



K

RETURN OF KINGS
SUZUKI SUZU / GoRA

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K – PROJECT WORLD

CHAPTER 5: CONNECTIONS

XX slowed raise her head.

It was a family room. There was a table, a dresser, and a TV. The aluminum sheet next to her was open, and soft sunlight streamed in from the porch.

It was the house of XX.

After blinking several times, XX looked around. Neither mother nor father. Did they go shopping or work? Even when she called out to them, the only response was silence, which only increased XX's loneliness.

At that moment, a voice shouted.

She looked to the side. Before she knew it, a cat was sitting on the sunny porch.

What was that cat called? Of course, yes.

"Tamagoro!"

A hoarse voice came from nearby.

XX turned to the direction of the voice in surprise, and then.

She got goosebumps all over her body.

There was a small altar in front of her.

It shouldn't have happened until now.

The altar looked like it hadn't been maintained in a long time. The flowers in the vase had dried up and not even the ashes were left in the incense holder. The dark and gloomy door closed tightly, but slowly, it was about to open.

She didn't want to see.

She shouldn't look.

Although she knew that, her body did not move. The door would open by itself. XX remained rigid, imprinting that movement on her dry eyeballs.

Two portraits of the deceased were enshrined on the altar.

One showed a white-haired boy smiling kindly.

One showed a grumpy, dark-haired boy.

Her heart began to pound.

Help.

XX just wanted that. She needed help. At that time, she just wanted to escape from that place.

XX twisted her neck with all her strength and turned to the side. To ask for help from the only existence that was not her, Tamagoro lying on the porch. Then she turned her eyes.

Tamagoro was not there.

A parrot with green feathers was perched.

XX widened her eyes, the parrot opened its mouth and clearly called out her name.

"Ameno Miyabi."

And Neko jumped.

She opened her eyes as wide as she could. Her body was wet with a cold sweat. She held tight to her heart that was beating like a bell from the top of her nightwear.

Neko tried to forget the dream, but she couldn't.

That name, that scene. She was stuck in her head and wouldn't let go. The dream seemed to merge with reality and spread right next to the bed. It took tremendous courage to confirm it.

When she looked to the side, Shiro was sleeping peacefully.

A relief that made her want to cry spread through Neko.

With that feeling, Neko buried her face in Shiro's chest. She could hear Shiro's sleepy voice.

"Neko...? What's wrong...?"

Neko didn't respond to that sleepy voice, instead she just shook her head. She was afraid to even tell him that she had a scary dream. As soon as she uttered it, it would come true that she couldn't help but feel like she was being attacked.

Unable to sleep or close her eyes, Neko clung to Shiro, trembling until morning.

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Seeing the "Jungle" Clansman jump out of the alley on the right, Andy Domyoji smiled and grabbed the hilt of his saber.

"Domyoji, ready!"

The lock was released by voice recognition and the saber was drawn at the same time he began to run. Noticing the approaching white blade, the green masked clansman flinched. However, as expected of a mid-range, he immediately turned his PDA towards them and displayed an interception stance.

Domyoji's smile turned fierce, and a voice of fighting spirit spilled from his throat.

"Oyaaaaaaaaa!"

Leaping to dodge the electrical discharge emitted from the PDA, he quickly approached the shaken clansman and struck him on the side of the head with the hilt of his saber.

After tying up the unconscious clansman, Domyoji let out a triumphant cry over the radio.

"Ok, one step up."

But what he returned was a warning.

"Domyoji! Behind you!"

"Huh? Gah!"

A group of green masks that seem to be friends were emerging from the alley. With murderous intent clearly visible through their masks, they pointed their weapons at Domyoji.

"Grrrroooaaahh!"

Furthermore, they were all knocked down at once by the giant that broke through.

Rikio Kamamoto, the leader of "Homura". With a massive body of over 100 kilograms and a red aura, he looks like an advancing heavy tank. After being run over by Kamamoto, the green masks flew through the air and rolled on the ground before being captured by the "Homura" clansmen who had been waiting for them.

"Ok, we caught the shit!"

"Give me the rope!"

Raising an animated voice, they skillfully placed the power suppression tools on the green masks. Taking a deep breath, Domyoji looked around.

The number of green masks in the report was six. They all seemed to have been caught.

Domyoji put down his saber and saluted Kamamoto.

"Thanks for your help!"

Kamamoto turned around and gave a thumbs up with a pleasant smile.

"Oh! You are welcome!"

Domyoji laughed and thought, "What the hell are these good guys?"

He had never collaborated with one of the "Homura" clansmen, but when he put together a united front like that, he got along well with Domyoji. Well, Domyoji is in the free-spirited category of "Scepter 4", so it's only natural that he would have a strong affinity with "Homura".

Then, Benzai and Kamo rushed up from behind.

"Domyoji, you stand out too much on your own!"

Domyoji waved his hand to the side of his face.

"Yes, the red guys were blocking the front. They're resourceful, so if you play with the green ones and spread them around, they'll take care of the rest."

"Not bad tactically, but relying too much on other clans..."

Domyoji chuckled slightly at Benzai, who was still scolding him.

"Benzai is not feeling well."

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"No, don't worry about it, we are talking about this."

Domyoji thought that Benzai, along with Akiyama, is a "Scepter 4" duo type. At best he is honest, at worst he is stubborn. This joint front is also following the rules, but they can't seem to move well because they lack flexibility.

"Akiyama, turn the transport vehicle around. Oh, we've secured them all."

Kamo, who finished contacting the escort team, joined the conversation.

"His illegal networks follow secondary routes that we often overlook. We were able to control this matter on the first try. Even if you thank him, you will be punished."

"Kamo is right. He is realistic."

"So what are you talking about...?"

Kamo had a questioning expression on his face and Benzai accepted the words, albeit bitterly.

"It is true that our security shifts have improved significantly."

"If you try it, it'll work surprisingly well. I'm thankful I had more hands. Thanks to that, I can take a shower."

"Well, that is..."

Benzai smiled wryly at Domyoji, who crossed his arms and nodded.

At that moment, a transport vehicle turned the corner of the street.

Akiyama's subordinates are driving.

And sitting in the passenger seat is Saruhiko Fushimi.

"Oh...", Domyoji thought and pretended not to see it. Just imagining how Fushimi, who originally belonged to "Homura", thinks about the current situation, makes him cringe. Domyoji tried to leave the place to avoid getting involved as much as possible.

And, he threw a juice at him, and Domyoji reflexively received it. The one who gave it to him was the "Homura" member, Kamamoto. He smiled and lifted his own juice.

"Good job. That's a gift."

"Oh, thanks."

As he said thank you, Domyoji couldn't help but worry about the passenger seat of the transport vehicle. As he tried not to look in that direction, Kamamoto and Akiyama got out of the car and started a meeting.

"Can I get in that car?"

"Oh, please."

The "Homura" members began to load the restrained "Jungle" clansmen in the back seat. He thought he heard the click of his tongue, but Domyoji drank the juice and pretended not to hear it.

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It was Usagi who asked him to clean Kokujoji's belongings.

He is an old rabbit that Shiro knows well. He doesn't know exactly what kind of chain of command "Tokijikuin" has, but from the fact that he served Kokujoji until the last moment, he was probably the "King's" closest vassal.

At first, Shiro was confused by his offer.

He certainly was an ally of Kokujoji. But that was nearly 70 years ago, and he hadn't even heard his voice since he fled into the sky. If Kokujoji's memory is accepted, there must be someone more suitable than him.

"There was no such person before you."

The answer weighed heavily on Shiro's back.

Has the lieutenant lived his entire life without making family, friends, or close friends?

After a moment, Shiro nodded.

The old rabbit didn't say anything, just bowed deeply.

It was a well-appointed room.

Tatami mats and shoji screens, Japanese sliding doors and chests of drawers, hanging scrolls and Japanese swords in the alcove. It's been a long time since people lived here, but not a single piece of dust has fallen on the tatami mats. This is probably proof of how much the owner of this room has been revered.

"This is the first time I've come to the lieutenant's room."

There was no longer anyone to respond to the fallen words.

Still, Shiro could feel his presence in the room. It was as if he could imagine how Kokujoji had lived in that place.

"You've been here alone..."

The room was too plain for a man of power who had led that country out of the quagmire of defeat. Perhaps Kokujoji wasn't allowed the luxury of private time. Control others, discipline yourself and continue to support a nation. To accomplish such a feat, he must have given up the worldly happiness of him as a human being.

But among them, there is only one. There was something that showed Kokujoji's humanity.

A photograph leaning against a Japanese chest of drawers.

There are three people in the image. Daikaku Kokujoji and Adolf K. Weismann straightened up. And...

"Lieutenant. My sister prepared something amazing like this."

The papers in Shiro's hands were as old as the photographs. The last person in the photo made it. Claudia Weismann, co-investigator of the "Dresden Slate" and his older sister.

"Many years after we parted ways, it was exhumed from a bunker next to the lab. Kusanagi-san found it when it was donated to the library in a box and left there for a long time without knowing what it was. Look, that Library Officer Red General Staff."

Stroking the surface of the document, Shiro narrowed his eyes. Handwriting, the habit of writing, scribbling here and there brought Isana Yashiro back to when he was Adolf K. Weismann.

The smell of the wind blowing through the majestic streets of Dresden. Voices of people talking and laughing in a familiar language. A strange-tasting homemade dish brought in between studies. Memories of the bright days that had passed half a century ago floated in Adolf's mind, and then disappeared.

"It seems my sister was able to see through it all. The lieutenant went straight to make his dreams come true, and I was lost in front of my inflated dreams, all..."

While he was flipping through the documents and saying that, something slipped across the space. He bent down and picked it up.

It was also a photograph.

It's the same composition as the photo hanging on the Japanese dresser, but it was taken right after. Even though more than half a century has passed, he still remembers that time vividly.

It was Claudia who suggested taking another photo. This time, she put the mouse used in the experiment on Kokujoji's head, saying that that boy should be with them. Kokujoji was taken aback by his sister's jokes, and Adolf saw this and laughed.

A time that will never return, but that certainly existed.

Shiro read the scribbles written in the corner of the photo.

"Irren ist menschlich." (To err is human.)

Mistakes are human nature. Forgiveness is the work of God.

With a pop, he felt a light pat on his back.

He looked back without wanting to. There was no one there, of course. There was only Adolf K. Weismann Isana Yashiro, and his sister or his friend was not there.

Shiro closed his eyes silently.

God is in heaven. The only thing he could do when he went down to the ground is face his mistakes. Because even if he doesn't get forgiveness, he can't move on without it.

He opened his eyes. He took the photo frame and attached it to a small box.

The memory of the mistake was also an irreplaceable memory. He was sure that it would be a light to go on.

When he left the room, Neko jumped towards him as if to say that she was waiting for him.

"Shiro!"

With a wry smile, he hugged and caressed her with one hand. Shiro thought lightly that the reason why Neko had become so spoiled these days was probably the effect of his long absence.

Kuro, who was taking care of him outside, asked him with a mysterious expression.

"You're done?"

"Yes. Even though it was called organizing belongings, there were hardly any personal belongings."

Kokujoji's relics were gathered in a box that he could carry under his arm. That was all Kokujoji had. Grasping that meaning, Kuro lowered his eyes with a mournful expression.

And suddenly Kuro put his hand on the hilt of his sword and Neko stiffened.

Before he knew it, almost 10 rabbits had appeared in the courtyard in front of the private room of Kokujoji.

All of them wore rabbit masks and black clothes. The figure that was destroyed seemed to embody Kokujoji's ideals.

With a look on his face, Shiro let go of Kuro and Neko's guard and spoke to the old rabbit that appeared in the hallway.

"The lieutenant's order was to cooperate with me until I came back down to the ground, but I asked you to extend it longer."

"Useless words. You are my king's friend."

Old rabbits wore their sleeves pushed together in front. After that, all the rabbits in the yard bowed at once.

"According to my king's will, the Golden Clan "Tokijikuin" will only be involved in the preservation of the current system from now on. We will stop actively getting involved in the situation. With your permission."

As "Silver King", Shiro said:

"Forgive me."

And as Kokujoji's friend, Shiro said:

"About Daikaku Kokujoji... Thank you for everything."

"...Ha."

Both sleeves trembled slightly. Looking at him, Shiro felt a little relieved.

Daikaku Kokujoji may not have had anyone close to him. His family, his friends, but certainly there were those who cared for him.

"Still, it's 'Tokijikuin'. As rumored, it's a formidable clan."

After leaving Mihashira Tower and walking down the street, Kuro said something like that.

"Is that so? Well, it's hard to get along at first sight, but if you talk to them, they're good-natured people, aren't they?"

"It's not about looks or personality. It's about skill."

Kuro said embarrassed.

"Mihashira Tower is a dependent territory of "Tokijikuin". I should have known they were there, but they appeared without any sign, so I inadvertently became wary. Now that I think about it, it was disrespectful."

"Yes, yes! I was surprised too!"

Neko nodded and Shiro smiled wryly.

"The "Tokijikuin" clan has been running this country for a long time. The number of people and the thickness of the ranks are incomparable with other clans. Those people are also stationed in the Mihashira Tower, so I think they must be quite influential."

However, it is said that even these people were unable to stop Mishakuji Yukari alone in the Mihashira Tower Attack Incident. Partly it was because the "Golden King" was weak, but more than that, it was because Mishakuji was that powerful.

As he walked, Kuro crossed his arms in annoyance.

"It's a bit harsh that we can't rely on the Golden Clan as a fighting force even though the battle against "Jungle" is about to intensify..."

"They are not a simple combat unit. They are the control system of the 'Slate' that controls the key points of this country. We cannot afford to lose them by running carelessly. The lieutenant knew that too, so he put the condition of to wait until I got down to the ground."

On the side of the street, "Scepter 4" personnel are stationed to guard Mihashira Tower. Kuro looked at them sideways and said with a frown.

"Hm, so... Is that the "Blue King" who is running the "Slate" now?"

That sentence clicked with a nuance. Shiro scoffed.

"What, are you still holding on to the fact that you were bullied before?"

"No!"

"Nyahahahaha! Kurosuke was criticized!"

"Well, it's not that kind of private feeling, it's more..."

"You got hit by that guy who almost killed you, so isn't Kurosuke really weak?"

"Neko! You!"

Enraged, Kuro approached Neko, who jumped and dodged. When the two started chasing each other around Shiro, the "Scepter 4" clansmen looked at them wondering what was going on. Shiro entered the arbitration, greeting them with a friendly smile.

"Well. Munakata-san can't help it, because he is a "King". Rather, I admire the courage you had to challenge him."

"Hmm..."

Hearing Shiro's words of praise lightly, Kuro made an expression that wasn't bad.

"As for Mishakuji Yukari, I want you to work a little harder."

"Guh..."

Hearing Shiro's reproachful words, Kuro closed his eyes in frustration and lowered his head.

"I know... I'm not as good as him... But still, in order to beat him, I will train every day with the spirit of devotion and diligence."

"No, Kuro? You're kidding, aren't you? Don't worry too much about it. You weren't doing your best back then."

"Idiot! How can you beat him with such a spoiled idea! Mishakuji Yukari is a traitor who pointed his sword at Ichigen-sama, and my mission as a servant is to defeat him."

"Oh, that's too much trouble. Say something to him, Neko."

Shiro made that comment to Neko and noticed that she was terribly quiet.

"Neko? What's up?"

A while ago, Neko should have been rolling with laughter, but she had a completely different expression. A look of fear, anxiety, and impatience that he had never seen before. As she clung to Shiro's arm, Neko was staring at one point.

"...Over there. Just now, someone was watching."

"Over there?"

In front of Neko's gaze, there was nothing but a nondescript street tree. Shiro patted Neko on her back, trying to reassure her.

"There's no one there. It's okay."

"Yes. He was looking. Absolutely, about Wagahai..."

Saying that in a low voice, Neko buried her face in Shiro's arm. Seeing that unusual situation, Shiro and Kuro exchanged glances and bowed their heads.

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Prime Minister Samukawa Kanichi.

That's his title. As a representative of the Cabinet, which is the executive branch, he is the most important civilian. He is the top of Japan, and the direction of this country depends only on his will.

At least, that is what it seems.

That is not really so, it was just a "presumption" among those who held a certain position. There are other supreme powers. Those who have even greater power than the chief elected by the people. Political tasks that they use conveniently, that was the reality of the Prime Minister.

Samukawa never felt dissatisfied with it. Originally, he was a self-protective person, and the position of Prime Minister became the result of sticking to the "shadow of the big tree". This is Samukawa's true nature, and this is why he became a politician.

But even so, the current situation was frustrating for Samukawa.

Official residence of the prime minister, office. Originally, it could be called the most important place in this country. Everyone but Samukawa must be nervous, considerate, and humble in this place.

Despite that, the man puffed out his chest arrogantly and acted as if he owned the room.

Reisi Munakata, Head of the Fourth Branch of the Family Registration Division, Tokyo Legal Affairs Office.

Officially, he is just an official. As the Prime Minister, it is incomparable to him, and it is an existence that can be blown up.

All that changes when you put the premise. Munakata will become an entity called "King", and Samukawa will become nothing more than a political institution.

"As explained above, we, "Scepter 4", have officially assumed the authority to manage Mihashira Tower and "Dresden Slate". A notice will come from the Golden Clan soon."

"With Gozen gone, are you literally pretending to be a king?"

The sarcastic way of speaking is a far cry from Samukawa's usual. Putting emotions behind a smile is the basis of politicians. He hasn't been able to do that. Even Samukawa took offense as he gave a sly smile at a youth who was much younger than him.

However, Munakata seemed to pay no attention to Samukawa's irritation.

"I'm not pretentious. I'm the "King" defined by the "Slate"."

Samukawa's temples twitched. He thought about how to teach the rude youth about his position, but in the meantime, Munakata dropped a bombshell.

"Therefore, we will also transfer the priority of the orders to each national institution held by the Golden Clan."

Samukawa's eyes widened and his hips began to float.

"No, impossible! Just when..."

"Just when you took the weight off of yourself?"

After noting the point, Samukawa fell silent.

The "Golden King", Kokujoji Daikaku, is a distinguished man who has rebuilt this country. No one in the world of politics or business can match him in terms of status, honor, or power. He is truly a political giant, and it is precisely his intention that an existence like the "King" can do as it pleases.

It was about two months ago that rumors began to circulate that Kokujoji was dead.

Of course, rumors are just rumors. No one had confirmation. However, in reality, Kokujoji no longer appears on the surface, and the rabbits' contact is nothing more than maintaining the system. It was clear that Kokujoji was in a situation where he couldn't give orders.

"King" is a high-ranking existence of politicians. That is the premise.

And finally the time had come to tear down that "premise" that had been hanging over their heads for a long time after the war. It was time for them, who were elected by the people, to recover their legitimate rights.

Even though he had such expectations.

Seeing Samukawa's agitation, Munakata smiled. It wasn't a smirk. It's a warm smile that tells a child, "You don't have to be ambitious if you don't know where you are."

"Don't worry, Prime Minister. We have no intention of influencing the fortunes of the nation with our own selfish desires."

Samukawa stopped breathing and Munakata continued calmly.

"At the moment, we are only asking for smooth cooperation from all quarters towards the confrontation with the Green Clan that threatens the peace of the world."

"You assume the right to give orders, please."

"The way a base has is what is called order. I kindly ask for your cooperation as the Prime Minister."

Samukawa clenched his teeth to keep from making noise.

Evidenced form, that is, system.

The current Samukawa couldn't reverse that.

The system continues to function even after the death of the founder. "Tokijikuin", properly operated by those pesky rabbits, is still in effect. If the youth in front of them demand the transfer of power according to the system, they have no choice but to respond.

"In short, are you telling me to follow you?"

"If you put it that way, yes."

Samukawa closed his eyes for a moment at Munakata's simple answer.

The next time he opened his eyes, there was a smile on his face.

"I see! If that's the case, I'll give you my full cooperation, Munakata-kun!"

Munakata's expression didn't change, but the attendant behind him was startled. Samukawa's sudden change was so splendid.

"I will notify every ministry and agency through the Chief Cabinet Secretary. Let's do our best to ensure that your "Scepter 4" can operate without delay. That must be the testament that Gozen left behind!"

"Then so shall it be."

When Munakata spoke, he felt his eyes shake again, but this time he was able to contain himself. He had experienced that kind of humiliation and bitterness countless times in his life as a politician. Survival was far more important than that pride.

He did not nullify the premise.

Not now.

The change is already happening. If "Scepter 4" really has the same power as "Tokijikuin"... Is it long term? When looking while taking a co-op system, there will be something that can be seen.

It is precisely when we determine that, that it is time to act.

"Anyway, I was wondering what would happen if Gozen disappeared, but if Munakata-kun puts it all together, I'm relieved! Well, the future of this country is bright! Hahahahahaha..."

As he gently turned his tongue, Samukawa also turned his thoughts around.

The Green Clan. An organization that appears to be hostile to "Scepter 4". First, he would start investigating from there.

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The war is waged within 10.2 inches.

Multiple green light points move on a wireframe map. A blue dot suddenly appears there, blocking the green path. The greens scatter and try to escape the blue by taking their own routes, but this time a red dot of light appears in front of them, a giant X mark was carved on top of the green dot of light sandwiched between the red and blue.

Kusanagi placed the tablet on the bar counter after confirming that the large letters "TARGET NEUTRALIZED" appeared in the center of the screen.

"It seems that the joint fight with the Blue Clan is unexpectedly going well."

"Yes."

The one who answered was Anna, who was drinking juice on the seat at the counter. She didn't need to look at the tablet or anything like that, instead she was the source of the location information that was displayed on the tablet.

Anna's original ability to respond increased dramatically after she became the "King". The marbles with her supernatural powers function as "terminals" for her sentient abilities. As long as you have the marble, they can communicate with each other without any electronic network. By distributing marbles to not only "Homura", but also "Scepter 4", they have built an information network that could be called the "Supernatural Power Network".

That is one of the new advantages gained by the "Three Kings Alliance". Jungle's superiority so far has been its control over the electronic network. If you blindfold him, "Jungle" will never beat the alliance.

"Ah, they are very lucky."

Yata, who was sitting on the couch, muttered so and dropped the tablet.

"Hey, Kusanagi-san, why am I on standby here? Even if you're going to blow those green guys away, without this Yatagarasu, you'll have to deal with "Homura"."

Kusanagi looked at Yata in astonishment,

"Idiot. If you see green, you'll run in without looking back. I heard various things, what kind of recklessness Yata-chan did during the cooperation operation with the blue ones."

"Gak..."

Yata shuddered. Seeing that, Kusanagi sighed quietly.

He thought that he had calmed down a bit, but Yata was still Yata. In the operation with "Jungle", he ignored cooperation and rushed over, rampaging without thinking about the damage to the surroundings, and even ended up fighting with "Scepter 4" who tried to stop him. In response, Kusanagi would have a headache.

With that said, Yata was also right.

"I can't help it. I can't keep my cool when I'm in front of those green guys. It's about Mikoto-san and Totsuka-san..."

Saying that, Yata cut off his words. Like he hates talking about it.

Until now, Yata has suppressed his anger towards "Jungle". The explosive power when released would not be suitable for cooperation. No doubt it was Kusanagi himself who told him not to deflect anger away from them, and it might be a bit unreasonable to ask him to adjust the output as well.

Kusanagi knows. The strength of Yata's feelings and the frustration that comes with it. That's why he spoke in a soft tone.

"Well, people like us are important too. Reserve forces, you say. In preparation for accidents, you always need to have some leeway."

"Is that being a substitute?"

Kusanagi smiled wryly at the Yata-style way of saying it.

"Yes, don't be silly. Yata-chan is the one saying that he's going to protect Anna."

"That's right."

Yata awkwardly looked away and looked at Anna. Anna was calmly drinking juice. Her calm demeanor oozes the dignity of a "King".

Hitting the tablet with his finger, Kusanagi said as if to persuade him.

"Yata-chan, you have to learn to look at things from a distance. This is a good opportunity."

"Hey..."

Yata took the tablet again while letting out a careless voice. Even as he curled his lips, he rubbed awkwardly with his fingertips, trying to grasp the battle situation.

Kusanagi returned his gaze to his tablet and opened the information screen.

"The "Green King" hasn't shown any conspicuous movement since the turmoil in Gakuenjima. It's only the clansmen in the end who are still rampaging."

"As long as you're being watched from blue front and red rear, you can't make any perceptible movement. But..."

Looking at the marbles placed on the counter, Anna said quietly.

"He's not holding back, he's gathering strength."

"It's like sharpening your fangs to make the next big thing happen... It's a spooky story."

Yata, who was on the couch, laughed heartily.

"No matter what, there are three "Kings" here, with Anna leading the way. Even if those green bugs bring their boss, we'll crush them easily!"

Yata stated so confidently, but Kusanagi's expression did not clear.

"Three "Kings", even if you say that..."

As he muttered, the exchanges at Gakuenjima revived in Kusanagi's mind.

"Could you tell the "Red Queen" to keep an eye on the status of the "Blue King"?"

The "Silver King" Isana Yashiro told Kusanagi that when he handed over the documents related to the "Dresden Slate".

"What do you mean status?"

"I can't say exactly what it is, but it's very dangerous. It's like..."

Shiro kept his mouth shut, as if he was hesitating to say anything else. Therefore, Kusanagi was able to accurately understand what he was saying.

It's like Suoh Mikoto.

Kusanagi groaned.

"The regicide charge, huh?"

It was directly Munakata who took Suoh's life. But... Even if Munakata hadn't wielded the sword from him, the "Sword of Damocles" would have fallen and Suoh would have lost his life.

A "King" can only be killed by a "King". It's a taboo. Appropriate punishment will be given to those who violate the taboo. That was the "regicide charge" destabilization of the royal authority due to the rapid increase in Weismann deviation, and the end result was the riot.

Suoh killed the "Colorless King". As a result, it went out of control and caused enormous damage to the entire Kanto region. It was Munakata's sword that prevented it from happening, but because of this, Munakata also had to bear the burden of regicide.

"You've noticed the signs, right?"

"The "Sword of Damocles"..."

It is now an open secret that the gigantic sword that towered in the blue sky had some flaws in its majesty. Every time Munakata wielded his royal power, the fault seemed to grow. He doesn't want to imagine what's to come, but he had to. If things get worse, the entire Kanto region could turn into a huge crater.

"It's not like it's going to happen right now, but the situation is the situation. It's better to be very careful."

Remembering those words, Kusanagi frowned.

"I don't know how much we can trust them anymore, and I want you to be honest about what happens to anyone. I wish it wasn't like that."

At this time, Anna put the cup on the counter and said quietly.

"I was able to meet Mikoto and the people of "Homura" thanks to the "Slate"."

There is a certain determination in Anna's eyes.

"But if someone becomes like Mikoto because of the "Slate", then I..."

"Anna, what are you saying...?"

Yata looked puzzled at Anna and then at Kusanagi.

However, Kusanagi couldn't take his eyes off Anna. The worst possible imaginable. That's what the "King" imagines, who has the ability to resonate louder than anyone else. That raised Kusanagi's sense of crisis on several levels.

"That's why the "Blue King" is in such bad shape."

Anna didn't answer. She was looking at the counter with a penetrating gaze.

The marble touched her elbow and rolled off the counter to the floor, making a loud noise.

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She flipped the futon over and checked the inside.

"Shiro?"

It wasn't there. Next up was the closet. She opened it on both sides and stuck her head inside.

"Eh? Shiro? Ah?"

Shiro was not there. She carefully opened each shelf of the dresser and said his name.

"Shiro, answer me. Shiro!"

No matter which shelf she opened, she couldn't see Shiro.

With each confirmation, Neko's anxiety grew by one. Shiro was nowhere to be found. Where had he gone? Did he go somewhere far away?

"Hey, Shiro, where are you?"

"If it's Shiro, he just left."

Kuro, who was cooking in the kitchen, said that casually.

"Where did he go? I'm going too!"

"Leave him alone for a while. I'm sure he has a lot to think about."

She spun on her heel, jumped, and when she landed on the bed, she had already taken the form of a cat. When she buried the tip of her nose in the futon, she was filled with Shiro's scent.

And, Kuro poked his head out of the kitchen. With an exasperated expression, he tried to scold Neko.

"I know you're happy to have Shiro back, but it's a bit complicated. He's not going anywhere, so calm down."

"Why!"

"...Why, you?"

"Why does Kurosuke know that?!"

As if she yelled, Neko said that.

From inside the futon, she looked at Kuro with bright blue and gold eyes. Kuro's calm demeanor annoyed her. Why didn't he care more? Where is the guarantee that Shiro will not go anywhere?

"He Might disappear again! Shutting people up is being selfish!"

"Neko..."

Kuro's expression changed to something like that.

As he wiped his hands on the edge of his apron, Kuro walked over to Neko and sat down next to her. He reached out his hand and gently stroked her forehead.

"Are you worried, Neko?"

Neko turned around and put her head inside the futon. However, Kuro never stopped stroking Neko. He placed his palm on the fur on her back and stroked her.

"Ok. Shiro isn't going anywhere. You said so."

"...Such thing."

"Can't you believe in Shiro?"

"No, it's not like that, but Shiro..."

A muffled voice echoed from the depths of the futon. She did not doubt Shiro. Kuro wouldn't tell a lie either. After searching for Shiro for a long time, she finally found it. He would never go anywhere again. She wanted to believe that, and she should have.

Still, she couldn't control the anxiety welling up inside her.

"It's strange."

As he slowly stroked Neko's back, Kuro said that longingly.

"When you were looking for Shiro, you never doubted that you would see him again. You couldn't be more optimistic. Still, you were the one who was really right."

That's how it is. Without Shiro, she never experienced such anxiety. She never felt the fear of not seeing him again.

And yet...

"Why are you so worried even though you were able to find Shiro?"

She didn't know.

Neko didn't know why. She doesn't care about Nagare or the Slate or anything like that. It is so because it is so.

Because...

Because she knows that people suddenly disappear for no reason and never come back.

"Oh!"

In the depths of the futon, in the darkness, Neko's body writhed.

With green feathers dancing in the air.

A name that was confined deep within, and she prayed that it would never revive again.

"Ameno Miyabi."

A young man's voice called out to Neko.

"No way!"

Shouting, Neko jumped. When she turned around and returned to her human form again, she hugged Kuro in surprise and buried her face into his shoulder.

Then she began to cry silently.

"Neko?"

Kuro, dismayed, raised a confused voice. But Neko couldn't handle it. Overwhelmed by inexplicable anxiety and fear, she trembled all the time.

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It was the first time in a long time that he had looked at the sky from the ground.

The sky was infinitely wide, blue and lonely. There was no one but Shiro. Therefore, it was quiet and lonely. It was the perfect place to break all ties and walk away.

The ground contrasted with the sky. It is teeming with people, and the speculations they create never cease, intricately intertwining and spreading. Thinking about it, Shiro was astonished as if it was the first time coming into contact with it.

The place where he is now, is the nostalgic Gakuenjima, the rooftop of the school building.

It's a place he used to hang out at when he was just Isana Yashiro. He would skip classes and take a nap there, and Kukuri would scold him for it. With nothing but white rice in hand, he would beg everyone for a side dish and turn it into a boxed lunch.

Looking back now, it seems like a memory from a previous life. Hard to believe it was only a year ago.

"If we delay, this country will end..."

After suddenly muttering, Shiro smiled quietly.

Was the voice he heard at that moment Kokujoji's scream? Or was it an unconscious warning from himself who felt it? At some point, he must have foreseen the path that would lead to the end of this country.

Where did it all start?

Hisui Nagare's secret move. The death of Daikaku Kokujoji. The attack on Mihashira Tower. Suoh Mikoto and the death of Totsuka Tatara. The accident of Adolf K. Weismann and the rampage of the anonymous "Colorless King".

Or is it the conflict between Kagutsu Genji and Habari Jin?

Or did it all start when he discovered the "Dresden Slate" in the first place?

While he was immersed in such thoughts, he suddenly heard a sound of wings.

A soft voice called out to Shiro who was still looking at the blue sky.

"You did your best to warn the "Blue King", but it seems to have been in vain. I feel sorry for you."

Shiro replied without looking back.

"Peeping is not impressive, "Green King" Hisui Nagare."

"My eyes are everywhere. It's my only freedom."

That's true. The "Green King" rules the network. In today's information society, he has tremendous power. Due to that power, he was able to evade the eyes of the "Golden King" and continue to plot against him to this day.

"Dragging you as soon as the lieutenant died, you are also quite cunning."

He thought the parrot that was perched on the rooftop rail smiled.

"To think that someone who finally decided to move after his friend's death would teach me a lesson. I find it ironic."

Shiro also smiled gently.

"I see, when you say that, I have no words to answer. So?"

"Yes. Now that the nice introduction is over, let's get down to business."

The parrot is the "Green King". Hisui Nagare's messenger spread his wings. As if he would open his arms when one entertains another.

"I have been waiting for your return. I wanted to bring you this proposal."

He had an idea of what the proposal was. However, Shiro said nothing and just waited for Nagare's words.

As expected, Nagare offered one of the wings to Shiro.

"First King, "Silver King" Adolf K. Weismann, would you like to join me?"

Shiro didn't laugh. Instead, he shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Let's join the "Chabudai Alliance" and let's all four work together to protect world peace! I don't think that will be your proposal."

"The "Chabudai Alliance"... It's a fancy and respected name, but of course it's different. It's a new one-on-one alliance between you and me to further the evolution of humanity."

"....."

"You must have pointed to that once. In Dresden, 70 years ago."

A breeze blowing through Dresden. The voices of people laughing and chatting. In an instant, the strange-flavored dishes brought in between experiments appeared in Adolf's mind and then disappeared.

"That "Slate" is the "Evolution Acceleration Device" displayed on the "King" and the Clansman. Suppressed by the strongest existence, the "Golden King", the appearance of tension was slight, and even the appearance of the "King" was limited to the entire Kanto region."

With a dry voice, Shiro asked.

"Is that your purpose? For what?"

"It's just like I said. It's "just" to further the evolution of mankind."

Slowly, he broke out in a cold sweat.

As for the ultimate goal of the "Green King", he had a few possibilities in mind, perhaps the worst.

Hisui Nagare has come up with all kinds of plans for "just" the evolution of humanity. It doesn't matter what the motivation is. The problem is that Nagare is infinitely pure and therefore never gives up.

Equal parts fear and vigilance, Shiro said:

"You seem to be more dangerous than I thought."

"I am honored to receive such a compliment. However, that is my dream."

"Dream..."

As if an old wound from the past had reopened, Shiro's chest slowly ached.

"That dream..."

"Did it break? So why don't we rebuild it together? The situation is different now than it was 70 years ago. Nothing can stop us anymore. We just have to."

Nagare's dream had an irresistible charm.

Because it's a dream he once had. In that nostalgic Dresden, he would make the dream he pursued with Kokujoji and Claudia come true. It would not fail this time. He wouldn't let anyone get in his way. Unravel the mystery of the "Slate" and lead humanity to a new stage!

Breathing easily, Shiro replied.

"I will politely decline."

Nagare tilted his head in wonder.

"Why?"

"Everything is different from 70 years ago."

Kokujoji and Claudia are no longer anywhere.

His dream disappeared from the earth with them. What Nagare sees is nothing more than a dream similar to the one he once had. It's up to him to decide what to do with it, but even if he makes a mistake, it's not something he can do on his own.

This is because Shiro knows too much about the many things that have been lost as a result.

"Hmm... I didn't think it was a bad proposal, but it seems I was naive."

Nagare said without a hint of regret, and then continued like this.

"There is no specification, let's do our best to get the "Slate"."

Shiro was not surprised. He assumed that would happen, of course. Analyzing his actions thus far, it was clear that he was trying to make the "Dresden Slate" his own, the source of the mystery.

"Originally, he was going to imitate the "Golden King" and wait for the rookie "Blue King", who was desperately suppressing the power of the "Slate", to run out. It's a change of plans."

"Since I came back, I won't let you do what you want."

"Is that so? I wanted to go hand in hand with you, but if you're going to compete, that's what I want. I'm looking forward to it."

Nagare's voice was filled with calm fighting spirit and confidence.

With the "Chabudai Alliance", the situation of the war changed drastically. Due to the cooperation of the three clans, "Jungle" was now cornered.

But where does this confidence come from?

If he asks that question, he won't get an answer. Because that was Hisui Nagare's trump card. Like Shiro, he must have a secret "something" that will show his power only when he puts it on the field.

So Shiro asked another question.

"I'd like to confirm one thing, but it's okay to say that you were the one who dragged me onto this game board in the incident a year ago, right?"

On the other side of the parrot, he felt Nagare let out a small laugh.

"Oh, did you notice?"

"This body..."

Shiro placed his hand on his chest and looked at Nagare.

"Even if the Blue Clan used the Yuishiki system, they wouldn't be able to determine his identity. There's no way anyone but you could prepare such a person. In that case, you were the one who set the stage for the "Colorless King". take action on that incident, and you instigated me."

The escape of the "Colorless King" seemed chaotic and calculated. Using Shiro as bait, the "Red King" and the "Blue King" collided, and in the midst of the chaos, he was trying to gain the power of various Kings. If he had bought into that ambition, he would certainly have been a vessel for the "King", but there was a limit to what he could do on his own. There must have been an organization to support him somewhere.

And the only clan that is benefiting from the current situation is "Jungle".

"I see. Was it counterproductive by erasing the traces of existence, disguising an accidental death to those around you, and providing the necessary information? It's a bad habit of mine to be too picky."

For the first time, Shiro was angry with Nagare.

Totsuka Tatara. Suoh Mikoto. Many others lost their lives in the rampage of the "Colorless King". If this was all part of Hisui Nagare's plan, then he couldn't forgive this man.

"Go so far, why me?"

Nagare answered easily.

"You should be a player, not a watcher. You started it all."

He felt as if he were being showered with cold water.

He thought that was true. It all started him. He found the "Slate", analyzed it, and became "King" through mystery; that's how it all started, and all the tragedies up to this point have started there.

Many people lost their lives due to the rampage of the "Colorless King". The "Green King" planned it. So what happened before that? Who is responsible for the hundreds of thousands of lives lost in the battle between Kagutsu Genji and Habari Jin? Whether it's him, Kokujoji, or Claudia, there's no such thing as lack of responsibility.

That's why Shiro thought.

What has been started must be finished.

"Manage the "Slate"... no, do you want to release it?"

"So it will be. Please, don't worry and trust us with your dreams."

Shiro stared at Nagare who said that with indifference and determination.

"What if I say you can't?"

"Fight if you want."

Leaving that behind, the parrot that housed it flapped its wings and flew away. Shiro waited until the figure turned into a black dot in the blue sky and finally disappeared from sight.

"I don't want any of this."

He doesn't like to fight. If dialogue and understanding solve the problem, then it's better. But then Nagare would never give up. The purity of his ideals makes him uncompromising. He knows this because Shiro used to be like this.

When Hisui Nagare stops, that's when his heart stops.

As he clenched his fist, Shiro determinedly lied a bit.

"But I won't run away anymore."