



K

RETURN OF KINGS
SUZUKI SUZU / GoRA

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K – PROJECT WORLD

CHAPTER 2: SILVER CHOICE

He swept every corner of every room.

He didn't leave a single hair behind, which was impossible given the nature of that house. Still, with that kind of feeling, Kuro cleaned up carefully. He cleaned everything from the kitchen, living room, bedroom, bathroom to the toilet.

A safe house that would hide them, even for a short time. He wanted to return the favor.

The ten or so cats that were the original owners of the house gathered in a corner of the room and looked at Kuro with sleepy eyes.

The reason they didn't bother with him cleaning up was probably because they wanted to sleep, not because they understood Kuro's feelings.

After finishing all the preparations, Kuro called to the corner of the room. "Neko. It's time to go."

"Hmmm~..."

Neko who was dozing with the cats slowly raised her neck. The resentful look hadn't changed since he decided to leave there.

He knew how she felt. It turned out to be an unexpectedly comfortable hiding place. The cats seemed to have become good friends, and Kuro had no trouble taking care of them.

Still, there was a division in things.

"We have to go."

Kuro's repeated words contained a soft resonance. Neko blinked many times. Each time, Kuro saw the resentment turn to sadness.

"...See you."

Her friends responded by purring as she silently stroked the cat's hand. Standing up, the two of them opened the front door of the safe house together.

And, the man who was standing there, his eyes sparkled unexpectedly when he saw Kuro.

"Oh, are you leaving yet?"

Kuro didn't know the strangely dressed man's name. He only recognized him as an "informant". He was the one who prepared a safe house for the two who had to hide after being attacked by "Jungle".

"Oh. It was for a short time, but they took care of us."

"It doesn't matter. It's not just for you."

It was that informant who told him that the bounty that had been placed on Kuro in "Jungle" had been withdrawn due to a failed mission. For him, who originally buys and sells information, "Jungle" seems to be a kind of business rival. The fact that he helped Kuro and his friend was also based on the principle that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend".

"Even if the reward was withdrawn, it was yesterday. It's still not certain. I think it's safer to stay here for a while longer, but..."

The concerned look wasn't just for show. It was only a couple of days, but Kuro had guessed that this informant was so kind-hearted that you wouldn't believe he was from the underworld.

That's why he shouldn't depend on him forever.

"I appreciate the offer, but it's already been decided by me and Neko."

"Oh, yes! It's not bad here, but wagahai is going home after all!"

Neko who was clinging to Kuro's back said that as if she was covering fire. The informant shrugged in astonishment and ushered the two in.

"Oh. If you go that far, I won't stop you anymore. Chasing people who leave is not my hobby."

"Sorry. Someday I will definitely return the favor."

"Don't do that. I didn't mean to help you with that intent."

Kuro bowed deeply to the informant, who stuck his tongue out at him and started walking. Judging from the fact that Neko also bowed, it seemed that she also felt indebted to the informant.

The moment they passed each other, the informant let out a single word.

"...Now that I think about it, I forgot there was a message."

Kuro stopped and looked at the informant curiously.

"Message? From who?"

"The "Blue King". He asks you to visit him."

"....."

Kuro's eyes were wide. Neko didn't seem to quite understand the meaning, and she compared Kuro and the informant with a dumbfounded expression.

The informant said, taking the initiative.

"I didn't tell you. They figured it out on their own. Be careful where you are; if you have even a little skill with information, you'll figure it out in no time."

"...Mmm."

At those words, Kuro let out a growl from deep in his throat.

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Kuro stopped and looked towards the building.

It was a solid brick building. The surrounding area was surrounded by iron fences, giving the atmosphere of a prison or a fortress.

Family Registration Division, Tokyo Legal Affairs Bureau, Fourth Division, "Scepter 4", headquarters. This is the base of operations of the Blue Clan who governs the "order".

Kuro took a deep breath.

It seems that the pretext under which Munakata called Kuro and Neko to his base of operations was only for the purpose of questioning the situation. That informant commented that the fact that it was a "request" rather than an "order" showed that "Scepter" 4 was not hostile.

Still, he can't let his guard down. He will not drink or eat, but this is the dependent territory of another clan. He needed a certain amount of spirit to get on board alone.

(Shiro.)

While thinking, Kuro tied up his own hair.

(Until you return, I will do what I can. As a member of the Silver Clan, Yatogami Kuro.)

He closed his eyes in silence and offered his vows to the man who is his teacher and friend.

After that, Kuro slowly took a step forward.

He approached a soldier in blue who was waiting inside the gate. It was a familiar face. If he wasn't mistaken, it was Benzai. A member of the "Special Forces", the elite force of "Scepter 4".

"Captain Munakata is waiting for you in the office."

After saying that, Benzai moved his gaze from him to explore.

"Hmm? Hey, where did the other one go?"

"It seems Neko didn't want to come. That's because, as the name suggests, she's a selfish alley cat."

"Oh..."

He worried whether or not that argument would be accepted by the person who governed the law somehow, but Benzai didn't seem to care much. After muttering in astonishment, he turned on his heel and entered the garrison. Kuro looked back at the building and then started walking with Benzai.

For some reason, there was a tea room attached to the office.

"Welcome. Kuro Yatogami-kun."

The "Blue King", Reisi Munakata, sat on the seat of the guest of honor and greeted Kuro with a smile. The posture of sitting upright with a straight back was like a model for a precision machine. A steaming teapot was placed in front of him.

After standing still for a while, Kuro finally asked a question.

"What is this?"

"It's the tea ceremony. Do you know it?"

Kuro responded sullenly.

"I know. Am I asking why is this thing here?"

"Since a strange Clan member is visiting us, we have to show some courtesy. It also means apologizing for being rude a year ago."

At those words, Kuro's face clouded slightly.

Exactly one year ago, Kuro, Neko, and Shiro were surrounded by "Scepter 4". To let the other two escape, he challenged Munakata on his own and was utterly defeated.

Of course, the opponent was the "King". He didn't challenge him thinking he could win. However, the humiliation of being treated like twisting a baby's hand and being stepped on with overwhelming force was still deeply etched in Kuro's heart.

"Are you saying that was 'disrespectful'?"

Hearing Kuro's dry voice, Munakata's eyes widened and he said, "Oh!"

"Should I demonstrate it in action? I don't mind rubbing my forehead on the mat here..."

"Is different."

Saying that, Kuro entered the tea room.

"I challenged you for what I believed in. You also defeated me for your fairness. That's all. It wasn't impolite."

He removed the scabbard from his waist and placed it on his left side. A position where you can always attack your opponent. Showing that he does not trust that person.

Seeing that, Munakata smiled slightly.

"I see. It was a slip of my tongue. Allow me to apologize for that rudeness."

Kuro looked at Munakata's smile without breaking his rigid expression.

"Then will you accept my tea again?"

"Yes."

Then the tea party started.

As a disciple of the former "Colorless King", Ichigen Miwa, Kuro knows all about the customs of literary and military arts. Even from Kuro's point of view, Munakata's tea ceremony was nothing short of splendid. He received the tea that was offered to him according to etiquette and slowly savored it.

As Munakata looked at that figure with a thoughtful look, he cut to the main topic.

"First of all, I would like to express my gratitude for helping to arrest the criminal. The other day you were involved in a bombing raid caused by "Jungle" and you disappeared..."

"Yes. We managed to escape just in time, but apparently we were attacked by the Green Clan. We hid for a while."

"It's a smart move."

Munakata said that with a half-smile. Kuro closed his eyes silently and asked.

"The reason why we are being watched is because we are members of the Silver Clan, right?"

Munakata smiled deeper and answered the question.

"It is true that the Green Clan is looking for the "Silver King". The only foothold for that is the Clansman who finally created the "Silver King" Adolf K. Weismann, who had been alone for more than half a century."

Munakata pushed a ladle at Kuro and said.

"Kuro Yatogami-kun. You and that Strain girl. You'll inevitably get marked."

Kuro looked down and muttered.

"What exactly is the Green Clan?"

Munakata narrowed his eyes in response to that question.

"It's a strange clan. Even among the clansmen, almost none of them have met the "Green King"."

"I heard that it is a special clan connected through the Internet, but it is too strange that a clan member has never met their "King"..."

"I agree. Calling them clan members may be the first mistake."

Munakata slowly got up and walked over to his desk. Running his finger over the desktop, he performed some operation, and a hologram appeared in the air.

"The "Green King", Hisui Nagare uses a social networking service called "Jungle" to secure his pawns."

Kuro stood next to Munakata and looked at the image.

A geometric pattern slowly unfolded against the background of the earth's rotation. The pattern eventually formed a large tree. A gigantic network that covers the stars, that is...

"Is that the "Jungle" site?"

"Yes. Users who have no knowledge of the existence of clans or supernatural powers and who simply log into "Jungle" as an SNS are referred to as "E-Rank", taking the last letter of "Jungle". They are the lowest rank, and by participating and completing quests, they accumulate points and increase their rank."

"In other words, the psychic crimes that are causing trouble in the city right now..."

Munakata nodded and continued as if he was giving a lecture.

"The mission of earning those points is like making an online game come true. Using the points, you have accumulated in this way, you can increase your rank, and if you go up a rank, then follow the G-Rank, and you will be granted temporary supernatural power."

"Tentative start..."

"If you fail a mission, the points you've accumulated up to that point will be deducted, and in some cases, you'll lose your ability. There's nothing we can do about the suspects who have been cut off from "Jungle" and turned into people common, and we have no choice but to hand them over to the police."

Kuro muttered into his mouth that the lizard's tail was being cut off.

The clansman he defeated in the alley must have been one of them. A pitiful man who regrets losing all of his supernatural powers and becoming a mere human. The appearance of being thrown down the upper steps of "Jungle" was a far cry from the appearance of the clansman Kuro knew. There must be a strong sense of camaraderie not only in

"Homura", but even in "Scepter 4", which is based on vertical division, but he didn't feel such a bond in "Jungle".

Kuro narrowed his eyes and asked Munakata.

"But... is there any member of the clan who is officially empowered?"

In Kuro's mind, Munakata said as if he could see through the image of a man.

"The highest ranking Ranker. A handful of executives must have met the "Green King" Nagaru Hisui and received power directly. One of them is the person you are currently imagining. It is Mishakuji Yukari."

Mishakuji Yukari. It is the name of a traitor who was once Kuro's older brother and who turned his sword against his master, Ichigen Miwa.

Now that man belongs to "Jungle". He seems that he is in a position that can be said to be the right hand of the "Green King". He doesn't know the details, nor does he want to know. All he knows is that Mishakuji Yukari is Yatogami's enemy, and that his swordsmanship is far superior to Yatogami's.

"Have you had any contact with Mishakuji Yukari since then?"

"No."

Kuro clenched his fists. Will he be able to defeat him the next time they meet? Giving an answer to that question. He felt a helpless frustration with himself.

Munakata asked again.

"What about the "Silver King"?"

"I haven't seen him in a long time...!"

The reason he raised his voice was because he didn't want to hear the obvious. After all, it was Kuro and Neko who were looking forward to the return of the "Silver King" more than anyone.

However, Munakata's attitude did not have the color of mockery. With a serious expression, he asked another question.

"Did the "Silver King" say something about the "Slate"?"

Kuro's eyes widened in surprise and then answered.

"No. Ever since he regained his memories as the "Silver King", we've only been together for a short time. I didn't have time to talk about it."

"...Is that so."

"What happened to the "Slate"?"

At Kuro's question, Munakata suddenly looked away.

"No. However, now that the "Golden King" is gone, I am in charge of managing the "Slate". I just wanted to know if there was any information left behind by the leading person, the 'Silver King' regarding the "Slate"."

Kuro looked at Munakata.

He was hiding something. The current "Blue King" is the kind of man who always hides his motives, hides his hand, and builds detailed plans and behind-the-scenes calculations that no one knows about. Ever since their meeting a year ago, Kuro had always had that perception.

However, Munakata was somewhat different.

He didn't think to confirm the identity of the discomfort. Munakata has circumstances of Munakata. There's no reason anyone other than "Scepter 4" should intervene.

"Sorry I couldn't provide any useful information, but if that's all then I'm sorry."

Kuro bowed deeply and began to head towards the exit.

"Kuro Yatogami-kun."

Behind him, Munakata yelled.

"The Silver Clan had no dependent territories."

"And with that?"

"In this situation, it would be a shame not to have a base of operations as a clan. If you don't mind..."

Saying so, Munakata, the "Blue King" extended his hand towards Kuro.

"The members of "Scepter 4" will protect you. I give you the authority to stay in the camp and I promise to protect you in case of an emergency."

"....."

It would probably be a good option.

The current Silver Clan is not established as a clan. It has no dependent territory that should have been a safe zone for clan members, it only has two members, and the most important "King" is missing. Kuro and Neko would be in a refugee-like situation from the perspective of other clans. Protecting them may be the responsibility of "Scepter 4", who claims to be "order".

If he accepts this proposal, he will not be targeted by "Jungle". There will be no more hiding and being forced to flee.

But...

"Thank you for your offer, but I reject it."

At that answer, Munakata gave a slight smile.

"Oh, how boring."

He only took a step forward.

"I don't think you and I have a bad relationship."

Two steps, three steps, four steps, five steps, six steps. Munakata was slowly approaching, and Kuro stepped back as if he was being drawn in by some unusually intimidating feeling. His back touched the door, and Kuro unconsciously felt "cornered".

Averting his eyes from Munakata's gaze as if he was looking at himself, Kuro said:

"Ah, it's not a compatibility issue..."

After saying that, Munakata took a deep breath and took a step back.

"Are you saying you don't want to owe other clans?"

"....."

His previous me probably would have.

When he was working to fulfill Ichigen Miwa's will, he wouldn't have even responded to calls from other clans. At that time, he was fine, because the "Black Dog", which was only true to the words of his late master, was nothing more than a device that lived alone and accomplished the mission by himself.

But now...

"No. It's not just me."

Munakata widened his eyes slightly surprised by Kuro, who responded with a smile.

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Fushimi Saruhiko stopped his work as he heard footsteps behind him.

Due to the mass arrest of more than 20 members of the "Jungle" clan the other day, "Scepter 4" suddenly perked up. Among them were mid-level N-Rank users, and it was a great harvest to be able to requisition all of their PDAs.

PDA analysis and Clansman questioning. The information obtained from both sides can be a stepping stone to the upper echelons of "Jungle", which has been shrouded in mystery until now. Not only for the intelligence department of "Scepter 4", but also for Fushimi himself, it's a job worth immersing himself in.

That was why he wanted to ignore the footsteps behind him.

The heavy footsteps stopped right next to Fushimi.

"Fushimi-kun, do you have a minute?"

Fushimi looked at Munakata while inwardly clicking his tongue.

"Has the interview with Yatogami Kuro finished?"

"Yes. He's probably going through exit procedures at the gate right now."

After a pause, Munakata, as if nothing had happened...

"Fushimi-kun, please follow him."

"Eh?"

He couldn't believe what he was hearing. (Are you asking me to follow him right now? Are you kidding?)

As if he heard that voice, Munakata looked at Fushimi and smiled softly.

"The Green Clan may contact him again. Stay tuned."

It was an unmistakable "order." As a member of "Scepter 4", the King's orders cannot be ignored. At least, this time, Fushimi responded by clicking his tongue in reality.

"I understand."

Instant job change. Benzai and Enomoto are the people from the Special Task Force who are capable of handling such important information. Facing Fushimi, who started writing an email requesting them to take over, Munakata spoke in a serious tone.

"Please inform Awashima-kun as necessary."

Saying that, he turned on his heel and tried to leave the briefing room.

Pausing to compose an email, Fushimi glanced over his shoulder at Munakata. He shot a bored look and a voice behind him.

"Where will you be, Captain?"

Munakata's response was direct.

"In the Mihashira Tower."

(Forcing people to work and pilgrimage to the Golden Clan.), Fushimi thought sarcastically.

"Again? Lately, you've been spending a lot more time with the 'Slate' than in the headquarters."

Munakata did not look back. He didn't even bother to reply. Fushimi clicked his tongue again at the sound of footsteps.

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Kuro was found at the main gate of the garrison.

Originally, he is a cat who seems to have run free. He's sure he'll come back when he's hungry, and normally he would have left him alone, but for some reason he worried that he wasn't even at lunch. Before he boiled the soba noodles, he walked around the place, thinking that if he didn't find it, he would eat it first.

A young man was kneeling down and caressing Kuro. Zenjo called out to Kuro, who comfortably rubbed his head against the youth's palm.

"Kuro."

The young man turned around. As he looked at Zenjo in bewilderment.

"What?"

"Oh, no, I called the cat..."

"Oh."

The young man nodded approvingly.

"Is he called Kuro because he's a black cat? Excuse me."

He picked up Kuro's body and handed it over to Zenjo.

Zenjo accepted it with one hand. Most people who see the one-armed giant Zenjo for the first time express surprise at him, but the young man didn't show even the slightest hint of that. After bowing politely, he turned on his heel and left.

His demeanor and the sword at his waist couldn't be that of an ordinary person. As he guessed that it was probably a famous clan member, he heard a voice behind him.

"Zenjo-san."

When he turned around, there was a woman standing there. Seri Awashima. A talented woman who serves as the deputy commander of "Scepter 4".

"Do you have some time?"

Her dignified voice had a strength that made it impossible to tell if she had or not. Zenjo blinked a few times and apologized to Kuro, who was purring into his palm.

"I'm sorry, but please have lunch first."

Lunch consisted of a heaping bowl of red bean paste.

After being ushered into the reception room, when Awashima asked, "Did you finish your food?"

One by one in front of Zenjo and Awashima, a mountain of black bean paste was piled up. It seemed like a joke, but Awashima's expression was serious and there was no sign that it was a joke.

She reached out her hand, took the red bean paste directly and brought it to her mouth. After that, Zenjo asked Awashima.

"Subcommander, what kind of business brings you here?"

Looking directly at Zenjo, Awashima opened her mouth.

"Today, I would like to hear from you as an individual, not as a deputy commander. For the previous "Blue King", Habari Jin's right-hand man, Gouki Zenjo."

Once again, the hand that was reaching out for the anko stopped in midair. Zenjo slowly shook his head with a half-hearted smile.

"I don't think he can say anything useful."

"You are the only person Captain Munakata wanted to bring back from the previous "Blue King" Habari Jin clan."

"I'm just an employee who works in the reference room."

He did not want to be humble. The past is the past. No matter what Munakata plans, no matter what Awashima sees, he was no longer a demon.

Despite Zenjo's casual attitude, Awashima's expression did not change and she opened her mouth.

"The Kagutsu incident occurred 14 years ago, when the Sword of Damocles of the former "Red King" fell. Zenjo-san, your left arm was also lost at that time."

Zenjo's eyebrows twitched.

The Kagutsu incident.

Caused by the "Kings", it was a form of end. It was the name of the detestable ending that engulfed and devoured several "Kings", a city, hundreds of thousands of lives, and Zenjo's left arm.

The past is the past. That's how it is.

However, there is certainly a past that should not be inadvertently entered.

"I heard that without you, the change in Japan's topography would have been more fatal. If things had turned out worse, the Japanese archipelago might have split..."

And Awashima was about to step into the past with some intention.

"Affected by the turbulence of Genji Kagutsu's Weismann deviation, the "Red King" at that time, your "King", Jin Habari, was also in danger of dropping his Sword of Damocles. But the worst was averted. Because..."

For a moment, Awashima hesitantly lowered her gaze.

However, the words that followed were inevitable to fulfill her purpose. Looking at Zenjo again as if she had made up her mind, Awashima spoke clearly.

"Because before that, Zenjo-san, you brought down your own "King"."

The previous "Blue King" Habari Jin.

Even now, 14 years later, just thinking of that name still made his missing left arm tremble. His own master. His own righteousness. His own "King". The fact that he cut him with his own sword will never go away.

Zenjo only responded briefly.

"Yes."

"...I know it's an insensitive question. But please tell me. What was the old "Blue King" like before the Sword of Damocles fell?"

Awashima's expression was tinged with despair. Maybe that was the point, what she really wanted to hear.

Looking at her calmly, Zenjo opened his mouth.

"You're worried about the Captain, aren't you?"

Awashima took a deep breath. Zenjo continued.

"The Captain's "Sword of Damocles" has a scratch on it. It seems there are other members who have noticed it as well. How is the Captain?"

"Usually, there are no changes. However, ever since he was put in charge of Mihashira Tower, he has spent more and more time with the "Slate". Every time, I feel that something is slowly changing..."

"Is that so."

Awashima clenched her fist tightly on her knees and said thoughtfully.

"I'm terrified. I was wondering if the reason the Captain called Zenjo-san to "Scepter 4" was for him to do the same job as before one day..."

"That's my job?"

"Eh?"

Unable to comprehend the meaning, Awashima raised her voice and looked at Zenjo. Zenjo didn't care and he got up from his chair.

"Reisi Munakata's right hand is you, not me."

".....!"

Awashima's eyes widened.

"Thank you for the food. I had sweets for the first time in a long time. It was delicious."

Pulling back his tied sleeves, Zenjo brushed past Awashima and left the reception room. After closing the door, suddenly, there were words that crossed his mind.

"Fate, huh?"

Everything has a role. A great providence that transcends the will of a small human being. Munakata said that this was what caused Zenjo's 'arm' to move and cut his 'King' at that moment.

Maybe that's right. Because none other than Habari had said the same thing. What he trusted is not Zenjo's head or his words, but his "arms". The "Blue King" who was looking at things from a great height might have seen the same thing.

That's what Zenjo thought.

He wondered if he and Seri Awashima had a destiny.

Is the same fate awaiting that man named Reisi Munakata?

There is no other answer than the "King". The past is the past, and the present is the present. Those who live in the current "Scepter 4" will have their own future.

While he was thinking about such things, Zenjo slowly walked towards the reference room.

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"Hmm...!"

Poking the red marble into her blue eye, Neko was looking for "him".

However, what she could see through it all was the red-stained bar of the HOMRA bar and the red clansmen staring at her in amazement. Neko raised her arms in an explosion of frustration and irritation.

"Not good after all! I can't see Shiro!"

"Did you really see the figure of the "Silver King"?"

Kusanagi, standing on the other side of the bar counter, called out to her. Neko barked as if she bought a fight that had been sold.

"I saw Shiro! When I looked at the marble, Shiro was there and he was fine!"

"Because I put my strength into that marble so you can connect with the person you want to find the most."

Anna, who was sitting next to Neko, said that in a soft voice.

This fall, Neko and Anna had a strange connection. It all started when Kuro and Neko, who were passing by, rescued Anna and Kamamoto from being attacked by the Green Clan. After that, even after Anna woke up as the "Red King", "Homura" did not forget her kindness and was kind to her.

Of course, she did not forget that "Homura" chased them in the past, but Anna was different. She's cute, kind, and gives her tasty things. Neko and Anna had become good friends.

"Well, if Anna says so, I will."

Kusanagi shrugged slightly. Neko looked back at the marble and muttered sadly.

"But I saw Shiro, and that was the only time... Hey, Anna, show me one more time!"

Anna smiled at Neko who snuggled up to her, but shook her head.

"You won't always be able to see him. But I'm sure he's connected. Your loved ones may be watching you."

"Oh, really?!"

Encouraged by those words, Neko looked back at the marble.

"Shiro! Shiro! Are you looking?"

"By the way, why are you standing here like it's natural? You're from another clan!"

Yata angled his shoulders and made such an accusation. Neko pouted and walked away from her,

"Because the glasses boss said he wanted us to go with him."

"So, you ran away and made this place your haven. Well, if you're in our dependent territory, even the blues won't be able to get their hands on you."

Kamamoto's words irritated Yata even more. He held out his arms intimidatingly,

"Don't be using HOMRA conveniently!"

Neko shook her head like a baby.

"I hate the glasses boss! I hate the other glasses guy too! I don't want to go to the blue hide!"

"Hey, you!"

"What happened to the Black Dog?"

Kamamoto changed the subject. Neko blinked and shrugged.

"I don't know..."

"You do not know?"

"I'm not worried about Kurosuke! Even if we get separated, we can meet again and again!"

When she put her head in Anna's lap, she stroked her head silently. If Neko was a real cat, she would have been purring. Anna's knees were so warm and soft and comfortable.

"An interrogation, huh? Looks like the blue guys are falling behind the green guys' moves."

"It's a good feeling, isn't it? There are many people who have green breath among the common people, and I don't know where the clansmen are."

"Those who live a normal life while playing with PDAs are connected to the vegetation. It's hard to do."

Kusanagi and the others were having some difficult conversations, while Neko absently sat on Anna's lap and listened.

Countermeasures and strategies, Neko didn't have such troublesome thoughts. However, those people with green masks were only perceived as "disgusting guys" who chased after Neko and Kuro. There was only one thing she could do with the "bad guys": ignore them and run. At least that's what Neko has always done.

But, now that she thought about it, those people don't seem to do that.

"They're not targeting Anna again, right?"

Kusanagi responded with a wry smile to Yata's words.

"Anna is now the "Red Queen", they won't want to mess with her."

"Even if they come, I'll be fine."

Looking at the hand that was caressing Neko, Anna muttered under her breath.

"The red inherited from Mikoto. With my red, I can fight. I won't lose."

Resting her head on Anna's lap, Neko stared at the gesture.

These people, "Homura", are trying to fight. They are trying to stand up. to protect your precious things.

"...Anna, are you okay?"

When she said that, Anna's kind eyes looked at Neko. Neko half sat down and communicated her feelings with gestures.

"Kurosuke said that the power of red was destined for destruction, but... Anna, won't you explode with the power of the king?"

Neko doesn't know much about the former "Red King". Still, she could feel his terrifying presence on her skin even from a distance. She recalled that she had the impression that he was so scary that she wanted to run away from a distance, but that it was somehow sad.

Neko doesn't think Anna is scary. But somewhere there was the sadness of the previous king. Neko doesn't know what will happen to Anna, who is trying to face the battle as a "King". Not knowing, she couldn't help but worry about it.

A person who has become "King" may suddenly disappear one day.

Just like the previous "Red King" did.

Like Shiro.

Suddenly, Anna got up from the couch. With just a smile in response to the restless Neko, she headed towards the wall.

There were many photographs there. They were all happy, cheerful, shoulder to shoulder and laughing. A fragment of memories now long gone, with little familiarity to Neko.

However, the figure of Anna gazing at them eloquently told her how precious those memories were.

"I'm not as strong as Mikoto. But I have a feeling that I'll be fine."

Saying that, Anna slowly turned around.

"I got this power to protect myself. There's Izumo, Misaki, Rikio, and everyone else."

Some important people. Also the people next to her, and...

"Tatara and Mikoto are here too."

Those who have already disappeared are still alive in Anna's heart.

"That's why I'm fine. This beautiful red is my friend."

Holding her chest, Anna said that.

Seeing Anna like this, "Homura" responded in the manner of them.

Some tried to hide their pain from her by looking away from her, while others nodded feverishly.

Among them, Yata was the only one who stepped forward and declared.

"I'm going to protect Anna too! No, I know that Anna is stronger than me currently, but..."

Yata scratched his head impatiently.

"Until now, I've always thought that Mikoto-san was amazing and didn't understand anything... I may not understand much even now, but I'm still the kind of person Anna can rely on. I'll be the kind of man Anna can lean on!"

"Yata-san...!"

Kamamoto looked at Yata with a hint of emotion as he sobbed.

Kusanagi and Anna had small smiles on their lips.

Neko got a little happy and jumped on her feet.

"Anna, you're going to be fine! That's good!"

The anxiety she had felt before disappeared. She is sure that Anna will be fine. Because there are so many people who care about her and who she cares about them. Even if they have to fight the green ones, they will surely be able to work together and beat them.

"When Shiro returns, I'll bring him! Shiro has been king for a long time, so he is the king's senpai!"

"Yes. I want to talk to him."

Saying that, Neko and Anna laughed together, and then Yata intervened.

"Hey, it's not easy to get along with other "Kings"."

Puzzled, Neko asked Yata.

"Why?"

"Eh?"

"Why can't we just get along?"

"...No, I don't know why... but that's how it was..."

To Yata, who was muttering, Neko seemed to be saying something obvious.

"It's better to get along!"

"Neko is right."

At Anna's sudden comment, Yata blurted out the words "Oh, oh..." and scratched his cheek awkwardly. Neko puffed out her chest in triumph.

At that moment, Kusanagi came over with a tray.

"Ok. If you don't fight, you can still eat this."

Neko's eyes sparkled. What Kusanagi brought were hot pancakes with brightly colored fruits, sweet and fragrant vanilla ice cream, lattice-shaped chocolate and raspberry sauce.

"Wow! It's a snack! It's a snack~!"

Neko's eyes sparkled as she jumped onto the plate on the table. But...

"Kusanagi-san, me too!"

"Me too!"

"Nyaa?!"

Similarly, Yata and Kamamoto rushed to the plate. Neko cringed and cornered the plate to protect herself and Anna's party.

"You can take it yourselves."

"Ahhh!"

When Kusanagi said that with a shocked face, the two of them turned around and ran to the kitchen. Neko released her guard and turned to the pancake with a big smile.

"Hm~! Delicious!"

As she munched on the fluffy pancake, Neko suddenly remembered something that happened once. She said to Anna as gesticulated.

"You know, Kurosuke made this for me the other day too! While I'm talking, I'd like to put black honey on the pancakes. Kurosuke's story is long, so it's annoying, but what Kurosuke does is delicious!"

"That's a big deal. Black honey, huh. I might be able to do it. But still..."

Kusanagi gave Neko a smirk.

"Neko-chan also likes "Kurosuke"."

Neko's eyes widened as if the tip of her nose had been turned upside down.

If they ask if she likes him or hates him, well, he likes him. Kuro is fussy, annoying, and sometimes grumpy, but he's a nice guy nonetheless. He seriously thinks about Shiro and

Neko, and he tries to protect them with his own body. Those days that the three of them went through were undoubtedly precious memories for Neko.

So Neko replied:

"I like Shiro better, and I like Kurosuke as much as I like fish?"

"Neko."

"Nyah?"

"You can come here with Kuro."

"Meow?"

Neko repeatedly blinked her round eyes. Today is a day when people say things she didn't expect, though Neko never lived to anticipate anything.

"You can stay here until Yashiro returns. It's safer here."

Neko looked around her.

As if to confirm Anna's words, both Kusanagi and Yata, who had returned from the kitchen, nodded slightly. Neko who had been chased by them and fought alongside them knows how strong they are. With "Homura" protecting her, even if the greens attack her again, she will be able to sleep peacefully.

But...

"Is there any dependent territory that you guys have? Ah, after becoming a member of the clan, the "Silver King" disappeared."

At Yata's casual words, Neko lowered her shoulders. She really didn't understand what "dependent territory" meant, but it was true that Shiro was not there. That's why they were being targeted by the greens.

"...Misaki."

Anna looked at Yata with sharp eyes. Perhaps finally realizing his own slip of the tongue, Yata hastened to explain.

"Ah... well, sorry..."

Neko kept her face down and shook her head.

"Alright."

"Ah, sorry! It's ok, as Anna says, if you stay here..."

"That's wrong!"

Neko looked up and smiled. Anna gave her a curious look.

Certainly, just as Yata said, Shiro was not there. There is nothing that can guarantee the safety of Kuro and Neko, and it is true that if they were chased by the Green Clan like the other day, they would have no choice but to run away.

Still, Neko was not alone.

Right next to her, was Kuro. He's not there right now, but she's sure that Shiro will come back. It is different from the days when she was alone, shivering with cold and loneliness.

Instead of giving up, Neko made a clear statement with hope burning in her heart.

"Because Wagahai has...!"

+++++

"Kurosuke!"

As he was crossing the bridge towards Gakuenjima, someone called out to him from behind.

When he turned around, Neko was jumping up and running towards him. Kuro asked Neko that she had reached him with an exasperated face.

"Where have you been?"

"I didn't want to go to the glasses boss, so I hid in Anna's place!"

It was really forceful. It seems that she doesn't feel sorry for pushing the troubles onto Kuro and quickly hides. However, that kind of thing about Neko is nothing new, so he didn't even feel like complaining now.

"Geez..."

"Hehe!"

Neko hugged Kuro who was sighing. A big smile appeared on Neko's face, as if something good had happened.

"What?"

Neko extended a red marble in front of Kuro. They gave it to her when she helped Anna Kushina that time.

It seems that it was endowed with the ability to perceive, and mirrored Shiro and Kuro, whom Neko cherishes the most.

How much the two were saved by that appearance. They didn't know where he was, no, they didn't even know if he was alive.

"This marble doesn't always reflect Shiro, but it's definitely connected to Shiro. Shiro might as well be watching you."

Looking at the happy Neko, Kuro also laughed.

"Oh, really?"

"Ok. So let's go home!"

Neko laughed as if she was convinced of something.

Seeing that, there was a scene that appeared in Kuro's mind.

Those were the words that Reisi Munakata said to him in the "Scepter 4" headquarters at that time.

"I offer you the protection of "Scepter 4"."

He thought that Munakata's offer was to their advantage. At least they wouldn't be attacked by the Green Clans. They could walk without worrying about their backs, and there would be no need to stay awake.

"Thank you for your offer, but I reject it."

Still, what Kuro said was...

"Even if I don't have any territory, I have a place to return to."

There was a reason for that.

Neko also remembered in the same way. At the HOMRA bar, Anna invited her to stay there.

"You should stay here until Yashiro returns."

Anna's words were kind, soft and full of warmth. If she had nodded her head, she surely would have lived a peaceful life. Surrounded by kind people, she should have been able to live in peace without being afraid of anything.

The Neko from a while ago would have done it without hesitation. Because it was everything Neko wanted.

However, Neko shook her head.

"Alright."

Anna's warm knees felt so good.

Those green guys are pretty scary though.

But still...

"Because Wagahai has a home to return to!"

Kuro and Neko were unaware of each other's situation. There was no way of knowing what kind of conversation each of them had with the "King" they met.

Still, the two of them crossed the bridge as if it were a matter of course. Because they know that it is the place to which they must return. As they squinted at the blurry sunset, they believed that somewhere, surely, their "King" was also looking towards that sunset.

Kuro and Neko walked away to go back to their own home.