, but I never thought that they would use force to this extent. I need to review my expectations. The information you have will be of great help."

With a laugh, Erin tossed her cigarette onto the asphalt. She put on her shoes and laughed a self-deprecating laugh.

"If I can predict what the United States will do, I can also think of ways to avoid it. In terms of avoiding conflict, it is also for the benefit of my motherland, right?"

"....."

"I've also tried to recruit spies from other countries for my own camp. The trick is to make them believe they're doing the right thing. Half of it should be true. I'll make it easier to swallow to protect myself."

Erin pushed back from the railing and shrugged.

"If it's that simple, I won't betray you in the first place."

"That's all."

Tanaka had no choice but to reply.

Erin got into the minivan and started the engine. She asked Tanaka through the window.

"Speaking of which, how are the members of "Homura"?"

"After meeting with Suoh Mikoto, I took him to the hideout you prepared for me. As soon as it is safe to do so, we will move to another hotel."

"Actually. Please excuse me for causing you trouble."

Tanaka remained silent and nodded slightly. He was a miserable person. He combined benevolence and righteousness. If a person like her entered "Tokijikuin", the peace they wanted would have become more secure.

But her choice was her freedom.

The minivan took off slowly. The tail light went back. A blue patrol lantern and a siren approached from a distance as if to pass him. Tanaka stared at him and took out a second cigarette.

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His body trembled and his confused awareness slowly surfaced.

"Where I am?"

When he blinked his blurry vision several times, he looked like he was in a car. It was the passenger seat of a pickup truck. When he looked to the side, Maria was driving with an exhausted look on her face.

"Guh..."

When he tried to move his body even a little, severe pain shot through him.

He gritted his teeth and endured it when he heard Maria gasp.

"Ed! Are you awake? Are you okay?!"

Ed looked at Maria. Seeing the anger in his eyes, Maria showed fear of being hit.

But even so, Maria lowered her eyes and whispered.

"I'm sorry. But I can't help..."

"....."

Ed didn't say anything either, gritting his teeth.

He knew what Maria was thinking. He supposed that she didn't want to die. It can be love, or it can be self-protection. He doesn't know what will happen to Maria if Ed dies. At least he got out of Las Vegas. "Blood & Fire" is not a loyal organization to the extent that the position of "previous boss's lover" is accepted.

No, or maybe even now...

"We'll be home soon. Good luck until then."

Ed frowned.

When he thought to tell her to stop, he had already reached a familiar section.

After stopping the car in front of the hideout, Maria got out of the driver's seat. Ed straightened up, got out of the passenger seat looking good at best, and wobbled. Maria lent her arm there.

It was nasty. He thought so reflectively. If they saw that...

"Boss. Are you okay?"

A low voice called from the shadow of the alley.

Leaning against Maria, Ed looked up. The organization's executive, Douglas, approached slowly.

An ugly burn ran down his cheek. Ed did. The other organization he once belonged to was crushed by Ed and the others, after which the surviving Douglas was recruited.

"Why are you here, Douglas?"

"I was worried about my boss. Looks like you did a good job."

Ed spent half of his life in the underworld.

It was much more important to read other people's thoughts there than in public society. You can't survive if you can't say what you want, what you're thinking, and what you're trying to do. That's why Ed relies on his sense of smell, which has survived until now.

And now, the scent emanating from Douglas was something he had smelled many times before.

Ed dared to speak bluntly.

"It's an extra help. What happened to Diego and Alan?"

"They left."

Two members appeared behind Douglas in the shadow of the alley.

He had a submachine gun in his hand.

Douglas's burns created an ugly smile.

"This bullet can also be used on psychics, right?"

Douglas pulled out a gun and pointed it at Ed.

Maria screamed. The passenger door was still not closed. Ed's damage was so severe that he couldn't grow his arms of fire in an instant. Something had to be sacrificed. Ed made an instant decision on what to sacrifice.

He grabbed Maria's shoulder with his left hand and turned his body at the same time. He let his body get between Maria and the gun. Ed pushed Maria into the passenger seat.

A shot rang out and a hammer-like discharge exploded from his back.

Blood gushed from Ed's mouth and splashed across Maria's face, who was writhing in fear and shock.

At that moment, the flame arm was finally ready.

The extraordinary arm that extended from his shoulder stretched out like a whip with a movement that was impossible for the human body, dragging the three people behind it.

Shouts and gunshots echoed down the back alley.

Ed looked ahead. His bloodstained lips were laughing. Shoulder, stomach, thorax. Despite the hail of bullets, Ed was still laughing.

"Hahahahahahaha!"

The two of them rolled on the ground, turned into balls of fire and writhed. Douglas, whose stomach was burned, his eyes widened in fear, but he still tried to aim the barrel between Ed's eyebrows. Ed burned the gun first. He then smashed his fiery fist into Douglas's face, sending flames down his throat at will.

When Douglas was extinguished, the other two had already stopped moving.

Ed got to his knees.

"Ed, Ed, Ed!"

Maria covered him from behind. The heat of tears fell on the flesh that had been torn by the bullet.

"Ha.", Ed chuckled.

Is that the reason why he couldn't die until now?

To save the life of his lover with his own life. Cheesy and cliché. Anyone in "Purgatory" would laugh. That's why he couldn't die.

That was true.

That is why he had lived until now.

Maria was crying, his voice was fading. He was very pleased with that. Not because he loved Maria. It was because a conviction settled in his chest.

A funeral procession crossing the white desert.

Far, far away, the march in black receded as if they were vanishing over the horizon.

Looking at them, Ed didn't feel the impatience he had before.

Because he realized that he was not qualified to do it.

Ed was no longer in "Purgatory". That day, "Purgatory" disappeared from this world together with Genji Kagutsu.

You cannot belong to what has disappeared. You can't touch it; you can't reach it. It was just something inside Ed, with bright memories.

It took him 10 years to figure that out.

Ed closed his eyes and murmured with a small smile on his lips.

"She's so sweet I hate myself."

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Foolishly, there were also slot machines in the departure terminal. A few people here and there were reluctantly playing slots even though they were about to become flight attendants. They wanted to make up some of the money they had lost in Las Vegas, but most of the time they were only going to widen the wound.

Looking at him with numb eyes, Fushimi leaned back in his chair and checked the ticket again.

It was business on the way there, but first on the way home. He could see the guilt of "Tokijikuin". Thanks to his clumsiness, Fushimi ended up traveling to Las Vegas. If he hadn't done at least that much, he wouldn't have been worth it.

At that moment, his PDA received a call.

After putting the ticket in his pocket, Fushimi took out his PDA, confirmed the call, and clicked his tongue. It was a name he didn't want to see as much as possible. He could have chosen to ignore it, but Fushimi took the call with a sigh, thinking it would be a bother if he found out later.

"Good morning, Fushimi-kun, oh, excuse me. It's still noon there."

"What's up, Captain?"

The reason for his dismissive tone was because the report had already been submitted. From the arrival in Las Vegas to the present, he had been sending almost every event that happened. Now that the enemy Intelligence Service had withdrawn and the incident was circulating in the media, Fushimi had nothing to say to Munakata.

However, Munakata hit a sore spot.

"What was in Tanaka-san's report was not in your final report, so I confirm it. I heard that you injured your left arm, is that true?"

"....."

That was true. Fushimi's left arm was in a cast and bandaged and dangled from his neck.

"Fushimi-kun?"

"There was a problem trying to stop the guys from "Homura"."

To be more precise, Misaki Yata's staff broke Fushimi Saruhiko's left arm, but it was too unpleasant to put into words, so he won't report it in detail.

"That's it. Then, you must file a work-related accident claim after you return home."

"I understand. Is that all?"

"That's all there is to talk about work. From now on, it will be small talk, but your activities have been spreading across the sea."

"Eh?"

At the same time, he frowned, the television in the living room played a news video.

It was a familiar image.

"The CIA cover story says that this incident was a conflict between members of the mafia, but it seems that you were unable to cover up your activities. So it seems that it was a new show at the Varangia Hotel. Congratulations on your debut in Las Vegas."

Three men fighting as if dancing in a fountain. They rained down fire, wielded glowing wands, and slashed with glowing sabers. It certainly looked like a spectacle depending on how you looked at it.

Fushimi whispered his impressions.

"This is the worst."

Munakata laughed.

"You've been unlucky for a long time. At that rate, the casino wasn't good enough, right?"

"I don't go there except for work. I didn't come here to play."

"Oh. That's a waste. Why don't you try your luck one last time? Aren't there any slot machines at the Las Vegas airport?"

Fushimi snorted.

"I'll cut it when I'm done."

"Yes. Please let me know when you get back home the result of the slot. After..."

That was it, the call was disconnected.

Fushimi tilted his lips and looked at the slot machines in the living room once more.

He supposed it wasn't an order. It was none other than Munakata who said that it was a talk. However, he could imagine that he would be the first to be asked about it when he returned to Japan, and he could also expect to be lied to at that time, or criticized for answering "I didn't."

Just to avoid it, Fushimi got up and walked over to the slot.

He sat down at the machine and entered a dollar bill. Upon pressing the button, the reels began to spin at high speed. As it was, Fushimi randomly pressed the button three times.

The 7 was complete and "JACKPOT!" showed up.

A terrifying volume of fanfare and sickening flickering lightning were emitted from the slits in front of Fushimi. A crowd of onlookers gathered around and the staff flew away in a hurry. Fushimi looked at them with the eyes of a dead fish.

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"Hey, Yata-chan. What are you doing?"

Yata snapped out of his thoughts when he called out to him.

"Oh, no, wait a minute..."

"Do you drink alcohol? Did you?"

Yata smiled wryly at Kusanagi's joking comment. He was sitting at the bar in the room. The "Pyramid Hotel" had similar facilities, but this one seemed more sophisticated.

The place to stay that "Tokijikuin" prepared was a VIP room in a fancy old hotel.

According to Tanaka, the crisis is over and there is no need to worry about the public eye. The sun was out and it was time to return to a fun vacation. The other members seemed to have already gone out to play the casino.

But Yata still didn't feel that way.

Seeing that, Kusanagi made a very nonchalant gesture and sat down next to Yata. He picked up the bottle in the cupboard and showed exaggerated surprise from him.

"Oh, it's Ballantine's 30th. As expected of a luxury hotel, that's a ridiculous thing to put in a room."

"It is expensive?"

"Well, at the HOMRA bar, a popular bar like ours, you can't really sell it. If it's a genuine product, it's probably around 80,000."

"Eh...?!"

A strange voice came out. Yata did not know of any other bottle that cost so much.

However, Kusanagi cleverly opened the bottle. He took out two glasses, he poured just a little and slid one of them towards Yata.

Kusanagi smiled at the puzzled Yata,

"In the beginning, it's better to drink good sake."

"Haa..."

When he raised his glass, it smelled like vanilla. When he looked at Kusanagi, he was drinking as if he was licking it. When he followed suit and he dipped his tongue into the amber liquid, it spread an indescribably smooth taste, and the next moment his throat burned.

The reason why he could barely contain himself was because he heard the price. Kusanagi looked at Yata with amused eyes. He knew that was going to happen. Yata raised the glass forcefully and made a toast gesture.

"It's good."

Kusanagi laughed out loud, then brought his mouth close to the glass again. Yata also looked ahead, but he put the glass down and started looking at the sake bottles lined up on the cabinet.

Before long, Yata opened his mouth, still unable to collect his thoughts.

"I was thinking about Ed."

Kusanagi didn't know about Ed. He had heard about the former "Red Clan member" who attacked Yata and the others, but he had never actually seen him. When Yata and the others joined Suoh, Ed had already disappeared.

In fact, it turned out exactly as Fushimi said. Yata, filled with irresistible anger, had no choice but to admit it. Ed tried to kill Suoh and failed. No matter how heinous it was, there was no way a mere clansman could win against the "King".

Ed must have known.

However, he challenged Suoh. He kept wondering why he did that.

"That guy said that he belonged to a clan called "Purgatory". I'm sure that was the Red Clan from before."

"Yes. I've heard that too. It seems they were quite unreasonable."

Yata nodded vaguely. He wasn't really interested in "before". If Yata only had "Homura", that would be enough.

But...

"He lost his "King", right?"

Yata began to reflect on what Ed was shouting.

(There is only one "Red King". You cannot do anything other than that.)

"Even if we were "next", he couldn't allow it. He couldn't accept it. That's why he attacked us."

No matter how favorably he interpreted Ed's actions, it was nothing more than resentment. It wasn't like Suoh or Yata had done anything to him. That man was just spewing out the anger and hatred that had been swelling up inside of him against "Homura".

"At that time, it wasn't a joke, I already figured it out. But when I think about it now, I feel like I understand his feelings a little bit."

Losing his "King".

Yata hadn't even imagined such a thing. Suoh Mikoto is the strongest and most invincible "King". Even if something happened, even if the time came when "Homura" had to fight with everything, he couldn't even imagine that Suoh would die. First, at that time, he was supposed to have died first as the captain of the vanguard.

But what if he was in the same position as Ed?

What if the "next" Red Clan appeared in the life of losing the "King", losing the clan and continuing to smolder?

"If that happens, I could do the same. I would not allow the "following" to praise the new "Red King", and so..."

He couldn't put it into words. Yata let out a breath.

Kusanagi slowly shook his head.

"I don't know much about this Ed guy. But how is he different from you, Yata-chan?"

Yata looked at Kusanagi. The eyes behind the sunglasses were thoughtfully downcast.

"There are times when you need to think, but you don't do meaningless things. The Yata-chan I know should have been that kind of person. Even if the same situation happened, I don't think that would happen to Yata-chan."

"...Yes, it's true."

"Do you believe me?"

Kusanagi smiled. Number 2 of "Homura", his unmistakable words had considerable persuasive power.

On the other hand, Yata wanted to ask Kusanagi the same thing.

"Kusanagi-san, have you ever thought about that?"

"By chance... you mean? Haha, that happens all the time."

Yata rolled his eyes and Kusanagi shrugged.

"Mikoto is that kind of person. I wouldn't be surprised if something happened."

Yata asked as he chose his words.

"If that happens, what do you plan to do, Kusanagi-san?"

Kusanagi turned the glass in his hand. As if playing with his own thoughts, Kusanagi repeated that gesture for a while before muttering.

"I don't know what will happen then."

Then Kusanagi looked at Yata and smiled.

"I just have to do what I can. At that point, do what you can do to the best of your ability and leave the rest to me."

Yata tilted his head.

"Leave you what?"

"I don't know. Luck or heaven. Maybe something like that."

Saying that, Kusanagi tipped his glass.

It was a story he could understand and couldn't understand. Yata was not smart. He knew it very well. Moving his body was more suited to his nature than thinking, and he still wanted to.

Even so, Yata thought of Ed.

Do what you could. That's how it is. If so, did Ed have no choice but to do that? For the sake of his "King", he challenged the next "King" knowing that he couldn't win. Was that all he could do?

"....."

Yata frowned, and then, like Kusanagi, drank the glass in one go.

"Ah."

Kusanagi let out a nervous voice. The hot alcohol slid down his throat and burned his stomach. Gritting his teeth and bearing it, Yata looked at Kusanagi with slightly reddened eyes.

"Thank you, Kusanagi-san. I can't say it right, but I'll do the same. If that happens, I'll do my best."

To be honest, Kusanagi smiled wryly. He picked up the whiskey bottle again and poured it into Yata's glass. This made Yata happy, as if he had been recognized for something.