



K

グラウンド・ゼロ

fragments



# **GROUND ZERO - FRAGMENTS -**

**TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN  
RAWS: RIDIA**

**CHAPTER 01 (PAGE 03)**

**CHAPTER 02 (PAGE 17)**

**CHAPTER 03 (PAGE 25)**

**CHAPTER 04 (PAGE 45)**

**CHAPTER 05 (PAGE 59)**

**CHAPTER 06 (PAGE 67)**

**CHAPTER 07 (PAGE 79)**

**CHAPTER 08 (PAGE 91)**



## **CHAPTER 1: THAT DAY, THAT TIME, THAT OUTSIDE**

That day, at that time, Izumo Kusanagi was having tea with his sister at their home in Kyoto. Kusanagi was thirteen years old.

"Izumo, make tea."

His sister was a third-year high school student, but she was relaxed without being desperate even in the summer called Tennozan. Like all of Kusanagi's siblings, she was smart and credited with being able to achieve results without despair.

However, because she was an examined, she behaved as if her younger brother should take care of her, preferring to treat Kusanagi to tea and dinner.

Kusanagi was the younger boy who was loved and good at it, so even at that time, he obediently brewed black tea with the tea leaves according to his sister's order. Due to the quality of the bean and the brewing, he learned the technique of brewing a delicious black tea that was unlikely to come from a high school boy.

"What about sugar and milk?"

"Leave it. When I use my head I don't want sugar."

"Don't study for a long time."

As he said that, he took out the box of cookies and served it with the tea. He sat at the dining room table across from his sister, drinking tea and biscuits while having a friendly conversation. He didn't turn on the television. So at that time, Kusanagi, who was having a quiet time in the Kusanagi family's living room, did not know what had happened to the world.

The house phone rang. His sister looked at Kusanagi. Feeling the pressure to "get out" of that line of sight, Kusanagi silently stood up.

"Yes, I am Kusanagi."

When he answered on the other end of the receiver, the impatient voice of his older brother, who should be away from the sea, hit his ear.

"Izumo?! Is Japan alright?!"

"Eh?"

His older brother, ten years older than Kusanagi, was studying abroad in the United States. Kusanagi had rarely seen his older brother, who was smart and unfriendly, he was confused by the voice that seemed to be impatient as if it was a joke.

"What are you talking about? It's midnight. Are you drunk?"

"Nothing happened in Kyoto? There was news that a huge explosion occurred in the Tokyo metropolitan area, but no detailed information came through."

"Hey, sister, turn on the TV."

Kusanagi told his sister as he held the phone to his ear. Although his sister looked suspicious, she immediately grabbed the TV remote no matter if she sensed anything unusual about Kusanagi's appearance.

The channel that was supposed to be doing another show at the time was broadcasting urgent news. As the older brother said, there was a large still screen of "a large-scale explosion in the southern Kanto region".

It seems that the news landscape was also confused, behind the scenes, there was a voice reporting something as if the staff were yelling at each other, and the commentators seemed to be upset and talked while rubbing the paper on their hands. They called for people not to approach the scene, they were urging the neighbors to quickly evacuate and to remain calm and save their lives, as they would be informed of the detailed situation as soon as information was available.

"What...?"

His sister muttered in a confused voice.

Kusanagi was confused, but he wondered if a large factory had blown up.

It was a video of the disaster site. As far as he could see, debris rising in the dust was spreading, and it was hard to believe that this was a modern view of the country. It seemed that a war had occurred.

It wasn't a mistake in the sense that a war had occurred, but Kusanagi at the time naturally didn't know that.

"The scale of the explosion appears to extend throughout Kanagawa Prefecture, and strong seawater inflow appears to be occurring in coastal areas."

As Kusanagi was watching television in a daze, his sister approached him and leaned in. Kusanagi seemed to have dropped the receiver before he knew it, and his sister picked up the receiver that was dangling from the cord and told her older brother that he was worried.

Nothing bad had happened in Kyoto so far, it seemed that the southern region of Kanto was swallowed by the explosion centered on Kanagawa, but the Japanese news had not given details yet, and the safety of the second brother in Tokyo had to be confirmed urgently. She hit the hook switch with her finger and immediately called back.

The second brother of the Kusanagi family was attending university in Tokyo. There was no denying the possibility that he was involved in the huge explosion in South Kanto.

It seemed that his second brother's cell phone was not connected. His sister bit her tongue and hung up the phone.

"This is not good. The phone line is out of service."

His sister couldn't seem to sit still, so she took the key to her bike.

"I'll run to see how the main family is doing. I'll get your phone, Izumo."

"Yes, I understand."

Kusanagi stared at the TV screen, holding his heart that was making a pounding noise.

He had no idea what happened. It could be an incident, an accident or a natural disaster.

Kusanagi wondered if there was a "criminal" who caused this ridiculous situation.

If there was "someone" who caused that, what kind of person was he and what was he thinking?

As he was thinking about it, the phone rang.

Kusanagi jumped a bit and immediately picked up the phone.

"Hello?!"

"That voice is Izumo's. I'm Mizuomi."

The person that called was Kusanagi Mizuomi, Kusanagi's uncle who had a bar in Tokyo. Although he was an odd uncle among his relatives, Kusanagi loved him ever since he was a child.

"Uncle, are you alright!? Just watch the news..."

"Oh, Tokyo is in a panic. But your brother is safe."

He heard that his second brother was at the bar "HOMRA" run by Mizuomi. When he was outside, an explosion happened in the southern area of Kanto and he tried to send a safe report to his family who might be worried, but he couldn't use his cell phone, so he went to borrow a phone from the Mizuomi store that was relatively close.

The phone was taken by his second brother, and he heard that there was no direct damage in Tokyo and that he was safe, and if the Shinkansen worked, he would return to Kyoto.

The phone was returned to Mizuomi, and Kusanagi spilled his thoughts of him from his mouth, nodding vaguely asking him to say hello to everyone.

"Man, I wonder if someone caused this explosion?"

"I don't know."

Mizuomi replied as if he couldn't say anything else.

"Recently, I've heard some horrible incidents from time to time. I had a feeling that a tumultuous time had come, but... I didn't think this would happen..."

Kusanagi looked vaguely at the calendar hanging on the wall. July 11, 1999. He thought it would be an unforgettable day for many people.

+++++

That day, at that time, Kuroh Yatogami was playing in his garden in Saitama. Kuro was five years old.

"Kuro, look!"

Kuro caught the ball thrown by his brother. This time he threw the ball at his sister. The ball flew straight and landed in his sister's hand.

"Kuro, you are better than the boys in your class."

His sister in the second grade of elementary school laughed. His third grade brother also proudly said, "Kuro has fine motor skills."

It seems that the reason why he is called Kuro by his family is that when he was born, his younger brother and sister couldn't call him "Kuroh" but instead said "Kuro, Kuro".

The mother was sitting on the porch looking at the fan while she watched the three brothers play in the garden. The suspended wind chimes made a chilling sound every time the wind blew.

Because it was a house where the air conditioner could not be turned on unless it was a very hot day, the sweeping window was open, and the sound of the television in the house could be heard as far as the garden.

"Oh, this is good. Would you like to take your children with you when you go into summer vacation?"

His father, who seemed to be watching a travel show on TV with his grandfather, said that.

His grandfather murmured.

"It's nice to play in the mountain stream, but it seems to be a place famous for autumn leaves."

"Hmm, it's hard to pull off the fall leaf hunt."

It was a quiet vacation.

The ball thrown by his brother flew towards Kuro again, and Kuro reached out to catch it.



At that moment, there was a low noise and the ground shook. Kuro lost his balance and threw the ball with his hand to get a mochi.

"An earthquake?"

His mother raised her hips and said that, but unlike a normal earthquake, the tremor was just a big tremor that seemed to push upwards at first.

Kuro stood up, picked up the ball and said, "Keep throwing the ball."

Kuro and his brothers started playing with the ball again, but his mother was uneasy, probably because the earthquake was suspicious.

"Oh."

His father who was watching TV made a weird voice.

"Earthquake bulletin?"

The mother on the porch leaned into the room.

"No, I switched to the news channel, but it's a bit hectic. Why isn't the news on right now?"

"Isn't it strange? It's really confusing..."

Even if the adults started running, the children continued to play without worrying about it. It was common for adults to make serious voices while watching the news, and that was usually followed by stories that children didn't really understand.

When he got tired of throwing the ball and his sister taught him to play with the ball under her feet while she sang a song, his mother made a little screaming voice.

Amazed, the children watched television and saw their parents and grandfather with astonished expressions. In particular, his mother seemed to be in severe shock, covering her mouth with both hands and trembling a little.

"Mom?"

When Kuro got worried and came closer, his mother jumped back onto the porch and hugged Kuro tightly.

"You guys go into the house too."

His father also came out on the porch and called Kuro's brother and sister. The two of them were confused and entered the living room through the sweeping window, and the father hugged his shoulders with both arms. Even though he wasn't old enough to be hugged, his mother picked him up and brought him home. Her feet were walking around with her shoes on.

"Was it an attack by a new weapon from a foreign country...?"

"Suddenly..."

"But if not, why would this happen?"

Grandfather and father were talking tensely. Kuro squirmed in his mother's arms and looked at the television.

A super large explosion in the southern Kanto region. It seemed that there were many dead and missing. They were asked to please be calm and save their life.

The discomfort in the room that could be heard was transmitted to the young Kuro.

The mother held his head and pressed his face against her shoulder to take his gaze away from the television screen.

"Okay. I will definitely protect you. I will be with you forever."

Kuro didn't really understand what was going on.

However, he wanted to cheer up his mother who was still trembling a bit, so he patted her mother's shoulder with his small hand.

+++++

At that time that day, Seri Awashima was eating a rice cake in the back of a Japanese sweet shop run by her parents in Tokyo. Awashima was eight years old.

The store where she was "Sweet maker Awashima", it was a long established Japanese confectionery that existed since the Edo period. In particular, the bean paste was reputed to be exquisite, and the simple botamochi remained the most popular product.

Awashima loved red bean paste for as long as she could remember, and would go after any sweet that had it, she also liked to eat anko just with a big spoon.

For such Awashima, the botamochi of her parents' house was the starting point and the pinnacle.

"How is it?"

The older brother presented the black letter rice cake and she put it in her mouth. After carefully chewing and swallowing, Awashima smiled.

"Delicious."

"Yes!"

"But the bean paste is a bit tough and astringent. I think it was a bit early to throw out the broth."



"Uh..."

The mother who was listening to the exchanges of the brothers laughed.

"Perhaps the tongue for bean paste is more than my father."

That day, she was tasting a rice cake made by her older brother, a high school student. Her father's policy was that "the sooner you start training, the better", and her brother was forced to make sweets on his days off. He may have wanted to play, but it seemed that he already intended to take over the store as his eldest son, and he was seriously working on making sweets.

Although it didn't work out, the impression that it was delicious was no lie, and Awashima loved any bean paste. She brought the rest of the rice cake to her mouth. "Damn. Even though it looks delicious."

"There is no such thing as anko that is not delicious."

"Damn."

"Fufu, even if you make a mistake, it's fine because she will eat everything."

When her mother told that mocking her, the earth suddenly trembled.

Awashima was surprised and swallowed the last bite of Ohagi without chewing. "What? An earthquake?"

Her mother frowned and walked out of the tatami room in the back towards the store. She was talking to a customer who was choosing candy at the store and was saying, "Are you okay? It surprised me."

"Isn't that strange for an earthquake?"

It was a creepy and big tremor. Her brother nodded, "Oh..." to Awashima who was confused.

Awashima also went out to the store and noticed that the main street was noisy. She thought was suspicious and went outside. Looking in the direction the people on the street were looking, Awashima saw something like a red pillar of fire standing in the southern sky across the heavens and the earth.

"What's that?"

Awashima muttered in astonishment.

Her chest made noise. She was sure something unusual was going on.

Awashima continued to stare at the southern sky with a strong expression until the ominous red light disappeared.

From there, spent some time before the situation was understood.

When it was reported on television that a huge explosion had occurred in the southern Kanto region and the city around the site turned into a heap of rubble, a woman who worked in the shop suddenly screamed.

"Are you okay?!"

The mother quickly knelt down, sat on the floor and held the shoulders of the crying employee.

"Wow, I... my parents' house..."

She squeezed her voice out from under her painfully tear-wet breath.

It seems that her parents' house was in the south direction of Kanto. Farther south than the debris-laden area in the news, a location that seemed closer to the center of the blast.

Cold, heavy, muddy air fell into the tent.

No one had a word for the crying employee. Her mother was still rubbing her back in silence.

Her brother bit his lip and quietly headed to the store to close up shop. Awashima also silently follows him and turned the sign around "open" with his brother who lowered the curtain.

Awashima, while listening to the clerk's crying voice, looked at the "Sweet maker Awashima" curtain, looked at the older brother who lowered it, and looked at her parents in the store.

If that store, her home or her family were lost.

Imagination made Awashima shiver, and then anger began to rise.

It was stronger than the feeling of pity for the clerk's crying, instead of the fear, the irrational childish anger aroused why she had to cry like that.

+++++

That day, at that time, Misaki Yata (who didn't have that last name yet because his mother wasn't married yet) was playing with his friend Rikio Kamamoto in the Shizume shopping district in Tokyo. Yata was five years old.

Since it was Sunday, the nursery was closed, but his mother was not working.

Yata was five years old, but because his mother was busy as a single mother, he went out to play alone before breakfast. That day too, he headed to the nearby Shizume shopping district with a familiar step.

There was a friend of Yata's at "Kamamoto liquor store" in the Shizume shopping district.

He attended the same kindergarten, graduated slightly earlier than Yata and went to elementary school, but he was weaker and less trustworthy than Yata. Yata, who was small, but was stronger than anyone in a fight, took control and turned him into a boy.

"Kamamoto. Ah, come here!"

When Yata yelled at the Kamamoto liquor store window, Kamamoto's mother laughed, "Oh!".

"Rikio! Misaki-chan came to see you."

"Don't call me by my first name!"

Yata insisted that he was tired of that name. It looked like a woman's name. After being teased, Yata hated his name. When they called him by his name, he felt like a fool. That's why he told Kamamoto to call him by his last name.

However, Kamamoto's mom smiled, "Because Misaki-chan is Misaki-chan.". He wasn't satisfied with the fact that he looked like a woman when he was called that.

Kamamoto came out of the shelter at the back of the store, shaking his round body and laughing happily when he saw Yata. He was a cute boy who would become attached to Yata without any selection, even when he became an elementary student.

"What are you going to play today?"

When asked by Kamamoto, Yata took out a white stone from his pocket. It was a stone that he had picked up on the path that he traveled before arriving there.

Yata and Kamamoto crouched down on the street surface and wrote graffiti and collected stones on the asphalt surface. People in the shopping district were quiet, and although Yata and his friends were doodling in the street, they laughed and looked at them.

He got tired of drawing from the beginning, and when he was playing with many circles on the street surface, suddenly there was a terrible noise and the ground shook.

It was more like a big monster jumping and landing, rather than an earthquake.

Kamamoto, who had been making a sickle with one foot, suddenly screamed and rolled on the ground like a ball, and Yata also jumped a bit and looked around hurriedly.

"Oh!"

In the distant sky, he saw a red light that connected the sky and the ground like a great pillar. The sky there was dyed red like burning.

"What's that?! It's great!"

Involuntarily, Yata said so and pointed at the red light.

He didn't know what it was at all, but the pillar of light like a bright red fire felt flashy and powerful and looked cool.

Of course, Yata didn't know what was going on under that, and what he imagines was an alien invasion, the gate to the demon world opening, the superhuman hero's super special move, etc.

Let's go under that red light! Yata tried to say that. Running home and picking up his bike... and so on, all around Yata's head.

At that moment, Kamamoto screamed. Yata looked at Kamamoto in a hurry. Kamamoto, who was still in a fallen position, burst into tears.

"What's wrong? Did you scrape your knees?"

"I'm scared..."

Kamamoto said in a thin voice.

Yata didn't say he was a queer.

When he was facing Kamamoto, who was crying because he was scared, he somehow got irritated and hurriedly hardened his expression and extended his hand towards Kamamoto.

"Okay! I'm here!"

Kamamoto looked at Yata with teary eyes. He takes Yata's hand, intimidatingly. Yata made a great effort to help Kamamoto, keeping his hands on his chest.

"Kamamoto, when you're in trouble, I'll always help you! So it's alright! I'll help if something happens!"

Kamamoto looked at Yata and obediently nodded, "Yes.", he pressed his hand back tightly.

Yata, that time, saw a pillar of red light in the distant sky with a somewhat mysterious feeling.

Still, the red light reflected in Yata's eyes in a cold way.

+++++

That day, at that time, Fushimi Saruhiko was walking alone through the gate of camellias in Tokyo. Fushimi was five years old.

As usual, his parents were not at home. He wasn't happy with them at all, so he was quite happy that they were absent, but it was annoying having a housekeeper.



Being a housekeeper and not a babysitter, if Fushimi had an attitude that she would ignore, she wouldn't have to take care of him more than necessary, but she said it would be bad if something happened to her employer's son when she was there. That's why she told Fushimi to tell her when he wanted to go out and play.

But of course he didn't want to hang out and go out with a housekeeper.

Fortunately, the Fushimi family was uselessly large, so it wasn't easy for the housekeeper to leave the house while she cleaned another room.

Fushimi walked out of the red brick Western-style house and headed for the camellia door. "Tsubakimon" was the name of that place, but it was also a common name for a building with a magnificent gate.

During the past few days, a large number of armored vehicles came out of "Tsubakimon" and passed in front of Fushimi's house, and people in blue uniforms like "Tsubakimon" staff were running. Fushimi was curious about what was happening and turned his foot towards "Tsubakimon".

"Tsubakimon" seemed calm. The door was closed and the building over there was also thin.

Fushimi grabbed the grille on the door, stretched, and looked inside.

It seems there were no cars parked at the time. Maybe they hadn't been back since they were dispatched.

When he thought that, there was a shock and tremor that pushed up from the bottom of the earth.

Fushimi was a child with little emotional fluctuation, but he was really upset and clung to the door grate he was holding.

However, the shaking did not continue and ended with a big pitch.

Fushimi looked up and saw a red pillar of fire in the southern sky.

"That's..."

Unintentionally, his voice leaked out.

Fushimi looked at the southern sky as if he was going to bite into it. He didn't know if the red pillar of fire originated from the sky and burned the ground, or if it originated from the ground and went up into the sky, but the unrealistic sight caught Fushimi's attention.

"Like the destruction of the world."

When he tried to express his impressions of it, his heart fluttered a little.

There was a change in the building that was quiet up to that point. The door was flung open and several people in blue uniforms jumped out from inside as if rolling.

They directed their eyes straight to the southern sky, and when they looked at the pillar of fire, their expressions were tinted with despair. It seemed like they were talking about something, but he couldn't hear the story because there was a big front yard between the gate and the building.

One of the blue uniforms suddenly knelt on the spot and groaned.

The roar, which was a mixture of pain and anger, reached the place where Fushimi was.

Fushimi was shocked at the appearance of a large man screaming and thought that the world would really be destroyed.

There was no particular fear in Fushimi. There was no one Fushimi wanted not to die, and he had no child-specific attachment to his own life.

Rather, he even felt that the event of the world's destruction was better than his daily life.

However, he got tired of seeing adults moaning from the start, and Fushimi turned his back on "Tsubakimon" as he walked out the door.

Fushimi went home alone, imagining what it would be like to destroy the world.

+++++

That day, at that time, Miyabi Ameno came to a picnic with her parents in a park near her home in Kanagawa. Miyabi was two years old.

The picnic was fun both to go and to prepare.

While her mother was preparing a side dish for lunch, her father was preparing rice balls. Miyabi's parents were a close couple who hung out in the kitchen during the holidays.

"Miyabi, it's a fish!"

Miyabi insisted on that, standing next to her father, who was lining up rice balls on the table.

"Yes. There are salmon and tuna mayonnaise as fish ingredients."

Her father held out a small ball of rice so that it would be easy for even Miyabi to eat.

He found it amusing to make a round shape out of rice, and on the way, Miyabi insisted that she do it, and even let her squeeze the paper-wrapped rice with her small hand.

They left home with a full lunch box. With Miyabi in the middle, the three of them walked hand in hand. It was a nice sunny day.

Miyabi sang a song in a good mood. A song about a lost kitten and a guard dog.

"Miyabi is good at singing."

Her mother praised Miyabi's singing.

"Miyabi may become a singer in the future."

Her father also said that with a happy voice.

Miyabi continued to sing proudly. Both of her hands were firmly connected to her parents. Unlike Koneko-chan, Miyabi wouldn't get lost.

The destination park had a promenade where you could enjoy seasonal flowers and a large grassy square, and it was a place where many families gathered during the holidays. As soon as Miyabi arrived, she rolled around on the grass and played, and when she was a little tired, her lunch box was open.

Her father grabbed the salmon rice ball, chewed on the sweet omelette her mother made, and Miyabi said that the distorted rice ball was delicious and ate it.

The lunch box was empty, when Miyabi was filled, she lay on her back on the grass.

"There, shine!"

Miyabi pointed to the distant sky and said that.

It shone in the distance and was as small as a bean, but the shape of the sword was clearly visible in Miyabi's eyes. However, Miyabi didn't know the word sword, so she used the word shine.

Her parents always praised her when Miyabi pointed to the sky and she said "Ohoshi-sama" or "Otsuki-sama", so she hoped they would praise her again this time.

However, unlike the stars and the moon, it was an object that her parents didn't even know about.

"Hmm? What is that...?"

"No, an unidentified flying object?"

Her parents looked at each other and fell silent.

At the point where Miyabi was looking, the red glow fell.

The red glow fell to the ground.

As soon as it hit the ground, there was a roar that seemed to tear at the back of her ears, and there was a shock as Miyabi's body who was lying down rose up a bit.

Her father raised Miyabi's body like a reflex.

Miyabi saw a column of red light rise up into the sky from where the red glow fell on her father's shoulder, and a tsunami of light rush from there.

Her mother got up like a fight, pushed her father's back and they started running together.

The people around her were running to escape the tsunami of light.

Miyabi opened her eyes and looked at the light that was chasing them.

The light swallowed the city.

A person running behind her hit her father's back hard. Her father, who had Miyabi, lost his balance and fell, but he protected her so she wouldn't be crushed.

The mother who was running with them also stopped and knelt beside her father.

The great wave of light was right behind.

The mother, realizing that she couldn't escape, covered Miyabi with her father, using him as shield.

For Miyabi, who was only two years old, the world was full of surprises every day, so the light that she swallowed them was taken as a surprise.

However, she thought that the light was the most dazzling and beautiful she had ever seen.

+++++

That day, that hour, everywhere, every person acknowledged the incident with every emotion.

The children who would eventually carry the same sword above their heads received the incident where a huge sword floating in the heavens fell and scattered the ruins, with their own emotions.

Or they just looked at the light of destruction as they were without having a specific feeling.

Or, thinking of who he must be to prevent such ruin.

Or, as he was impaled on debris, he swallowed the fact and thought about the future.

On that day, even the fate of those who were not within that time, the only sword that had fallen to the ground moved silently.



## **CHAPTER 2: STARTING WITH A DREAM, AND...**

The largest "King" and "Gold King" on the ground, Daikaku Kokujoji, stood beside a wide-open window.

Near afternoon, the summer sun is already golden and slanting, but the setting sun in the aerial garden is late.

"A dream?"

When he muttered that, about 30 minutes had passed since the hearing began.

Nanakamado, on the rooftop of the Mihashira Tower, is Kokujoji's private residence. A private space, normally accessible only to a very limited number of people who care about their surroundings, now welcomes guests.

There were two customers. He didn't have an appointment, but when he visited the Mihashira Tower, he was greeted by the messenger from "Tokijikuin" before greeting and going to the rooftop.

Of course, it is usually unthinkable. Everything in the politics and economy of a country revolves according to its intentions: the ruthless giant Kokujoji Daikaku, of whom it is said that "if he stumbles, the country will collapse", it is not common sense to meet unexpected visitors or spend minutes.

In other words, the client was an unconventional person.

"Colorless King" Ichigen Miwa. He sat quietly and watched Kokujoji's back as if he were enjoying the atmosphere of a giant rock in a garden.

And another boy in casual clothes that he brought with him. His slim and well-organized appearance appears to be that of a girl, but his agilely trained body and central posture make it clear that he is not just a student.

His name is Yukari Mishakuji. Kokujoji also knows that he became a member of the "Colorless King" clan a few months ago.

When the helpers who had guided the two were evacuated, Kokujoji ordered Miwa to speak directly.

"Say the matter, Miwa."

A direct tone that admits neither opportunism nor dignity. In a word, he easily dismisses the pressure with which a normal person could faint on their own.

""I'm not in a good mood, Your Excellency. I had a bad dream this morning, so I'm a little worried."

"A dream...?"

Kokujoji fell silent.

The vision of the future is a unique ability of Miwa. It may fall into his mind in the form of a mysterious poem, or it may arise in the form of a non-verbal vision. Such visions often come during special wakefulness before and after sleep. In other words, a dream. It is a dream of precognition.

"Ichigen Miwa visited the "Golden King" with an unwanted vision of precognition."

In response to this fact, the tyrannical monarch, Kokujoji Daikaku, who made a quick decision, turned to the recipient. Things were serious and there was very little information.

In the background, there was a situation of immediate readiness.

The existence of a man who is losing control with enormous power.

Kokujoji waited for the next word, but since Miwa didn't say anything, Kokujoji asked about the situation.

In that way, thirty minutes passed.

+++++

The Silent Thirty Minutes of Kokujoji Daikaku.

It was a time when the taiga water was blocked by the dam and the volume increased moment by moment. Kokujoji's vassals, who were below, probably felt chills.

Not to mention the inside. Yukari Mishakuji tried to pretend to be calm, but the overwhelming "water pressure" seemed to crush his entire body. Miwa Ichigen said, "You just have to sit quietly.", but that was just a life-threatening event.

It was Kokujoji who broke the silence.

"A dream?"

"Yes."

In a word, Kokujoji's wrinkled face looked slightly skyward.

"I've already encountered that."

This is a confirmation, not a question.

The giant airship "Himmelreich" constantly orbiting over Tokyo. Adolf K. Weissman, the lonely inhabitant of the celestial world, who lives on the airship and has not set foot on land for more than half a century.

Miwa Ichigen, who had the vision of the ruin in a dream this morning, first visited the Himmelreich before the Mihashira Tower. Just a few hours ago.

This was to gain Weissman's knowledge of the unprecedented "giant extraordinary disaster".

The power of royalty, far beyond the limits of the different abilities of an individual. The possibility of the force losing control and going out of control was predicted from the beginning of "V" physics research, which began in Germany during World War II, with the danger that the trigger was left to the will of the individual.

In terms of simple calories, the energy release far exceeds strategic nuclear weapons, the explosion of royalty (Damocles down).

After the war, Kokujoji, who took control of the national affairs of his native country, turned the metropolitan area centered on the Mihashira Tower into an experimental site where the "Seven Kings" were concentrated, that was to study and control the state of that power.

The "kings" with seven attributes and seven destinies pursue life, society and power, and die. In the end, he was able to catch some truth... it was supposed to be like this.

However, there was a blind spot in the Kokujoji concept, no, a gross miscalculation.

The "Red King" Kagutsu Genji.

The man had a will for violence that could be said to be out of the standard, he was extremely radical compared to the "Red King" that existed in the past.

He had no stop. He ran full speed for the shortest distance that led to a fugitive and sought more destruction.

The means to stop the self-seeking "King" are very limited.

Normally, only another "King" can control the "King", but trying to stop the runaway "King" makes it easy for the stopping "King" to escape. In other words, it is the blowout of a chain of blowups that goes far beyond a simple royal outburst and brings about global ruin.

The suburbs of Tokyo, where the "Seven Kings" are concentrated at close range, have been turned into huge bombs with the "Red King" as the detonator.

Adolf K. Weissman, the proponent of "Theory V", was very concerned about the possibility of ruin. However, if he stepped in as the First King and one of the Great Kings, that power could immediately trigger an outburst from Kagutsu. He was afraid of interfering with the ground.

A few hours ago, Weissman told Miwa.

"I'm willing to provide information, but I can't help directly. I'm just a helpless observer. If I try to do things, I'll be the source of chaos."

And now, Kokujoji, who heard the summary of the press conference, silently nodded.

His position was similar. If the "Earth's Greatest King", together with Weissman, came into contact with the fugitive "Red King", it would cause an outburst of both, and even super-physical mutual interference involving all the other kings.

"Silver" and "Gold", the two giants are tied to their respective positions due to their enormous size.

The acknowledgment was in line with Miwa Ichigen's understanding. In a word, he doesn't have a means of observation like Weissman or an information network like Kokujoji, but he has come to the same point of view just by his five senses and inspiration. He was another "King" with the same sense of crisis at this stage, and the only "King" with freedom of action.

"Tell me what you need."

Once again, Kokujoji spoke. It was a tone that neatly stopped the flow of the conversation.

The exchanges thus far may have been a necessary process for Kokujoji to gather his thoughts and intentions, including the time of silence.

A man who was blown away by the wind and casually visited him was blocking the river so the giant could breathe.

The man, "Colorless King", Miwa Ichigen, touched the tatami.

"Can you let me take a walk around your knees?"

"Permitted."

Kokujoji responded immediately.

"If necessary, we will talk amongst ourselves."

"I think I'll ask you when necessary."

"Well, do you need an escort?"

"Clansman, Yukari Mishakuji. That is enough."

"That's it."

Kokujoji looked at Yukari's figure. Yukari held his breath and just endured the "pressure".

The steep line of sight turned out the window again.



"Go, "Colorless King". Look down into the eyes of the heavenly whale, the power of the pillars, walk all the way to your heart's content, and find a way to avoid ruin."

"Yes."

"...Miwa."

As he looked at the garden, Kokujoji spoke. It was a huge back like a rock. Immovable, solid as a rock, but therefore...

"It takes time and effort."

Heavenly giant whale, earthly giant tree. The two giant Kings in heaven and earth are motionless due to the size of their existence. The reason is that the giant tree that supports a country entrusts things to the fluff that rides on the wind.

"Come on."

Miwa stood up as he urged Yukari on.

"Fortunately, I have nothing to carry on my back. The lightness of my waist is the key."

+++++

The hearing ended in less than an hour.

After leaving the tower, the city on the ground had already fallen into darkness. Looking up, the setting sun was shining on the upper floors of some skyscrapers. Depending on the height of the viewpoint, the view that is seen will change.

But other than that,

"I wonder if you are responsible for my identity."

Kokujoji's parting word mentioned above. There was a complaint from an unexpected place.

"Yes? Oh, of course I feel responsible, Yukari."

Miwa answered easily.

"But I haven't brought him into your life, because you have your own path."

Yukari still had a dissatisfied face. He didn't seem convinced. He didn't mind following Miwa.

"I've been a bit away due to my fitness and changes in my position, but I'm chasing 'a stick, cut and stretched'. It's okay to have a life like that. You can have a life like that. I'm sure it will be fun."

He imagines a "path" that he couldn't choose, Miwa's tone seemed to be very funny. But,

"Hah."

He couldn't keep up with Miwa. Far from being fun, if life will continue like this in the future...

A world that can be said to be the secret behind the world, woven by kings and talented people. The sensitivity of Yukari, who has just set foot there, is still close to that of ordinary people.

If he organizes the situation in his mind to deal with an unusual situation...

The fugitive "Red King" and other "Kings" trying to stop him.

The Lord who plays a role in the "Seven Kings", the "Colorless King" Miwa Ichigen visited the "Silver King" and the "Golden King" to understand the situation and guidelines for action.

In order to maintain the balance of power between the kings as mediators and avoid ruin, it is necessary to visit the remaining four "kings".

In what order should he visit each one, and how should he work? It's a dangerous puzzle that can even ruin the world if he made a mistake in one step.

First of all, the next move, except for the "Green King", which is completely hidden, the choice is one of the remaining three "King".

Namely,

"Red King" Kagutsu Genji.

"Blue King" Habari Jin.

"Grey King" Otori Seigo.

Of these, "Red King" Kagutsu and "Blue King" Habari are based in central Tokyo, which is Kokujoji's knee, and engage in small-scale battles on a daily basis. The assault of the red clan "Purgatory" is being addressed by the security organization of the Blue clan "Scepter 4".

The remaining "Grey King" phoenix has a huge autonomous territory "Cathedral" in the southern part of Kanagawa Prefecture, and maintains a calm demeanor.

Regardless of the power he came into contact with, "Red", "Blue", or "Grey", there was a risk that the dangerous balance would be thrown off balance and the "Red King" would go out of control.

In particular, Yukari Mishakuji killed a member of the "Purgatory" clan in the "Yodomiya Incident" six months ago. Members' lives are light for "Purgatory", but it's not hard to imagine expecting retaliation from Yukari due to the organization's physical condition.

Also, before "Blue King" Habari who visited the place after the incident, he refused to join "Scepter 4" after being recommended.

"I tried to kill him..."

When talking about it for the first time, Miwa said in a cheerful tone.

"You only thought about it for a moment."

Yukari denied it. It was surprising to think that he was a dangerous person, and even more so that amused to him.

"At that time, it was an instant. But did you think about it every time you remembered? "How could he be cut, can I cut him today?"."

"Perhaps it is so."

"Of course, Habari Jin is not a person who has such a root, but it can't be helped if he is judged as a dangerous person. If you leave him alone, you don't know which "King" to cut down next."

"That is..."

"Haha... Just kidding, Yukari. Ordinary humans can't kill the "King" in front of them, even if they have extraordinary powers. Even if you can think about it, you're..."

At that moment...

The sudden sound of a bell interrupted Yukari's memory. It was a telephone ringtone.

Miwa took out a clamshell mobile phone from his chest. The screen did not announce the sender.

"Hello?"

"Hello, "Colorless King" Miwa Ichigen."

An electronically discordant voice. The owner of the phone was using a voice changer.

"You got your approval and secured the position of mediator."

"Who are you?"

The owner of the phone kept talking without answering Miwa's question.

"Your partner is Yukari Mishakuji from "Niibangai, in Yodomiya"."

At that moment, with a single look from Miwa, Yukari noticed that he was talking about him, and his slender body tensed.

"Even if it's a chicken, "Regicide". You can take it anywhere in the name of mediation."

"It's out of my mind for him to be called that."

"I'm not blaming you. I'm impressed that it's an interesting move. Miwa Ichigen, you're a good move."

"Thank you. I will accept it obediently."

Miwa replied.

"If you are going to praise me, can you tell me something instead of a reward?"

"Fine, but there may be a penalty for a boring question."

Ignoring the words that could be taken as a threat, Miwa asked.

"What is your motive, "Green King"?"

The owner of the phone did not deny the sudden name, and...

"....."

After a few seconds of silence, a word was murmured.

"...Dream."

"Dream?"

"Yes, it's a dream. Is there something else that moves people?"

Mockery, ridicule, or a bit of urgency. Suddenly, the phone was hung up faster than Miwa could measure the true meaning of the word.

"Ichigen-sama, that phone call was from..."

"The messenger of the "Green King"... no, perhaps himself."

Miwa seemed hollow, as if he imagined the appearance of a mysterious person.

"He called me a "move". In other words, he viewed this one-touch situation as Go or Shogi...and he designated us as a pair."

"Does that mean an unidentified "King" has declared us hostile again...?"

"Hostile... How about that? In any case, it seems that he invited me to play."

Suddenly, Miwa stopped.

The "words" had gone down.

Ichimoku,

He plays with me,



Play of war.

"Yes."

Miwa smiled back as if he wanted to release Yukari's tension.

"Let's enjoy this situation too. Well, we should move on to the next one."

Miwa started walking again, followed by Yukari.

The smell of summer nights was beginning to waft through the urban streets looking up at the high-rise buildings like giants.

If he made a mistake, this mega-city would turn into a smoky plain overnight.

Miwa Ichigen knew his responsibility, but he did not allow himself to be overwhelmed by the weight of it.

There was no impatience in his steps, even light ones somehow.

### **CHAPTER 3: CHILDREN**

The first time they went out in a high school uniform was not at the entrance ceremony but at their parents' funeral.

Siblings Minato Hayato and Akito attended the funeral ceremony held at the "Scepter 4" camp in the second half of March when the cherry blossoms were about to begin to crumble.

"Draw your swords. Ready, Battou!"

It was Gen Shiotsu, a person familiar to Hayato and Akito, who issued such an order. While listening to the voice of Shiotsu as the deputy boss of "Scepter 4", who was the uncle of a serious and caring relative, with a mysterious feeling, the two of them looked at the coffin in the grieving family's seat prepared in the front.

The faces of Hayato and Akito's parents, Minato Hayato and Akio's bodies were beautiful, but their bodies were covered with white cloth and could not be seen. They knew that they were wounded from the battle with "Purgatory", and wanted to see how their parents fought and died, just looking at the footprints, but Shiotsu's face, begging for "Don't look", looked pained, so the two walked away in silence.

During the ceremony, neither Hayato nor Akito shed tears. It wasn't a good idea to stubbornly cry after that, so they put their shoulders together and bid their parents farewell in silence while sharing a light body temperature.

When it was over, Hayato and Akito asked Shiotsu for an audience with the "Blue King" Habari Jin. The two decided it before attending the event.

Shiotsu had a complicated look on his face, but he didn't refuse the request of the two. Shiotsu knew that they longed for Habari, so he may have wanted to repay the poor children who lost their parents, or perhaps he thought that if there was any grudge against Habari who had carried out an operation that would kill their parents, they should tell him. Shiotsu was one of those people.

Guided by Shiotsu, they entered the main building of the tunsho. The members who crossed stopped when they saw the brothers and gave them their condolences.

When they entered the command office, they saw Habari Jin standing by the window and looking outside.

"Habari. Akio and Minato's children."

Shiotsu called, Habari looked directly at Hayato and Akito as he walked away from the window.

Habari's eyes, which had no sadness, no anger, no regret, and only saw the essence of what was in front of him from the front, made them somewhat flirtatious. When they got there, his eyes were clearly different from the eyes of the members who were directed at them, and the eyes were like a clear sky that was not suitable for children whose parents were killed.

However, Hayato and Akito thought that these were the eyes of the person whose parents believed and entrusted their lives.

"Make us members of the Blue clan."

They didn't plan it, but Hayato's and Akito's voices overlapped beautifully.

Habari looked at them with a faint smile, but Shiotsu, who brought them, averted his eyes.

"What are they saying?!"

"In the test, we were also diagnosed as having different aptitudes. We have qualifications and aptitudes."

"I think I have enough motivation to become a member. I will fight with the will of my parents. I will defeat the enemy that killed my parents."

"You're still kid!"

"I am not a child."

The voices of the two overlapped again.

Shiotsu seemed to have been swallowed for a moment, but he immediately made his facial expression pronounced and he glared at them stubbornly.

"No. I have a duty to protect them, Akio's forgotten memory, and a responsibility as the underboss. As their guardian, I can't let them go to their deaths, and as the underboss of "Scepter 4", I can't let some children get away with it, joining the team."

Shiotsu stood up and said that in front of Hayato and Akito. The two defended themselves strongly, but there was no sign that Shiotsu was going to change his mind.

Habari silently looked at the children and the deputy chief who stood in front of him and began to argue with his pale eyes.

+++++++

The matter of becoming members of the Blue clan flowed due to Shiotsu's fierce opposition, but the Minato brothers' whereabouts were moved to the member's dormitory in the "Scepter 4" tunsho.

Because Akio and Hayatoshi's parents died early, Shirahane's arrow stayed in Shiotsu as a relative to take care of the Minato brothers. Although, Shiotsu is a distant relative. However, Akio grew up in the neighborhood as brother and sister, and Minato and his wife also worked together, so the relationship ran deeper than blood connection. Shiotsu was also willing to do his best as the twins' guardian.

But, the story is different when it comes to acting as a parent.

Shiotsu is a single man, a lieutenant in a life-threatening organization. The battle with "Purgatory" was intensifying and it was difficult for the twins to leave the government building and live together.

Shiotsu, who was thinking about what to do, even thought about getting married for a moment, but...

"It's rude to get married to take care of ourselves, Gen-san."

"Even if we don't do that, we can still do our thing, Gen-san."

He got the very correct opinion from the twins and immediately returned calmly.

"If you find it difficult to live outside, why don't you let your children live here?"

It was a good idea to say it.

"In the dorm, if you go to the cafeteria, you'll get proper food. It's hard to live."

Zenjo was a man like a great wild child suddenly picked up by Habari. For Zenjo, the "Scepter 4" camp can be a place where a civilized life is guaranteed.

"It would be bad for emotional education."

Zenjo made a neat face at Shiotsu's words as he rubbed his eyebrows. He maybe he didn't understand what was wrong with emotional education there, or maybe he didn't understand what emotional education was like in the first place.

"But isn't there a reason for what you say, Zenjo? The dorm has everything you need for your life, and Akio's children will take care of it. It's good to have a lot of eyes to watch. I think it is. Even if the deputy director doesn't just carry them on his back, all the members can take care of them."

It was Azuma Sohei from the Chainsaw Squad Sawing Unit who said that.

Chainsaw Squad, a special unit formed by Habari to kill Kagutsu Genji, the "Red King". Although all members of the unit are projectiles with non-standard power and individuality, each one engages like a gear through thoughtful cooperation, becoming a huge, vicious chainsaw and mowing down the enemy. This Azuma, Zenjo and the now deceased Akio, mother of twins, were also members of the chainsaw team.

Azuma also had something to think about Akio's death. Even in an environment where you are inevitably used to the death of your partner, the pain does not go away. In particular, it is humanity that made him feel that he couldn't leave him alone when he heard that they had left behind two growing children. It seemed that Azuma, let alone Zenjo, did not question whether this place was a suitable environment to raise children in good health.

However, Shiotsu couldn't think of any further measures, and when he asked people about his intentions, both Hayato and Akito wanted to live in the "Scepter 4" camp without hesitation, so a dorm room was reassigned to the two of them.

"If you have any problems, tell me right away. It doesn't matter if it's about life, school, or anything trivial."

The two of them honestly nodded to Shiotsu's words, but Shiotsu never consulted them.

Hayato and Akito woke up in the dorm, ate in the dining room, and went to the tunsho high school.

The children were between Akio, a famous member who was a small but ridiculous teacher as a child, and Hayato, who was a person with common sense and was soft on everyone. The twins were loved and well-liked by many members.

The twins also seemed to like the other members more than Shiotsu, who had known them since childhood. They wanted to hear about their work from the off-duty members, and said they wanted to learn swordsmanship, so they brandished a bamboo sword at the tunsho dojo and had a caring member train them.

When they saw the members returning covered in blood after being dispatched, they were not scared and worked handing out water and medicine and helping with first aid.

Although Shiotsu told them, "You don't have to do that.", they said, "We want to." and "I owe you."

If he witnessed such a healthy and honest appearance of a 12-year-old boy, it would make sense to be tied down. Among them, Azuma was particularly careful in caring for the twins, perhaps because they felt a sense of responsibility for the twins who lived in the tunsho.

"Oraora! Hayato, the driving is shallow! Akito, the armpits are open!"

The care was mainly in the dojo. Shiotsu often watched Azuma "play" sword training to Hayato and Akito.

Azuma, a user of twin swords. The bamboo swords he held in both hands wielded Hayato and Akito desperately at the same time. He thought he was dealing with Hayato with his right hand and Akito with his left hand, so he swung his sword to guide the two people's movements and allowed them to switch their standing positions, this time with Akito with his right hand and Hayato with his left hand, taking the other part. They both have habits that usually appear when attacking from the right and when attacking from the left, so the bad habits are corrected by hitting them with words and a bamboo sword.

Azuma passively spun for a moment and continued to catch Hayato and Akito's bamboo swords, but when the two were out of breath, they spun to counter and strike. He made a nice noise and hit two hands in a row.

Hayato and Akito groaned slightly and dropped the bamboo sword.

Unlike the members, the twins, who couldn't protect themselves due to their incompetence, wore kendo armor, but they still seemed to feel severe numbness and pain from their beaten hands and couldn't pick up the bamboo sword right away.

"Enough rest!"

"Yes!"

Although their faces were distorted with pain, the twins responded cheerfully.

Shiotsu, who stopped at the entrance of the dojo and was observing the situation, noticed that Hayato had noticed his presence.

"Vice-Commander."

Shiotsu wiggled his eyebrows to the point that the voice he called didn't notice.

Recently, the twins no longer called Shiotsu "Gen-san" like they used to. They call him "Vice-Commander" because of the title in "Scepter 4". It seemed to be proof that they hadn't given up on being members of "Scepter 4", and Shiotsu felt awkward every time he was called that.

"Azuma. Don't hurt them."

Shiotsu frowned and the twins yelled before Azuma answered.

"We ask for strict training."

"He wanted to be stronger, so I told him not to adjust."

"Even if you say that, of course I'm adjusting it."

Azuma said that with a straight face, Hayato and Akito puffed out their cheeks and fell silent.

"Hayaaki, please rehydrate."

Azuma called them and gave instructions by the nickname of the two. The twins left the dojo saying "Yes." with puffy cheeks.

"It's okay to get along and take care of them, but don't forget that Hayato and Akito are still twelve years old."

Azuma listened to Shiotsu's words, murmuring with a sigh, as he twirled the bamboo swords he held in both hands around his hands.

"Is age that important?"

"It's important. Even if they look a bit older, they are immature in mind and body."

"But Hayaaki is smart and they have enough sword qualities. If they want to be a member of the clan, they should."

Shiotsu got a headache when he told him that he should let them do what he didn't want them to do.

"Enough. I'll say it again, they're still kids."

"Skill as a clan member has nothing to do with age. Hayaaki also had great aptitude for different skills, even if they weren't as good as Akio-san, right?"

"It's not a matter of ability. I'm saying we can't allow children with poor judgment of themselves to enter the world of life and death."

"I wonder if you can say that."

The tone was benign, just asking a pure question, but Shiotsu was speechless for a moment.

"Other than that, I don't want to see them on the front lines right away because they've been made a member of the clan. Right now I'm practicing with Hayaaki, but teaching a child a sword is completely different from teaching a child with different abilities a sword. If you put them in the commander's facility, they will definitely be stronger. They may



not be as outstanding as Akio-san, but they are warlike and have high concentration, and they also have Hayatoshi-san qualities, so they are smart. You should teach them and train them to handle their different abilities and give them a job when they grow up with a good feeling. You're in trouble because you don't have enough, right?"

In the fierce battle with "Purgatory", the number of members of "Scepter 4" decreases every day. As Azuma said, "Scepter 4" was suffering from a shortage of members. If he does a small number of missions, the death rate of members will naturally increase. Currently, the defense forces and the police are recruiting a large number of personnel with different skills and are struggling to make up for the shortage.

When he saw Shiotsu silently with a bitter face, Azuma thought that he had said too much, and changed the tone of his voice with a laugh.

"Well, Hayaaki's guardian is Vice Commander Shiotsu, so I'm not going to say anything."

He saw Hayato and Akito return to the dojo.

Azuma raised his hand slightly and welcomed them, saying to Shiotsu in a low voice.

"Once I asked them if they wouldn't join the kendo club at school and they said, "The swords you learn at school can't cut people"."

Shiotsu was amazed, but there was no time to return his words, and Azuma called out to Hayato and Akito, who came running in and said, "Okay, then break is over!".

As he watched the two holding the bamboo sword again, Shiotsu remembered the conversation with Hayatoshi when he talked about the twins' birthday presents.

Shortly before Mr. and Mrs. Minato were killed. he hears the twins said, "I want a sword for my birthday.". Shiotsu said that he couldn't give them a saber, but he could send them a small knife as a souvenir, but Hayatoshi shook his head gently. He refused to give the children a knife and said that the pen would be mightier than the sword and would send a fountain pen.

"I hope they are prepared to harm others a bit later."

Remembering Hayatoshi's calm but determined voice, Shiotsu looked down in suffocating humor.

+++++

Hayato and Akito went to school earnestly for the day, and when class was over, they flew back and went on to live a life wielding a bamboo sword in the dojo. When the members were training at the dojo, they would join the corner and when no one was there, they would practice together. In many cases, Azuma and other members of the group came to teach the sword.

Since the beginning of high school, they did not feel like making friends at school, engaging in club activities, playing games after school, etc. His parents were killed by a human like beast. The life that a normal child had disappeared from Hayato and Akito's eyes.

They just studied hard during class, and the grades always stayed up. It was also because Shiotsu didn't seem to neglect their studies when holding a sword. The two of them never gave up on being members of "Scepter 4".

It was raining a lot that night.

Hayato and Akito wore raincoats and smoothly escaped from the room at midnight and left the dorm. The light footsteps were drowned out by the pouring rain.

The main building was packed with night shift members and several windows were lit, but the west building they were aiming at was dark. Hayato and Akito entered the building, took off their raincoats and rolled them up so as not to wet the floor.

Shining a flashlight on their feet, they aimed at the room at the end of the first floor.

The purpose of the two was the material of the case where their parents died.

The case materials were classified and could not be shown even to the grieving family of the line-of-duty deaths. But Hayato and Akito wanted to know the details of how their parents died and what kind of person killed them.

After living in the "Scepter 4" tunsho for about two months, they have been able to understand what is in the place and when there are people. The two of them went down the corridor of the barracks at midnight to see the materials.

They opened the door where the handwritten "Materials Room" sign was. The key was stolen from the general affairs section during the day.

They didn't turn on the light in the room, they shined a flashlight on the file shelf. It wasn't hard to find what they were looking for in the chronologically arranged files.

A tape with the words "March 1999 Kaume Detention Center Suppression Operation" was taped to the back cover of the plastic file that was removed from the shelf. Hayato and Akito sat down near the ground and opened the file. In the dark, they looked at the letters that emerged with the flashlight.

— For the purpose of subduing the "Red King" Kagutsu Genji, they hurriedly entered the ruins of the Kagutsu detention branch in the Fengze district, which belongs to the "Purgatory". Zenjo Goki, Akio Minato, Sohei Azuma, Bado Ryoichiro, Chidjiwa Gaku, Daiba Sadamitsu are the leaders of the "Chainsaw Squat Sawing Unit", and the first, second and third platoon of the Mobility Division were introduced.

From what they read in the report, it seemed that the operation went smoothly in the early stages. The situation changed when they reached the depths of the detention center and

entered a large-scale battle in a hall-like place made by taking out walls from several rooms centered on a common room. Akio Minato died after being attacked by "Purgatory" that was waiting for them.

— The cause of death was the penetration of the chest by the fist that housed the Red Clansman's flame. Instant death.

— Akio Minato's death interrupted the cooperation of the six chainsaws, and the formation of "Scepter 4" collapsed. The waiting "Blue King", Habari Jin and Minato Hayatoshi rushed inside. Although the war situation was restored, Hayato Minato was also pierced in the chest and died by the same clansman who killed Akio Minato.

"Dad and mom were killed by the same guy."

Hayato's murmuring voice fell into the darkness of the sound of rain.

Following the report, there was also a corpse examination plan for deceased parents. There, Hayato and Akito learned about the state of their parents' bodies, which Shiotsu did not show at the funeral.

When they slowly turned the paper over, the materials of the "Purgatory" members who participated in the battle continued. Noto Kongo, died. Katsunori Tada, died. Keiji Fujitani, died. Fumiaki Honjo, died. Shogoro Yamazaki, died. Kaga Kotetsu, died.

The endless materials of the dead continued to be delivered. Those whose identities were known were given their names, photos of their lives, and backgrounds. For those whose identities could not be identified, a photo of the body was attached to the material with only "Unknown" in the name column. Some of them were so damaged that it seemed impossible to identify them.

Neither Hayato nor Akito were afraid of the horrible pictures of the bodies. They looked and stopped at a page.

Makoto Magara, assassin of Minato Akio and Minato Hayatoshi, escaped.

He was in the materials of the "Purgatory" members who survived and escaped. He was a very young man compared to the other members. He even looked like a child.

"The guy who killed mom and dad is still alive.", Akito said. He was a dry voice without emotions.

The two then silently stared at the material for a long time.

Finally, they closed the file on both sides and returned it to the shelf. They quietly left the library and walked down the dark corridor.

It was still raining heavily. However, Hayato and Akito forgot to put on their rolled-up raincoats and walked out as they were. A large drop of cold rain hit their bodies, but they felt nothing.

The heavy rain made them soak in a few seconds. When they returned to the dorm room, they took off their wet clothes on the floor, roughly wiped their bodies, and put on their home clothes.

There was a bunk bed in the bedroom, and Hayato usually used the top bed and Akito used the bottom bed, but they snuck into the bottom bed together without saying anything.

The two lay in silence, their backs pressed together to protect each other's helpless backs. The rain-beaten body was cold, and the limbs remained cold, but the backs that touched each other were feverish and felt burning. They thought it was the temperature of anger.

They even had a strange feeling that the amount of heat from anger would change so much just by knowing the face of the human who killed them.

Until recently, the death of their parents was beyond the mist.

The sadness of loss was bitten many times, thinking that they could no longer hear the voice of their father who sweetly and intelligently advised them, and that they could no longer see the back of their mother, who was bold, and never made a mistake on the important point. However, the feeling of death itself was ambiguous. That's why they wanted to be members of the Blue clan, they could choose a beautiful word to inherit their parents' will instead of revenge.

It is also because it was adorned with the sound of martial arts, which seemed to produce proud, and they were sent only looking at the beautifully groomed face without seeing how their parents' bodies were destroyed.

However, it was not the vague concept of "enemy" that brought death to his parents, but a living human being with a name. His hands pierced the bodies of their parents, crushed their organs and made a wind cave in his chest.

Hayato and Akito didn't express their feelings about it, but shared their anger at not being able to handle it with their backs touching each other.

It was less than a few weeks after that that they were motivated to believe in the word destiny.

Hayato and Akito witnessed the appearance of a true childhood pattern.

+++++

After the hideout received the avalanche from "Scepter 4", the people of "Purgatory" were chased and scattered.

Takao Kurayama survived the battle with "Scepter 4" in the Kaume Detention Branch, and later returned to the house where his wife and children were.

Takao Kurayama was married. He entered the registry long before Kurayama entered "Purgatory". The other woman was a cabaret girl with a deeply carved face and a dull

atmosphere, and she said that she had a son, so he asked, "Would you like to get married?". It was not a statement of sense of responsibility, but rather a favor to a woman who declared that she had a child. Kurayama didn't take marriage very seriously, so either one was fine. Even after registering, his life did not change, and the woman gave birth to a child and raised him alone. While doing anti-social work in an anti-social organization, Kurayama would occasionally go see the faces of women and children.

Finally, Kagutsu Genji appeared, "Purgatory" was born, and Kurayama's organization was also incorporated into "Purgatory". At that time, many of his friends died, but Kurayama survived and obtained a life flame in exchange for his right ear.

He felt that the screw in his son's head was flying, but as he grew older, he felt that he was weak, but the decisive factor was when he was expelled from "jail" and returned to the house of the woman who was his wife. He seemed like he saw it somewhere and had great admiration for Kagutsu.

"Father, are you that person's subordinate? I also want to be a subordinate."

The boy told him that, Kurayama laughed, but was strangely devoured. Even if he threatened that he would be killed, even if he told him that he needed to be prepared to burn a part of his body to become a subordinate, the glow in his eyes kept increasing.

Upon receiving the installation from Kagutsu, a part of the body is destroyed by the captured flame. The one who dies will die, and only the one who survives will become a member of the clan. In Kurayama's case, the place where the flame went out and burned was his right ear.

The boy stared at Kurayama's burned and nonexistent right ear with eyes close to envy, saying, "Oh. I'll dedicate every part of my body to him."

It was clear from the fact that his eyes were uncomfortable that it wasn't a joke. It was a human eye that he would see daily if he lived in "Purgatory", and he could throw away anything by the time he burned the life out of him.

He was somehow sick of his son not being old enough to have those eyes.

"It's not crazy.", he said.

"Kurayama, what are you doing?"

The voice was released and Kurayama raised his face. He looked like he was lost in thought of him with a pile of gold in his hand.

Kurayama was counting money with two men in a room where the concrete wall was black from being burned.

"Oh, yeah."

The man who spoke to Kurayama bowed slightly and counted the money in his hand.

Kurayama returned home after being chased by "Purgatory", but after a while he left the house and entered the office of the organization he belonged to before becoming a member of "Purgatory". The reason why he returned to the building where he couldn't smell the scorching odor due to the donpachi when he was taken to "Purgatory" and joined his friends was to resume Shinogi, who earned the top pay. "Purgatory" is different from ordinary gangster society, but Hitoshi Soma, who is number 2, has a solid cash flow and has a mechanism to raise money from the bottom. He didn't know if the maximum payout had been properly raised to Kagutsu or if it had been absorbed into Soma's pocket.

It was Hiura who asked to restart Shinogi, and he was Kurayama's older brother in the previous organization. However, it is the same in "Purgatory", and, in the first place, "Purgatory" has no other hierarchical relationship other than the force of power. He didn't have to drag the hierarchy from his previous story, but he didn't have the bad feelings of rubbing against it (rubbing usually means killing each other in "Purgatory"), so Hiura was still his older brother.

"Joe Norkin, this is good!"

Another man put a part of the counted gold in an envelope and made a cheerful voice.

Ed, whose real name is Edward, is a brilliant man and has a unique record of illegally entering Japan from Mexico and arriving in "Purgatory".

The envelope that Ed had put aside was placed on the edge of the table and the remaining money was distributed by three people.

"Tonight is a party! Eat good meat and good sake!"

Ed laughed and fanned out his own layout.

At the back of Kurayama's right ear, there was a sudden buzzing of flames. Kurayama's right ear was burned to the eardrum, but on the right side he could hear the sound of flames instead of the normal sound. The flame was sensitive to signals from others, and Kurayama survived for a long time thanks to the ability to hear the signals he had obtained in exchange for losing his right outer ear and eardrum.

"He is a guest."

A few seconds after Kurayama said that, he started hearing footsteps that could be picked up by his left ear and spoke.

When Hiura answered, the door opened and two young men dressed in black appeared. It is a boy-like duo that doesn't look good in the black suit that is synonymous with "Purgatory". Kyoji and Taku. Soma loved them quite a bit and they were often assigned to work as cabin messengers.

"This is Soma-san's errand."

Kyoji raised a hand and said that with a careless gesture.



Especially when he looked at Kyoji with a baby face, Kurayama sometimes remembered his son. He told him that the "Red King" would not have a child as a subordinate, but when he saw Kyoji, he felt that this was not the case. Either way, there was no point in trying to guess Kagutsu's heart.

"What is there to give Soma-san?"

Kyoji said with a meek mouth, moving his palm to urge him on. Hiura's temple, who doesn't like the attitude of young boys, jerked back, but Ed issued a bright voice at the right time.

"Oh! Sure! Yeah, wait a minute."

Ed handed Kyoji an envelope containing the gold he had just set aside. Kyoji greeted him casually, "Yes, surely."

During that time, Kurayama's right ear caught the sound of a small flame still buzzing. The flame in the right ear, reacting to the signal, emitted a flickering sound that was particularly sensitive to hostility.

"You guys got it with someone."

"Eh?"

Kyoji frowned.

"He's small, but I heard the hostility was directed at me. Out of the office. Maybe it's two."

At Kurayama's words, Hiura distorted his face and looked at Kyoji and his friends.

"What are these guys doing?!"

"What?!"

Hiura yelled at him, and Kyoji's head filled with blood as well. However, Taku held Kyoji's shoulder from the side and stepped forward.

"I'm sorry, but I'm going to get rid of him soon, so you have no complaints, right?"

Taku tried to leave the room with Kyoji, but before he did, the sound picked up by Kurayama's right ear was far away.

"No, the sign is going to go away. Maybe I'll call my friends."

"Can you chase them?"

"I can't keep up, but it's a nuisance. That little sign isn't blue clothes. Maybe something from the mob. It's easier to wait for your friends to come back and then finish them off."

Kyoji and Taku looked at each other as if to consult, but Kurayama waved them away.

"I'll get rid of him here, so you should go home and give Soma-san the money. I'll kill you if you're a cat."

"I'm sorry!"

Beside Kyoji who barked, Taku gave Soma a warning as he made a slightly involuntary face.

Currently, "Purgatory" who has lost his home base is scattered and hiding on his own. Soma used youngsters like Kyoji and Taku who could become couriers and fundraisers.

To summarize the notification elements, it was said that the time of the war with "Scepter 4" would be indicated there, so they would avoid any flashy action as much as possible, but if they did, it would be an outburst in "Purgatory". Such release was transmitted through Taku's mouth.

"Kurayama. Why did you go home? It's his fault, so I wish they'd tighten up."

After repelling Kyoji and Taku, Hiura said that in an unpleasant voice. The main reason was that it was troublesome for Hiura, who hated cheeky youths, and Kyoji and Taku would be an unnecessary quarrel, but Kurayama scoffed as he lit a cigarette.

"I've been lacking in exercise lately, so I only wanted to do it if there were clients who might diverge."

Hiura snorted and Ed laughed, "Takao, I'm fine!"

When Takao Kurayama's right ear heard the sound of hostility again, he was skeptical about the smallness of the signal, which was exactly the same as before.

Didn't you call your friends? Are you going to keep monitoring? He was wondering, "I'm going to take a look outside.", he said.

As he walked down the stairs of the building, the sound of hostility grew louder. However, it was strangely unstable. It was murderous, but it made a terribly immature sound. Anxiety, fear, and conflict mixed and wavered. The one of those who are not used to murderous intentions.

The immature killing intent was heard from the side of the building's entrance. It was not visible from the stairs of a narrow, dark multi-tenant building.

When he deliberately left the building unprotected, a large leaf came out of the blind spot.

Kurayama flipped the sword over with his arm engulfed in flames. It was an unusually thick and heavy blade, but the silhouette of the human with it was small.

"Huh?"

It was a boy who had a large sword that was as tall as his own.

A boy the same age as his own son. He forgets if he was eleven, twelve or thirteen, but he was a kid that age anyway.

The boy was attacked by Kurayama and staggered from the weight of the sword. However, he did not let go of his hands that were holding the handle of the sword.

When Kurayama stopped moving towards an unexpected opponent for a moment, his right ear heard another murderous sound.

An attack that pushed straight into the heart from behind him. Without turning around, he felt it alone at the sound and turned around.

The silver blade passed through the side. He put a roundhouse kick to his back holding him up. He was unable to light the flame because he was unconscious.

"Wow!"

The person who attacked from behind was also small. He groaned and rolled to the side with the greatsword, but soon got up and repositioned the sword. The sword was familiar to "Purgatory". It's a formal saber from "Scepter 4" that should normally emit blue light.

The faces of two children, each holding a standard saber and a huge saber that seemed to be a custom-made item, were eerily similar. The children, who had thin eyes and thin lips and seemed to copy and paste, looked at Kurayama with a look like that.

"Where's the baby-faced guy?"

Said the boy with the big sword.

At that moment, some scenes flashed in his head and Kurayama grasped the rough situation.

A sword of the blue clothes, possessed by a boy who has no signs of special powers. A familiar formal saber and a rare but familiar great sword.

Immature killing intent and Kyoji's name.

Battle in the "Prison". A scene of killing each other with the blue clothes in the corridor.

The great Venus that Kyoji defeated.

"Are you guys relatives of Akio Minato?"

Akio Minato: Although she was a small woman, she looked like a fierce man who wielded a great sword that matched the good devil. He hears that it was Akio Minato who killed Hiiragi who was number 3 in "Purgatory".

"Do you know my mother?"

The boy with the formal saber said that.

He wondered if there were two children as big in front of that woman as a boy. He thought she was her little brother or something.

Probably, after finding Kyoji and following him, they thought that this was his hiding place. Is it because they went looking for the saber?

It was shallow and meaningless to run to death.

In Kurayama's mind, the face of another boy who was in a hurry to die came to mind.

"Ahahahaha!"

High-pitched laughter erupted on the stairs.

When he turned his face, he could see Hiura happily distorting his face and shaking his shoulders and laughing at him.

"If you think about what kind of customers will come, will it be Minato Akio's son?"

Hiura slowly walked down the stairs and stood in front of the children.

"No, the best! Two of them!"

Hiura's eyes shone brightly. Hiura hated cheeky youths and he hated cheeky children more, but as soon as he became the target of harm, awkwardness turned to joy. In response to Hiura's sadistic killing intent, a flame sounded in his right ear.

Kurayama took a step back in a mood that couldn't kill him beautifully.

"Let's kill an animal here for the first time, and feed the other alive with blue clothes! If the child in the family becomes a hostage, can there be blue clothes that will be killed quietly?"

The children held the sword with a tense look. From that position, he knew they had some sword knowledge, but it means nothing to a combat-ready "Purgatory" opponent, other than just stabbing a shielded opponent in the back.

Flame violently erupted from Hiura's chest. He burned the front of his black suit and ignited the burn marks on his chest. He spread his arms wide and lunged at one of the boys to hug him. It was a hug from hell that burned alive with flames and wouldn't let go until you died.

There was a murderous sound in Kurayama's right ear.

It was not the sound of Hiura's killing intent. It was not the sound of children.

It was the sound of his own killing intent coming out of Kurayama's body.

Well, he calmly acknowledged that he wanted to kill Hiura and decided that if he wanted to kill him, he couldn't help it. The humans in "Purgatory" do not control his murderous intent.

Kurayama circulated the flame from the back of his right ear to his entire body. He took a deep step and swung his right arm. Kurayama's fist hit Hiura's defenseless back.

Kurayama's flame struck from his fist to Hiura's body. Hiura, who had concentrated his abilities at the front of his body, boiled his blood and internal organs with a blow from behind and spit out boiled blood.

"Ku, Ku...Kurayama..."

Hiura called out to Kurayama spitefully, turning only his face and moving his mouth wet with thick blood.

"I didn't mean to hate you enough to kill us, but I wanted to kill you. It's bad."

Hiura collapsed forward as he looked at Kurayama. The flames on his chest that had been emitted completely burned the asphalt. On the back, the part hit by Kurayama's fist had the clothes and flesh burned, and the blood bubbled up for a short while, but it soon subsided.

When he raised his face, the children looked at the dark mountain with astonished faces.

He thinks it's ironic.

On the battlefield of that "prison", Kurayama watched Akio Minato die. The woman, who had been slashing the necks, arms, and torsos of the people from "Purgatory" without hesitation, like a reflex monster, stopped moving for a moment when she saw Kyoji's face.

The reason was that she was able to understand the dark mountain that she was looking at the end, but at the same time it was also mysterious. Akio Minato no doubt hesitated to cut when she saw Kyoji who was a boy. However, it often happens that the ace class in blue clothes, which is a different vector from "Purgatory" and mercilessly cuts the enemy so that there is no human heart, stops and makes a gap just because the opponent is a child.

However, as a person who had just inadvertently killed a friend with murderous intent, he had a feeling that humans are unexpectedly like that.

"It's not crazy."

To the children who stood up, Kurayama vomited in a childish tone.

"Did you guys really believe that you could take revenge, even if you didn't have the power? Is the child's brain made of cotton candy?"

He looked at the children with a confused expression and bit his tongue.

"Go home, shit and go to bed. Or do you want to kill me with your mother's sword?"

The children bit their lips hard and slowly backed away from Kurayama and Hiura's corpses. Kurayama watched the cautious stance of not turning his back until he was out of range, taking out a cigarette. He chewed the filter, he turned it on and took a break.

After enough distance, the children ran off. After disappearing, Kurayama called out to the stairs of the building.

"Are you going to go up like a traitor? Or are they killing each other here?"

"Hahahaha! Well done, Takao!"

Ed came downstairs and laughed happily as usual.

"I'm fighting because I didn't want to do something with my friends. Do you understand?"

"Well, that's right. It's a daily fact that in the fights of "Purgatory" we kill each other, but now it can be said that it is a betrayal to kill a friend to help the relatives of a blue clothes."

"No, no!"

Ed shook his head in excess of action.

"I'm here to burn my heart! By killing a child who isn't a person with powers, my heart won't burn. I'm fighting too."

Ed said, "That's more than that.". He took out a bunch of gold from his chest and shook it.

"I'm planning on eating good meat and good sake tonight! Let's go early, Friend."

"That's right. Because I let the child escape, this place will be invaded by the blue clothes, and I'll move if I eat a meal?"

"Let's split the money that was for Hiura-san."

"I am not crazy."

Kurayama changed his mind and decided to think about the meat and sake he was going to eat, getting rid of his old friends and the troublesome boy who had tried to kill him.

+++++

A reckless barbarity that can only be said to be a miracle to be alive, such as seeing a human in "Purgatory" and leaving without reporting, pulling out a relic saber, and even trying to avenge his parents. Hayato and Akito were rebuked by Shiotsu like a burning fire.



Habari suddenly visited them when they told him to be reluctant, except when they were at school and they had written an overwhelming number of sentences of remorse in their room.

"Wow, Commander Habari."

"Oh, why are you here?"

The members of "Scepter 4" were also excited, the two children who were not very active, were amazed by Habari came to their territory without warning.

"I wonder what the kids are doing that made Shiotsu angry and depressed."

Habari said happily.

"Gen-san, is he depressed?"

Akito asked intimidatingly. He didn't like that he was angry, but he didn't know that he was depressed. Habari laughed.

"Oh. He's depressed because he thinks he couldn't stop them from acting recklessly."

"That is..."

When Hayato rebutted, Habari easily nodded.

"He's a creature that thinks too much. That's also an advantage. I'm still thinking about it. What would be best for you and what should I do now?"

Incidentally, Habari turned to his brother.

"Do you still want to be my clansmen?"

+++++

"Oh! Not a good feeling, Hayaaki!"

Azuma made a funny voice and was attacked by Hayato and Akito with the bamboo swords in both hands.

The two of them used light blue light on their bamboo bodies and swords, and breathed together to challenge Azuma. Originally, the twins were so close to each other that they could communicate with each other without words, but ever since the swordsman Azuma started training them together, the precision of the cooperation improved dramatically. Who was laughing at the twins who had been trained by Azuma, saying that they could become twin swordsmen whose bodies split in two?

"It's a face that doesn't float, Shiotsu."

Habari told him that from the side, Shiotsu deepened the wrinkles that had drawn between his eyebrows.

Currently, he was in the middle of randori training at the dojo. In other words, instead of Azuma playing with children in his spare time, Hayato and Akito also participate in training as members. They also trained to control the different abilities of blue and protect their body, so they didn't wear kendo armor like they used to.

The twins received the Habari installation and became members of the Blue clan.

"Perhaps because you make them clan members without warning."

"Haha, sorry, but it is up to the "King" to decide who will be the clan member, because there is no provision for the installation of a minor to have a guardian seal."

When he looked at Habari, who said that lightly, he gave him a cold look back.

"And you're too worried these days. It's to your advantage to worry and think more than others, but you should be free enough to stop worrying about unanswered things, right?"

The air in "Scepter 4" and "Purgatory" was getting worse every day. Today he was able to spend his time training that way, but there were so many emergency dispatches every day that he didn't know when he would be able to do it again. As the Vice-Commander of "Scepter 4", he couldn't afford to spend all his thoughts on his family.

Even so...

"Do you think the facility will reach a scene where those who have become clan members will be useful?"

"They can't be put on the battle board yet, but I'm sure they have the qualities. If they continue to train for different abilities, they can awaken as a Strain. Facilities currently mean collars and seeding for them."

"Sowing?"

Habari suddenly smiled at him.

"It's a situation where it doesn't matter when, who or what happens. It's a good idea to sow seeds for the future and bet on what grows."

"Don't play with those kids."

Habari laughed lightly and looked at Shiotsu with clear eyes.

"They will grow well, Shiotsu."

With no confidence at all, Shiotsu sighed deeply.

## **CHAPTER 4: THIS SUMMER BEGINS**

Many people remember "that day" in 1999 as a special moment.

For some, a shocking disaster that suddenly hit them. For others, the moment when an extraordinary catastrophe was felt through distant rumors.

The sun shining from above. A cicada screech they can't even talk about. Sweat running down the cheeks. Some will remember such a scene.

But that was a little further.

The temperature had already started to rise every day, but it was still far from summer production.

In a fate similar to high pressure magma that swallows everything and burns it, the daily life of thin skin remained, that is the history of that time.

+++++++

It was awkward getting on the train after a tough event.

A black suit with holes here and there and fraying. Burning smell. A soot-smeared face floated on a crowded station platform.

Just a few hours ago, "Purgatory" was attacking a gangster headquarters, a few miles away from the area where it was approved to live.

Number 2 splitting the plan, what Soma calls "room hunting". At a minimum, to get a place to live in the land where the infrastructure is alive, he said, "I have a star in the correct yakuza", but in reality, there may be strategic reasons such as expanding the territory of control, threatening the security system and secure a bridgehead.

However, such a "room search" failed due to the outburst of the "Red King" Kagutsu Genji, and ended in vain enough to destroy the unlucky gangsters.

The large car used on the outward route was also wrecked, so clan members procured their return journeys locally. Specifically, it was decided to divide into several vehicles and motorcycles that were stolen from the owners through threats, but it happened that two young people were run over by the number of members.

The baby-faced boy Kyoji and Takuya Choya. They didn't care if they had a license or not, but they didn't know how to drive either.

"No, Jibun and the others are going back by train."

In response to Soma's amused instructions, the boy was in a bad mood and Choya bought the ticket with a nihilistic mood. At that time, the transportation IC card service had not yet started.

"It's better to go home... than stay and die today."

As he waited for the train, Choya said that.

"Why, will we live long? No way."

And, the boy answered that on the train platform.

In the battle that day, some members of "Purgatory" also died.

Most of them were influenced by the power of the "Red King", and their bodies exploded due to a leak of different abilities, but there was only one man who died when he was hit by a yakuza's ammunition.

Yusuke Kadota. He looked to be in his early thirties, but he still looked like he was in his early twenties due to his baby face and hip attitude.

About a month ago he had entered "Purgatory". Immediately before, he killed 13 members of the antisocial organization he belonged to and got out. The case was registered as a normal criminal case, not an extraordinary case. Before the installation and manifestation of dysphoria, the man caused a mass murder with a single gun.

"Uh, I don't think he shot. The yakuza and the police often shot, bang bang."

The boy liked the "newcomer" Kadota. Unlike other members of the clan, he did not treat children lightly due to their age and appearance.

"Hey, how does it feel to shoot and kill a person compared to doing it with extraordinary power?"

Faced with such an unscrupulous question, Kadota did not seem offended and replied politely.

"Here we go... what's up? I haven't had a chance to compare. I've never killed a person with this power."

Kadota extended his right hand and showed it. His index finger was missing and the cross section glowed red like a flare.

"I can't shoot with this finger anymore."

As you could see, Kadota's stigma was that he was "missing his right index finger," probably because one of the guns was traumatic. The power of extraordinary power was the "bullet" emitted from the missing finger, but the extraordinary power of the bullet was rarely used after only a few test shots.

"Then let's shoot the yakuza in that area the next time we go in and out."

"No, that's a bit... what do you think?"

"I don't care. He who hits and dies is bad!"

Kadota smiled a little embarrassed at the boy's laughter, and today he was hit by a bullet and died. He wasn't killed by the power of an extraordinary skill, he died like a normal man by mere ammunition.

"He could have shot, but he didn't. He didn't prevent it, even though he could prevent it. That was suicide... I think he chose to die like a normal person. I'm sure that's what he wanted."

"What is that? I don't understand the meaning."

The boy had a sharp mouth. Every time he was told a complicated story, he was in a bad mood. And...

"I think that old man was a bit tough, maybe he was too nice."

He said it lightly.

"That's right. I'm sure his personality was calm."

"Whatever way you hit the weapons, which way, the guys above will disappear the weak guys."

"Well, that's right. I'm sure that's correct. The train has arrived."

Choya tried to round off the topic by saying that.

"Most of all, that old man was..."

The boy was eating even more.

Miscellaneous words about Kadota continued for many train stations after that. He was feeling a little upset, but he knew it was a shame for a child.

In everyday life, the children sometimes talked about people close to them and sometimes said mean things.

Mothers who couldn't live with them, grandmothers who raised them, local childhood friends, etc. None of them were in the world now.

According to them, they were bulls. They were angry. She was a careless woman. She was a messed up slap. It was heartless shit, and the fight was weak. In this way, the children enumerated the reasons why they had to die. This is how he was trying to convince himself.

Choya's idea was different. The outlook on life was simpler.

There was no meaning to life or death.

— So you don't have to say bad things to someone you like.

He thought would say that, but he stopped himself.

Emotions, souls, life, life that has no meaning, he believed that it was not correct to think like that. In that way, he who lived as a zombie was meaningless and unnatural. That's what he thought.

The boy lived in a slightly better world than himself as a dead person. He just stared through the glass at his sparkling emotional displays.

When five train stations passed after the criticism of Kadota began, the topic broke and she was supposed to be the grandmother of a child.

That grandma, she put a candy ball in her pocket and walked over to her and gave it to a kid in her neighborhood. That's why the kid could lick it and also look at the bad guys. Even though she said that, he couldn't hear it.

The train stopped at the station and a large number of students entered. It was the closest station to a famous private high school. Boys and girls in English-style blazer-style uniforms filled the seats, chatting like a flock of birds.

— It is bad.

Choya wondered about the boy's situation.

Student, rich, nice guy. The boy hated "hanging out together and seeing their own faces".

It was a complete alienation; it would be a source of fire if the stalemate turned out to be extreme.

"Smells like burnt?"

"Funeral... Coming back from the crematorium?"

"No, he's a yakuza."

He heard such whispers that they were exchanged.

"Kyoji... do you want to move to another platform?"

Although he tries to say that calmly so as not to irritate him, the boy's line of sight was already fixed on a point ahead.

"Hey!"

The boy screamed. It was a loud voice that echoed throughout the vehicle.



"Sorry! You're sitting there!"

Several male students sitting in the priority seats at the front of the vehicle looked at each other.

"Give your seat to the elders!"

"Uh..."

Choya finally caught on. An elderly woman, in her 80s, boarded through the vehicle entrance. Her waist was bent and she used a cane. The step was small and she was swaying a bit.

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"Please, Grandma."

The students who hurriedly stood up bowed their heads to the boy and urged the old woman to sit down. There was no need to shout. It was easy.

Rather, the old lady suddenly made a noise and attracted attention, and she stood still.

It would be a problem if she was told to sit cross-legged in the middle of that situation.

The door closed and the train began to move while the situation was awkward and stuck.

"Hmm... I'll be by your side."

"Uh..."

At least if they were out of sight, the old woman would be able to sit down and the students would be quiet.

That was the world of ordinary people, and they were the obstacles. He was aware of that.

When the children were about to start walking...

"Uhahahaha! What is it?! What is it?!"

From behind, he heard crazy laughter.

Looking back, there was a strange girl there.

The girls in the vehicle were all girls who were wearing uniforms from prestigious private high schools and seemed refined. It wasn't just about appearance, but behavior. They were elegant creatures carefully bred in a greenhouse.

On the other hand, the one in front of them was a completely wild species. Poor pedigree or poor growth, short, old-fashioned body shape. Her skin was dark, her hair was coarse and she laughed with bad makeup like a dark circle. The teething was also terribly bad. Her clothes were the same as the students, but she was also poorly dressed. She loosened

her collar, tucked her skirt in, and loosened her stockings on one side. It was almost a costume from a fairy tale.

In a word, she was like a raccoon dog that failed to become a young girl.

"Mika-chan, you can't do it. It's rude if you suddenly laugh."

"And they're a little scary. They might get mad."

From among the animal-like girls who were worried and whispering, the raccoon dog took an open step and stood in front of the boy. She was even smaller than a toddler.

"Fufufu, you're weird. Aren't you the kind of person who secretly picks up a kitten on a rainy day?"

"What... what the hell are you saying?!"

"It's a waste to make a loud voice. I don't know if you're a good guy."

"Ku..."

"She's not your grandmother, right?"

"What did you say?!"

— If he thinks she's just a stupid woman, he'll be looking at her unexpectedly. No, were she listening to the conversation?

"You..."

Choya intervened.

"No matter what this guy and Grandma are, it's not something that others should make fun of."

The Tanuki laughed with a "Hehehe." unafraid, and she put her hand in the pocket of her uniform.

"Sorry, do you want candy?"

Her palm, which was filled with individually wrapped sweets, was presented in front of the boy.

"Hm... I don't need such a thing!"

"Hahaha, don't hesitate."

The Tanuki leaned towards the boy and put a piece of candy in the pocket of his black suit.

"What... what are you doing?!"

When the boy tried to push her away, the Tanuki quickly reached down, sat in the priority seat and touched the empty seat next to her.

"Bah, come on, it's free here! Come on, sit down!"

It was a strange behavior, but when he noticed it, the tense air inside the vehicle was loose.

"Thank you..."

The old lady bowed to the boy and the boy gave up his seat, and with the help of the raccoon dog, she slowly sat down.

"I'll get off next station, Taku."

"It's not the station to get off yet..."

"We can get on another train."

When Koji and Choya spoke in a whisper...

"Haha, it's a TV store!"

The Tanuki pointed at him.

Finally, when the train stopped and the door opened, a loud voice was heard from the back of the two descending.

"Bye, Kyoji, Taku, bye! Take care of yourselves! Stay together! Bye!"

Even after the train left the platform, the reverberation remained for a while.

After that, the two of them walked out onto the street from the station. They had to walk for more than an hour to the base of "Purgatory", but they did not complain, they chose to go home on foot. It was so awkward that they couldn't wait a few minutes for the next train.

"Hmm... who the hell is that woman?"

"I don't care. We won't see her anymore."

"She's like a raccoon dog."

"Oh, I thought that too."

"She asked me if I wanted a candy? Damn."

The boy reached into his pocket, pulled out a piece of candy, and handed it to Choya.

"Eh?"

"Look, I'll give you half."

Saying that, he peels off the packaging and throw it in his mouth.

— Oh, you eat it...

"Eh?"

When she noticed Choya's line of sight, the boy looked intimidating and...

"I can't turn it into a poor morsel!"

"That's how it is."

Choya also put the candy in his mouth. He couldn't turn candy into food. He thought so, even if he said that, the boy would not be convinced. On the contrary, he would think it rude to refuse the food served.

"I see, Grandma..."

"Oh?! Grandma doesn't matter!"

The boy was poisoned again. However, since he had the candy in his mouth, he didn't spit it out.

+++++

The two met the "Tanuki" a few days later when they went out into the city as messengers for Soma.

In the post-processing of the gang attack case, there were some things that he had to talk about "Tokijikuin". As a return to that, he delivers the documents to the nearest branch.

Order and deviation to "Tokijikuin" which represents law and order. Soma from "Purgatory" was always kept in the gray zone and as a result behaved freely without social or anti-social restraints. It was just a devilish twist.

"Wow, it was easy, right? I'm just a middle manager. My general and my junior boss, and the politicians and citizens, somehow, while they push me here and there, I managed to put him in a circle. I'm on his side. I am working for everyone. You can get a salary from your country."

It was a man holding a poker card in his left hand, lighting a bomb detonator in his right hand, smiling a bottomless smile, and distorting his mouth.

Contact with "Tokijikuin" was often made by the boy and Choya. Among the mischief makers in "Purgatory", he had an appearance that was exceptionally close to the general public and was rarely noticed in the city. He was a rare human resource in "Purgatory", who could act as a courier without causing any trouble.

"I really don't like this kind of use of children."

That day there was no driver, so it was a train movement. As they headed to the nearest station, on the way, Koji told Choya.

"Soma-san says that he believes in us and leaves it to us. We have to live up to expectations."

"No... that person wouldn't wait for others. If we were wrong, we would just use it as a source to move another plan."

"Huh? You're like that."

At that moment,

"Oh, Kyoji! Kyoji!"

A loud voice came from behind.

"Eh?"

Looking back, some kind of raccoon was constantly running and stopped in front of them. It was the raccoon dog from the other day.

"Oh, Kyoji and Taku!"

"You... don't disrespect people."

"Oh, sorry, Kyoji and Taku."

"I'm telling you to put the "kun" on it."

"Hahaha."

"You were called "Mika-chan" by your friends."

Choya yelled from the side.

"Looks like the uniform is different today."

"Oh, that's right. Taku-kun, are you a person who knows about this kind of thing?"

That day, the Tanuki was wearing a uniform from a local public school. She wasn't as floaty as the prestigious private uniform from the other day, but after all, she was in disguise somewhere.

"What is that? What do you mean?"

Choya answered the boy's question.

"Maybe she's walking around in another school's uniform. I don't know if it's private or public, but I don't know if she's actually enrolled..."

"I will hit you!"

When the Tanuki said that without being afraid,

"Hey, Somekichi."

Across the street, high school students in the same uniform and various men and women waved their hands.

"What are you doing?" "Are you going to karaoke?"

Thereafter,

"Oh, right~"

The Tanuki turned to the students as she said...

"I'm going to work part time!"

"Oh, I'm sorry." "I'll call you later." "Do your best at the part-time job."

The students started walking again.

"Part time job?"

"What is Somekichi?"

When Koji and Choya asked her...

"Huh, are you interested in that? It's me."

Saying that, the Tanuki smiled. As usual, the alignment of her front teeth was poor.

"Somekichi Mikako, part-time worker, 17 years old.", the Tanuki called to herself.

Although she did not go to high school, she wore a uniform and went in and out of various schools, and she had many friends.

"Are you a fake student?"

"Well, it's the value of the Joshi Kose, that's why it's in demand. Fufufu."

"No way, you're doing suspicious work."

Before the boy, Tanuki-Mikako slammed the palm of her hand against the large cardboard box that had been strapped to the mamachari's loading platform.

(Note: Mamachari is the shortened expression in Japanese for mama no charinko (mom's bike). These types of bikes are equipped with a basket in front or behind, and a special seat can be placed on them to carry a child and circulate safely.)

"Fufufu... money to watch? It's my job."

The contents of the box were tightly packed pocket tissues. The phone number was printed on the package.

"Tissues distribution?"

Looking around him, there was a part-time job handing out similar tissues in front of the busy station. She will take a long time to complete the quota for a large box, as passersby often ignore her.

"Well, it's okay to work seriously, but... it's a normal job for a while."

"Although my work is futuristic, "Puri" is different, "Puri".

"What is "Puri"?"

"Fufufu, look at me, look at me."

Perhaps it was a part-time job uniform, Mikako put on a fluorescent cap that shone on her uniform, reached into the box, and held a bunch of tissues in her left and right hands. And...

"Love & Peace!"

"Eh?"

As she ran through the crowd in front of the station at full speed, she hugged the waist of a middle-aged office worker in front of her.

"What?!"

Several tissues swirled in the suit pocket of a salaryman who made a strange voice and stiffened.

"Uhahahaha! Uhahahaha!"

"Hey, peace, peace! Thanks!"

Mikako ran towards the children as she one-sidedly thanked the clerk who took it away.

"How about? A part-time job I thought up."

"No... no matter what you say."

"What is this "part time job"?"

"I call it "Aggressive Free Hug". Fufufu... With this trick, the tissues will be sold 10 times faster and there will be no conflict in the world. Imagine..."

"It's far from a Tsukkomi."

"It's a technique or an eccentricity, it's almost the work of a youkai, that's all."



"Oh? I don't know either."

Mikako filled her hands with tissues again and...

"Fufufu, there is a secret in the low pass when tackle."

"Don't ask. She just said tackle. It's not a hug."

"So, next time I'm targeting that onichan, take a closer look."

The target was a tanned young man in a tank top. He maybe he went to the gym, he had a good physique and was muscular.

"Come on! Love & Peace!"

Mikako ran towards the man and...

"Gak!"

The next moment, she rolled onto his back.

"Eh?!"

The boy hurried.

"Hey, Mikako, are you alright?! Wow, there's blood coming out!"

"Uh..."

Mikako pointed at the man.

"I was able to adjust my knees to the tackle..."

"Hey, hey!"

"Wait."

Choya stopped the boy who was about to activate his fire power towards a man.

Then, turning back to the confused man, he said...

"I was watching. Do you practice martial arts too? Something jumped out like a strange animal, so I tried to lift my leg and stop it. It came running out of his face."

"Oh, yeah... Hey, Mikako, show me where did you hit... Oh, your front teeth are messed up!"

"That... isn't that..."

"Oh, this is a row of teeth. Did you hit your nose? The nose isn't crushed either. Does it originally look like this? You just had a nosebleed."

"Sorry, I got involved in something strange. It's okay, go away."

Choya urged him to do so, but the man left at least 5,000 bills for medical expenses.

And...

"Hehehe, I made a profit."

Mikako, who covered her nose with a tissues, looked at the boy and Choya.

"I have cash, maybe I'll have some tea. I'll treat you!"

"Tea... what about your part-time job?"

"Well, it might not be a job if her nose bleeds..."

Mikako paced back and forth with a large box as the boy and Taku said so. And when she hit the side of the box and draw the attention of passersby...

"Hey, hey! Attention, free tissues! Free tissues! Take them away!"

She left the box in the middle of the street and came back.

"It's finished. Let's go!"

"It's not finished. I'm going to get sick when I do technical work."

"First of all, I'm not saying I'll find you."

"Hehehe. Don't hesitate."

While saying that, when she tries to pick up the mamachari parked on the side of the street, the ringtone of the mobile phone sounded from the pocket of Mikako's uniform.

"Oh, the phone."

The clamshell mobile phone was a type of clamshell that was common before PDAs. Many pets were hanging in the leash hole.

"Hello, this is Some-san. Eh, Nanisore, really? Ah... yeah, that's fine. Thanks for helping me out. Hahaha. See you soon."

She closed the mobile phone.

"Sorry, I have another part-time job. Maybe next time we'll go for tea!"

"You don't have to apologize. Go on your own."

"Hmm...?"

Mikako stopped and looked at the boy's expression.

"That's right. Well, I'm glad Kyoji has recovered."

"Ah? What are you saying all of a sudden?"

"Actually, I was a bit worried. When I met him on the train, he surprised me."

— She look closely.

Choya thought.

It is true that the boy that day was depressed about Kadota's death. That's why he constantly said bad things about Kadota and his dead family.

"Shut up...! What are you saying?"

Mikako suddenly hugged the boy who turned red and denied it.

"No..."

"If you feel sad again... wipe your tears with this."

"You..."

The boy grabbed Mikako's shoulder and pulled her away from him.

"That's how you put your used tissues in the pocket! Also, you got a little blood from your nose! It's dirty!"

"Uhahahahahahahahaha!"

Mikako jumped on the bike and ran off.

"Love & Peace!"

After that, on the train back, the boy was slandering Mikako.

Later...

"What's wrong with that chibi?"

"Raccoon dog."

"Gnashing teeth and laughing."

"I don't know... I can't forgive her, a woman without manners."

— Oh, this is... a lovable boy every time. If you are a little nice, you can understand immediately.

Choya thought that.

— I wonder why.

He also thought the same.

In a life where you see a dead body three times a week, how can this guy not be dead?

How can he grieve over people, get angry over irrationality, and people like him?

How can the light of the soul be kept forever as a tiny spark?

"Well, we won't find her anymore."

The boy leaned against the exit door and looked at the scenery outside the window. The setting sun shone red on his cheeks.

"I could be dead tomorrow... right, Taku?"

"Come on...what was that?"

Choya looked away with a dazzling sensation and at the same time a small backlash.

"Hey, what are you asking with that?"

This time, the point was directed at Choya. The boy said, narrowing his mouth as if he was sulking.

"Oh, you know, that guy is crazy, really crazy."

+++++

Boys meet girls.

This is that summer story. It is the story of three children who shone and disappeared like sparks that summer.

One of the three did not wait for "the day." The other was right in the whirlwind of "the day."

And the last one is...

## **CHAPTER 5: CHILDREN'S TELEPHONE COUNSELING ROOM**

"What is Kagutsu thinking about?"

Soma, who usually did nothing but smoke when asked by a person, paused for a moment... but immediately after that, as usual, an unreadable smile appeared on his face.

"That's the "Children's Telephone Counseling Room"."

"I'm going to ask a serious question."

Choya said without moving his eyebrows. Originally, he had a poor facial expression, but in this case it was a sign of dissatisfaction.

"No, I'm going to answer seriously."

In fact, with a less playful attitude than usual, Soma responded.

Choya "suspected" that Soma was "hiding" something. The conversation between the two of them tended to be a form of belly rub, but a bad deception could lead to useless information. Therefore, he "gave information that could be given, and was hesitant to pry any further". That was Soma's grace to Choya.

"I asked Tendo-san, "What are you thinking? " Adults should ask. "Why did you want to come up from the east?" And, "Are you angry on a sunny day?", for example."

"Don't guess the "Red King" with a superficial understanding..."

"It's not easy. Yes, it is."

"Eh...?"

"Children grasp the world as it is. "The sun laughs" and "a huge mass of hydrogen fuses" are expressions of the same thing. To put it the hard way."

"Ah."

"In that sense, the answer to the previous question is... "Something that he can see, we can see as strange. In his mouth, he has a great feeling. One day he might make a big move.", I think so."

"Is that a "kid's explanation"?"

It was a terribly stupid exchange. If the question was stupid, the answer was stupid too. He didn't expect Choya to say such a stupid thing, so Soma, who was surprised, gave a stupid answer.

However, it was probably part of Choya's speculation, including that. He was trying to survive by assimilating the situation as much as possible with limited knowledge and recognition. He believed it didn't make sense, but he didn't deny it. In the first place, there was no meaning in front of the "Red King".

Soma understood and thought of Choya's actions that way.

— What did he say next at that time?

"Well, there is no mistake in saying "don't guess", but there is also a saying: "What if you look into the abyss?", uh."

"Of course, it's a word from Nietzsche. It's not a saying."

"Anyway, if you think about him too much... you'll burn out your brain."

"What's that?"

"It's literally the meaning. If you're a chive with garlic, you'll be crushed. It's the same thing."

"Is that a warning?"

"That's why I say, it's a story that literally says "the brain is dangerous" when you threaten it."

Soma's missing little finger pointed to Choya's missing left eye.

"When you entered "Purgatory", you did that, right?"

The extraordinary power hit by the "Red King" roars inside the body, concentrating on a point on the body and a point that corresponds to the person's mental trauma, and explodes. Those who survive the injury are recognized as members of the clan, that is the "Purgatory" facility.

The same type of phenomenon was now occurring in his brain. No one "endures" and survives a brain defect.

At that time, some of the deaths that occurred around the "Red King" Kagutsu Genji were unidentified sudden deaths. There was also surrounding testimony that the person's head at the time was "exploding" and "boiling".

"Anyone who has reached a certain understanding of Kagutsu's existence will burn out their brains and die."

It is unknown if it was some kind of "attack" from Kagutsu, or if it was some kind of runaway phenomenon of different abilities.

In any case, it is one of the reasons why it is difficult to go back in time because there is a lack of information about Kagutsu Genji, even in the confusion before and after the Kagutsu incident.

And again, in any case, Soma himself was no longer distracted by the matter.

+++++

At that time, Soma was looking at the collapsed "Sword of Damocles".

The collapsed body lying on the ground was looking towards the "red sword" that collapsed in the heavens.

He was seeing the vision of the image created by the great existence, the great energy, and the great destiny.

"Haha... special seats."

As he told people "don't think" and "don't get close", Soma paid more attention to Kagutsu than anyone else and was thinking about it. Soma's own indivisible darkness may have been drawn to Kagutsu's heat, which burned away all complexity.

As if Icarus in Greek mythology approached the sun and shattered, no, the expression would be too fixed. For those who care about themselves, "summer insects that fly into the fire" are enough. Yes, that would be the true proverb...

Heat was taking over his thoughts.

"Not good... I'm finally here."

His brain burned.

He felt that Kagutsu's existence in his brain was accessing a great deal of heat.

He thought it would come one day, and on that day, at that moment, it finally caught up with him.

At that moment rang the cell phone in his pocket.

There should be a large-scale radio interference going on, no, the cell phone was silent. It was an illusion. Consciousness was beginning to blur.

"Hello, Soma-kun. It's me."

The mobile phone talked by itself without any operation. Of course, that was also a hallucination.

"Congratulations, you're finally here. I think I can tell you the answer... not the riddle..."

"... "Explanation for children"?"

Soma responded without doing anything to the other party.

"The answer you wanted."

"I don't need it. The "answer" I made to be happy."

"Everybody is happy."

"I am a twister."

"I'm serious, you..."

"Anyway..."

"In any case, you played the expected role. Thank you Soma-kun. And goodbye."

Leaving a farewell greeting lawfully, the "hallucination" disappeared.

"Expectations...?"



Of course, it was a relationship that was linked to interests. He had no complaints about being "used".

However, what did he get after all and who was he waiting for?

"In the end... I couldn't understand anything about him..."

A part of his brain was beginning to make noise.

Like an egg thrown into a microwave oven, it was bound to explode with his skull in a few seconds.

"Oh...?"

An unknown vision began to unfold in Soma's mind. It was a continuous stream of information that was beyond all of Soma's knowledge and memory.

"Haha... Oh, that's right. Is that so..."

It may have been a hallucination created by Soma's dying brain. But the truth that can only be understood by the burning brain, if it exists, Soma certainly had a glimpse of it.

"I see... I see, I see...!"

It is said that Icarus died when he got close to the sun due to his arrogance.

However, in exchange for the melted wings, he certainly saw the sun.

+++++

A group of black suits walked among the burned ruins. It was hard to see due to the storm of hot air accompanied by heat, but the decaying red sword floating above them was undeniable.

The "Red King" Kagutsu Genji and the Clansmen of "Purgatory".

Although the first strikes with different abilities and conventional weapons were considered, the "Blue King" Habari Jin rejected them.

"First of all, I want to see his face."

That said, together with the elite from "Scepter 4", they formed a formation in Kagutsu's direction of travel.

The distance to "Purgatory" had already been reduced to about 100 meters.

Kagutsu's W deviation had reached its maximum and a fiery shrine was developing. It seemed like those powers increased with every step they took.

It was as if it was a burning inferno in motion. The demons of hell burn as they walk. He was laughing as he burned. Looking up at the sky, shaking shoulders, burning to the point of laughter, leaving only a laugh, burning one by one.

The only one in the center of the herd, like the same haze of heat, was Kagutsu Genji, who did not tremble, did not stand up and did not laugh.

Kagutsu had stopped. Line of sight was established at only one point, Habari. The clansmen also stopped and...

As Kagutsu smiled on one cheek, a shock wave was emitted accompanied by an extraordinary ripple in all directions.

The members of "Scepter 4" reflexively developed different abilities and strengthened their defenses. A huge red wave swallowed the formation and pierced through, and several people with delayed defense and weak power retreated with full body damage.

Some of the black clothes from "Purgatory" also collapsed. The number of people and individual damage was great because they were so close to Kagutsu. Some people vomited blood on the spot and fell down, while others breathed fire all over their bodies and fell down.

"It's an unprecedented ending, Kagutsu."

The "Blue King" Habari Jin pierced the tip of the saber sheath into the ground and called Kagutsu into a standing stance. His long hair and the hem of his jacket fanned in the hot air, but as he accepted the influence of Kagutsu's existence with his entire body, his limbs did not move.

"You must not be on this earth. Today I can assure you that I was born to kill you."

Habari's right hand left the stem and pointed up.

"In other words, this is the fate of the "Red King" Kagutsu Genji."

A blue "Sword of Damocles" appeared above Habari.

"Red" and "Blue", two "Kings", the two swords clashed with each other in the smoldering ruins.

Among the "Scepter 4" members, the first to notice the small incident was Shiotsu, an aide who was packing the command vehicle behind.

The black robes around Kagutsu were slightly changing his standing positions. From a bird's eye view, it might have looked like some kind of mandala. The black robes arrived in an oddly ordered radial arrangement centered on Kagutsu.

— Procession, no, formation...? What is "Purgatory" doing?

"Be careful, Habari. There's something wrong with that."

"I know."

Habari responded to Shiotsu's communication with a fearless smile.

As Habari lowered his center of gravity slightly and took a stance, Zenjo and others from the Chainsaw Squad "Sawing Unit" naturally changed his stance and standing position. They weren't even aware of it. Their bodies naturally moved like a living creature with Habari as a brain.

"Purgatory" like a herd of beasts formed a camp, "Scepter 4", who had discipline, aimed at intuitive battle. They were in a situation where they were fearless and fell.

And Habari said happily as he took a forward leaning stance.

"Use the sword to take to the skies, there is no yoke in our justice. "Chainsaw Squad", mission execution!"

Together with the commando, Habari and the five "chainsaws" unleashed their abilities. Each of them carried a blue light and a violent screaming sound throughout their body.

The normal formation of "Scepter 4" was, so to speak, a single sheet of steel. The closely aligned general members produced a heavy and sharp impact force, like a strong metal crystal. The "Chainsaw Squad", on the other hand, was equivalent to a high-energy ionized plasma, especially when "Blue King" Habari led them himself. It was a quick and deadly beam of light and heat. The glowing plasma blade should have been able to easily cut through any formation, just as an arc cutting machine would cut through thick sheets of steel effortlessly.

But...

The only and last "form" of "Purgatory" was Soma's memory and the last trick.

It was not a defensive posture. Its structure and principle resembled an implosion lens that detonates a nuclear warhead, so to speak.

"Haha!"

Kagutsu laughed. For the first time that day, he laughed out loud.

It was a dead laugh. Dozens of black clothes surrounding Kagutsu exploded all at once in response to the explosive vibrations from different abilities.

And the next moment, contrary to the previous moment, the pressure from the explosion of the different skill was received from all the surroundings, and Kagutsu's surroundings were placed in an abnormal state of ultra-high pressure.

Usually some kind of pressure vessel is used to artificially cause a sudden "explosion" rather than an open "burn". A closed high pressure environment creates the conditions for a more destructive reaction.

Normally, neither material barriers nor energetic pressure could contain the tyrant of extraordinary power. The only exception was the Explosion Mandala, which was created by the red genie that originated from the god of gods.

Being trapped in the center of the Mandala and exposed to extremely high pressure and heat, the "Red King's" abilities were about to start a new chain reaction.

"Hahaha...!"

The red "Sword" shattered on top of Kagutsu.

It broke, but didn't fall off. It hung in the air like shards and they were turning into something other than a sword.

"Hey, what's that?!"

One of the general members waiting behind Habari screamed as he looked at Kagutsu, and in the next moment, his head exploded and he collapsed.

"Shiotsu, disconnect communication!", Habari yelled.

"Defense of all members! Close your eyes! Don't look at that! Don't listen! Don't think!"

Shiotsu reflexively cut off the communication. The members also closed their eyes and strengthened their extraordinary defenses, as if they had been hit by Habari's orders.

"So what is that?"

Beside Habari, Zenjo asked.

Zenjo was not thinking of Kagutsu. He didn't believe. However, he asked Habari.

"I don't get it! I don't know, but..."

"That" could be the phenomenon of hatching. Or maybe it's an emergency.

He didn't know if it was being born in the flames of the "King". He didn't even know who he was.

It could be a superhuman. Could be a demigod. The unknown giant reaction of physics W would not explain anything.

But, Habari was confident. There was still a fearless smile on his profile as he gazed at "it".

"That's also... No, that's Kagutsu Genji. My enemy."

"Well, let's cut it down."

Zenjo ran off. It was at the same time as Habari.

Then, the members of "Chainsaw Squat" continued without a break. No one was lost.

The "Blue King" Habari and the five "Chainsaws" turned into plasma blades with a single blow and slid towards Kagutsu's throat as they pierced through the explosive pressure of an extraordinary ability.

With a broken sword above his head, laughing, angry and exploding like a thermonuclear reaction, there was no telling what Kagutsu was about to do. He couldn't even guess.

That's why, before becoming someone, lower your head.

+++++

"I don't care about branches and leaves, whether it's W physics or an overflow of different skills."

The absent "Green King" said that and laughed absently.

"Well, if I will explain to you."

## **CHAPTER 6: EVE OF A DREAM**

"Huh? How did you get to be "King"?"

After finishing cleaning up after lunch, vacuuming the area around the dining table, collecting and folding dry clothes from high above the ground, he finally had some precious down time, as he was definitely a sun fanatic. Iwafune Tenkei, who was enjoying daytime drama reruns with his beloved canned beer in hand, turned away from the television and frowned.

The one who asked the question was Sukuna Gojo. He was lying on his stomach and operating a handheld game machine, but he mumbled, "It's clear now. Override game."

Then he suddenly sat up and turned to Iwafune.

"Speaking of which, Iwa-san, how did you become the "Grey King"?"

He asks abruptly.

There is no doubt that it was a random question that had no context. However, it seemed like it was a topic that piqued Sukuna's interest. He gave Iwafune a curious look as Iwafune frowned as he interrupted his break.

It's more,

"Oh, come to think of it, I don't know. The reason why Iwa-san became "King". Even though he is by my side."

Even Mishakuji Yukari, who was doing his daily yoga routine, came up with the subject of Sukuna. He released his pose, let out a small sigh, and looked at Iwafune, a vainly sexy look. Iwafune peeked out from the top of his head and said, "Excuse me."

"It's a tacit understanding that "Jungle" doesn't pry into the past."

"It's a player's saga to exploit loopholes in the rules."

"My life is not a game."

"It's boring, Iwa-san. We're friends."

"Even I don't know anything about your past."

After answering bluntly, Iwafune drank a can of beer. His gestures and expressions clearly seemed troublesome, but Sukuna and Yukari didn't give up. Even the Kotosaka parrot was flapping its wings at him.

"Right now, you're working with Nagare to play a supporting role, right? Iwa-san is also a genuine "King", right?"

"Chosen by the Slate, one of the seven great kings. Normally, you shouldn't be in a position to go underground and focus on household chores, right?"

"It's too much."

"First of all, didn't you have a different name in the past? What is it? Birds aren't chickens, they're even cooler."

"Parrot! Parrot!"

"No, parrots aren't particularly cool, are they?"

"Gah! Sukuna is terrible!"

"Writing it in kanji is cool, isn't it? Parrot."

"Yukari! Great! Sukuna, nonsense!"

"Okay. Kotosaka, shut up."

Sukuna frowned at the noisy Kotosaka, and Yukari responded as he laughed.

"Huh, "Grey King" Otori Seigo."

"That's right! Like a phoenix! Also, in terms of how long you've been a "King", it should be the second longest after the "Golden King", shouldn't it?"

"That's right. In the past, the two people who were involved in the Kagutsu Incident, the predecessor "Blue King" Habari Jin and the previous "Red King" Kagutsu Genji had an existence and eyes that were side by side. The mysterious "Grey King" who left his name in a turbulent era... If I were to compare him, I would be like Nobunaga, Hideyoshi or Ieyasu..."

"Hmm, well, if you go that far, something will be different. Even if you say so, he's an old drunk."

"Yes."

"You guys..."

Seeing his young allies teasing him, Iwafune became upset and bitter. Then, remembering the two "Kings" in his memory, he finally grabbed the top of his head.

"I just wouldn't go with those monsters. It's because they stopped being human, especially Kagutsu."

"To put it bluntly, Nagare and Iwa-san aren't "Kings" either."

"The "King" is a human. Tentatively."

"But it's refreshing to be able to comment on Kagutsu Genji like this. I'm embarrassed to say that I'm one of those people who lived in that time, right? It's hard to express, but... "Kagutsu Genji" is "Kagutsu Genji" not no matter how far you go. It's more like a pronoun than a person's name or nickname..."

"Is that correct?"

"Eh?"

"Didn't I tell you? He stopped being human... Really."

Speaking in an unusually low voice, Iwafune tilted a can of beer.

Even after more than ten years, it was still a difficult question to handle. God or devil. Paranormal phenomenon. "Something" demanded by the times or by "the world". Something that transcends the individual will.

Such an indescribable existence turned out to be in the form of a human being, or perhaps it was two people who were incarnated in this world. They moved with something different from reason in the human world. At that moment, he honestly whispered to himself that even the thought of Kagutsu's existence would destroy one's life.

If that was the original "King", then it would definitely be an imitation.

When,

"Sukuna, Yukari. Please leave it at that."



The "King", who was looking at the screen while he was sitting in his wheelchair as usual, spoke.

The "Green King" Nagare Hisui.

"Iwa-san's past belongs to Iwa-san."

His gaze was still fixed on the screen, but his voice seemed to be a little louder than usual.

After being reprimanded by Nagare, the two closed their mouths somewhat awkwardly, like children being scolded by their parents. Yukari, in particular, seemed to have honestly acknowledged his own innocence and silently expressed his gratitude towards Iwafune with an elegant gesture.

However, Sukuna did not seem convinced.

While he acknowledged everyone's stance not to go beyond what was necessary, he still couldn't hide the fact that he wanted to know more and to be taught in particular. It could be seen that "smells like water" was written on the face of the boy, who was still very young.

Cursing, Iwafune suppressed a wry smile.

Honestly, it was a hassle. However, there was also a part of him that didn't want to take the boy's attitude lightly.

In the end, Iwafune shrugged and said:

"Sorry, but I don't have the kind of dramatic "trigger" you guys were hoping for. I don't know why, but my consciousness faded and before I knew it, I became a "King". I don't even know how that happened."

"Huh? So pitiful..."

"Don't be rude. Even if you say something like a king, there are many things to do."

Some of them must have become "Kings" after living such a dramatic experience. For example, Nagare Hisui who was in front of them. In terms of drama, he is probably one of the most prominent awakenings among the successive "Kings".

Unfortunately, he was not like that.

"Actually, why did they pick me? Slate may be unexpectedly suitable for the job."

Iwafune let out an innocent self-deprecation and bowed his head.

But,

"Negative."

Nagare responded immediately.

"Considering Iwa-san's achievements, the Slate certainly chose the "King".

"Stop. If someone had been elected around the same time and in a similar position, I'm sure he would have done much better than me at the time. In fact, I was left with nothing."

"Negative. The chance of someone other than Iwa-san achieving what Iwa-san did at that time is so small that it can be objectively ignored."

Looking at the screen, Nagare said that nonchalantly, but with a firm tone. After snorting, Iwafune replied, "Thank you."

"After all, I don't know very well."

Sukuna grunted in boredom. "I'm sorry." Iwafune said, going back to his usual pace and tipping a can of beer.

Suddenly though,

"Ah. That's right..."

And unconsciously he was unearthing memories that he had long forgotten.

"Huh, "generate" is ambiguous, but... how should I put it... there was a bit of "foreshadowing".

At the monologue he let out while he blinked, not mentioning Sukuna and Yukari, even Nagare was surprised and looked away from the screen.

"This is the first time I've heard of it. An omen, huh? What would you become a "King" of?"

"Ah, no, I don't know, it was the day before Slate called me, but was there a "strange thing"?"

"Strange thing?"

Nagare repeated on the urge to lean forward. Whatever will happen, the person most interested in Iwafune's past was none other than the "Green King". Kotosaka yelled "Nagare! Watch out!", but neither Nagare nor Sukuna nor Yukari listened.

Iwafune stroked his beard.

"Hmm... Still, I'm pretty sure I was drunk at the time, so I'm not sure how accurate my memory is..."

"Huh? Iwa-san, have you been drinking for a long time?"

"Don't be stupid. At that time, I was suffering from the harshness of the real world."

"Okay. What was that "strange thing"?"

While Sukuna was shocked, Yukari leaned forward and asked. Although Nagare did not urge Iwafune, his eyes shone with curiosity and anticipation.

Though Iwafune was a little taken aback, he shifted his position, sat cross-legged, and stared into space for memories.

"That's right. That was before he made me "like a king", so that was when I was still in charge of welfare at the city hall."

"Huh?! Welfare?! I mean, Iwa-san, were you an official?!"

"Ah, but somehow, I get it."

"Yeah. I've heard of that work history."

"Isn't that a lie? Did a drunk like you comb hair? Did you shave every day and wear a tie?"

"What's up, Sukuna? Not bad at all, right? A public servant is important. For the good of the world, he works diligently day and night."

"No, stop it! I can't imagine it. Heh, it's too funny if I imagine it!"

Sukuna laughed as if something had happened. Iwafune felt his cheeks burn and pursed his lips dejectedly.

"Anyway! I was a social worker at the town hall and, partly because of my job, regularly ran a soup kitchen for the homeless. Well, to be more precise, I was helping out at a certain church where I cooked."

Yes, as soon as he said that bluntly, memories welled up in a way that even he didn't expect.

For various reasons, there are people who cannot save themselves. People who can't be called excellent, or rather have only glaring flaws, but are still "good" people.

He wanted to help people like that, he wanted to be strong to protect them.

At that time, he was seriously thinking about those things from the bottom of his heart.

That's why helping the church cook was more like a volunteer than an extension of his work. In fact, Iwafune was unnecessarily obsessed with it and looked bitterly at his colleagues in the government office. However, Iwafune's enthusiasm did not cool down even though he was a bit reluctant. He found joy in serving the helpless.

However, the church that Iwafune attended had a certain problem. The church, located in the center of the old town, was an obstacle to a large-scale redevelopment plan that came about by chance.

Looking at the big picture, the remodel must have been the "right" thing to do. It was clear that the project would generate enormous wealth, and that wealth would have enriched the lives of many people.

However, the priest in charge of the church was on the side of those who were not included in the "many".

Rather than a cleric, he was a large, muscular man who looked more like a professional wrestler. At the time, Iwafune was in love with him and at one point even considered him his life mentor. And he stubbornly refused to agree to eviction from the church and often clashed with the redevelopment faction.

Iwafune did everything in his power to help him, but he was unable to resolve the situation. On the contrary, he received strict orders from his boss to convince the priest. Needless to say, the city was also involved in the redevelopment plan. Iwafune, who was caught in a dilemma, was worried and gradually increased the amount of alcohol he drank.

That was when the priest was attacked by an assailant.

"Hmm? Wait, Iwa-san. Who was the assailant?"

"Huh? Don't you know? That's why you're a boy."

"Normally, you didn't know, in those days. Well, it's the people who were working to evict the people who lived there to buy the land."

Sukuna still bowed his head at Yukari's explanation.

"Did they want to take it with all their might? Wasn't it smarter to buy it? Ah, buy it as cheaply as possible?"

"I would have said so, but in any case, it's not a matter of money. It's for neighbors who don't understand money, no matter how expensive it is, to leave their land. Even Sukuna-chan wouldn't be willing to sell this hideout, no matter how much money has accumulated, right?"

"Oh, it is true..."

"I can understand why the priest refused to sell it if there were a lot of people who had nowhere to go if they lost that place."

"I see. Well, we are the same, we have nowhere to go."

"Actually, thinking about it like that, I don't think much has changed since the old days. Even now, I still "cook" for those pitiful people every day."

Yukari responded with a wry smile at Iwafune's words, while Sukuna asked, "Who's pitiful?"

In the midst of that, Nagare, who was fully aware of the fact that she was being served food, calmly said:

"Didn't you say the priest was attacked? Was your life in danger?"

"I didn't get that far. Well, I hurt my leg a bit, but I recovered quickly. On the contrary, I was on fire with fighting spirit."

Iwafune spoke lightly, but at the moment he was extremely serious. What appalling violence. Of course, the police also acted, but unfortunately they could not arrest the culprit, and in the end it turned out to be the crime of a bystander. That was it, the attackers were meticulously prepared.

Concerned about the priest, Iwafune convinced him to compromise, but he refused. And again, the owner's move ended with a dark raid.

Interfering with church business and intimidating surrounding residents. The assault on vagrants lining up at the soup kitchen and the intimidation of food providers. Various tangible and intangible harassment heated up over time. Iwafune desperately tried to defuse the situation, but all to no avail.

And finally...

They told him not to come back.

Yes, that's what the priest told him. Iwafune still vividly remembered his expression at that time.

He knew that he gave him that advice because he was worried about Iwafune. For Iwafune, however, the priest's words were a sword pointed at his helplessness. Although Iwafune relented, the priest's attitude did not waver. What was frustrating being that somehow Iwafune himself understood that the priest's judgment was correct.

The priest was trying to protect the clumsy young man, but "well" he had no power to save himself.

After Iwafune left the church, he drank a lot of sake and then...

"He was shrouded in mist."

"Mist?"

In response to Nagare's question, Iwafune commented, "Of course, it wasn't my fault, was it?"

"It's a story from before I became a 'King'. Actually, the place where the church originally stood was a land where fog and mist often appeared. Also, since the harassment of landlords had increased, a lot was done denser and denser. Thanks to that, I was saved more than once or twice."

Even among the things that the landlord set up, the most vicious cases: attempted arson and attempted robbery. Others tried to fake accidents and ram them with trucks, but the dense fog that had formed nearby physically prevented all of them from being carried out. At that moment, the blood rushed to his head and he didn't have time to notice it, but when he thought about it later, it was a very unnatural phenomenon.

"Kamisama! Miracle!"

Kotosaka spread his wings and said that, without joking, he thought it was God's blessing.

However, that "god" was nothing like a "god", at least in terms of appearance.

He, at least back then, was a small existence, wounded, lost and wandering aimlessly.

+++++

No matter how much alcohol he drank, the feeling of helplessness coursing through his body didn't seem to go away, and it only got worse. And then Seigo Otori thought the result was good.

He didn't want to be saved. He was drinking because he wanted to blame himself.

"Don't come again.". The words commanded by the priest echoed in his heart. He didn't know how many times he vomited and didn't remember how much he drank. His brain and his nerves were undermined by the alcohol, and his five senses were confused and twisted. In the blink of an eye, thunder roared 100 times in his mind, and on the other hand, a great discomfort like tar stagnated at the back of his stomach, endlessly piling up and hardening like the lead.

Anger, sadness, regret, depression. Even so, he still clung to himself. A myriad of emotions fused in alcohol, swollen and throbbing. What did he have to do? What should he have done? Were his wishes wrong? It wasn't bad, but wouldn't it come true?

He didn't know anything about the past or the future. Unknowingly, Otori moved away from the present and continued to move aimlessly.

That's right, Otori didn't remember when he got lost there. Time and place. He wasn't even sure if he was dead or alive then.

The first thing he noticed was the sound.

A soft but artificially produced tone with a somber tone.

The sound produced by an instrument.

His intoxicated awareness surfaced, and Otori realized that he was surrounded by a thick fog that prevented him from seeing even a few meters ahead. He stopped involuntarily and looked around in amazement.

Where was he? When he thought that, he saw a dim light beyond the thick fog. From there he could also hear the sounds of musical instruments. As a guest, Otori staggered in the direction of the lights and sounds.

And...

"What is this?"

When he barely noticed his surroundings due to the alcohol inhibiting his awareness, Otori was in the middle of a crowd of people coming and going.

No, he didn't know exactly if there was a person there. The fog had not cleared. However, beyond the thin veil formed by the mist, there were many writhing figures. Also, the street was lined with stalls with lights hanging on both sides. It looked like a festival scene. However, the signs and atmosphere conveyed were clearly different from the festival. There was a more miscellaneous "vulgar" atmosphere, more vulgar than familiar. The place reminded him of the post-war "black market" he had heard of.

Of course, there was no such place in that area.

No, there shouldn't be.

"This is... what the hell..."

It was like a drunk's dream. Reason decided so, but for some reason Otori knew otherwise. He smacked his cheek to bring his sanity back, if only a little. However, the suspicious scenery in front of him did not change at all.

Then, it was time to put the bottle of sake from his hand to his mouth.

—— The world cannot be measured by black or white ——

Otori heard a voice and shivered.

He turned his head to find the direction of the voice, but he couldn't tell where it came from. He could feel his heart beating rapidly, regardless of the amount of alcohol consumed. There was a taboo feeling, like touching something out of this world.

And...

—— If you still want to go through the cracks, at least you'll be fine ——

It was a low and sad voice... yet it was a voice that made him feel a deep experience. No, or was it not a voice but a thought?

Otori's consciousness became intoxicated again. The thoughts sank gently into the bog of alcohol.

A narrow road that was neither black nor white.



Young Otori did not know what that meant.

As it left a strange and vivid impression, Otori's vision and thoughts were blocked by a dense fog.

The next day...

Otori woke up in the church, and after being cursed by the priest that he seemed to have swallowed a bitter bug...

"Aid."

They told him.

It was a funeral. One of the homeless regulars at the soup kitchen was found dead in the corner of the church grounds. It seemed to be a simple natural death, regardless of the owner. It was certain that the dead man was an old man, but it was difficult to guess how old he was. After all, the homeless man had old, severe burns all over his body, which he had covered with bandages. Despite the great physique of him, he was gaunt and thin.

There was no one among the wanderers who was close to the old man, and they had no idea what kind of person he was.

However, the old man, who was sound asleep, was holding a crude accordion in his arms.

He still didn't know if the sound he heard in the mist was the sound of an accordion.

In the afternoon of that day, the frustrated owners attacked the church that had finished the funeral of the old man.

There was no fog.

It was during the melee that Otori was chosen by the Slate.

+++++++

"Huh?! What is that? Is that the end? No explanation?"

"I told you. I don't remember well and my memory is vague."

"You became 'King' the day after you got drunk, right?"

"That's it, I had a terrible hangover."

"Did you become 'King' with a hangover?!"

Iwafune laughed lightly at Sukuna, who spat in disbelief.

Yukari, on the other hand, looked amused and smiled, "Fog, huh..."

As Nagare silently looked at Iwafune,

"Iwa-san. Otori Seigo. What happened to the person named Otori Seigo?"

"Oh, I know. Because I did a lot of research. Or rather, I'm surprised you knew."

"It's just a name. Or rather, I'm not even sure if that name is correct."

"I am the same. That is why, whether that was or not... is forever in the mist."

While exchanging glances, the two "Kings" confirmed each other with a few words. Yukari watched the situation with interest.

"Hey, I really don't understand."

"Anyway, after quickly defeating the attackers, I decided to quit my job and start working as a cleric under the guidance of a priest. That's how I came up with forming my clan."

"Huh, "Cathedral". It was a gigantic clan that embodied a kind of beautiful thing called "Relief for the Weak" as the real thing."

Following Iwafune's lines, Nagare spoke solemnly. However, Iwafune couldn't help but snort ironically at Nagare's words.

Just as Nagare said, "Cathedral" led by Iwafune was a powerful clan that wielded power second only to the golden "Tokijikuin" clan during their heyday. Indeed, it may even have been a kind of "independent state".

Kagutsu, of course, is a clan ruled by a "King" who was much more "King" than Habari. Territory of many weaklings and patrons. The garden of salvation of good people.

At the time, there were irrelevant rumors that he boarded to prevent "destruction". The reality was the opposite. A desperate escape after being trampled. A powerful and absolute impotence that could not be compared to the time when he was a civil servant.

"In the end..."

At that moment, Yukari said in a whisper with a disgustingly seductive and slightly provocative voice.

"For Iwa-san, what is really "important" is not the "chance" or "foreshadowing" of becoming "King", but the chance to 'descend' from the "King", is it not?"

Iwafune reflexively cast a sidelong glance.

That, though he wasn't aware of it, was such a sharp look that Yukari immediately changed his demeanor and slightly raised his hands as if he was apologizing for his mischief.

"What?"

"Nothing."

Iwafune replied haughtily to Sukuna, who was dumbstruck. As Nagare made a complicated smile, he returned his posture to the screen without saying anything.

Iwafune took a sip of the beer, noticing that it was already empty, he crushed the can with one hand.

He gave in to the intense emotions that instantly coursed through his body... and then slowly relaxed.

Apparently, it wasn't a thing of the past, even for him. Such a foolish discovery made Iwafune realize how inexperienced he was.

"Sukuna. Fill it up. Take it."

"Uh, no. Take it yourself."

"I told you about the old days."

"It's disappointing. If you want, tell me a more interesting story."

"Yes, yes. Then I'll respectfully pour it into a glass. Even with this, I'm confident in my drinking."

"Keh. Then serve it quickly."

Even as he cursed, Iwafune's memories kept going back to "that day...". Amidst his heart's denial, the memories he normally blocked out came back whether he liked it or not.

Scorching heat and icy despair.

Iwafune took a deep breath with his whole body.

He sighed for a long time.

## **CHAPTER 7: THE END OF DREAMS**

It looked like a typhoon.

A large typhoon. A deadly storm that rained fire instead of rain.

As if the change in air pressure signaled his approach, he could clearly feel his approach. Facing the approaching destruction, the "Grey King", Seigo Otori, sighed for a long time.

"Didn't "Scepter 4" arrive on time? Habari... No, it's wrong to blame you."

The gray clan "Cathedral".

In the central chapel of the church, Otori knelt before the cross and offered a deep prayer. As he did so, he endured the current situation with his entire body.

A strong pressure that could crush him if he let his guard down even a little. In the midst of that, he repeated to himself many times what he should do.

Seigo Otori's mission was to protect.

Help the weak, the people gathered in the sanctuary. But that was it.

"What's the answer to 'Purgatory'?"

"Ah, no. Even those who went directly to them lost contact."

"What about 'Tokijikuin'?"

"They said they would send urgent reinforcements. However, whatever happens, right now..."

"I guess so."

The aide's report was bitterly self-critical.

He knew it. Otori stood up suddenly and turned his sorrowful gaze to the cross. However, he immediately walked away and turned his back on the metaphysical paradise.

"I'm leaving. I'll give you as much time as possible, so proceed with the evacuation with all you might."

"Please wait! Please, 'King', let's evacuate together!"

The helpers correctly understood that Otori's words amounted to a testament. He pleaded while twisting his body... but Otori just smiled silently.

He didn't answer directly.

"Leave it to me."

After saying that, he left the chapel without hesitation. He doesn't look back even when he stops calling him out.

He knew that this "situation" was due to the intentions of the "faceless man".

However, since the "faceless man" was dead, there was no turning back. No, even if he had lived, he would have been defenseless. It was a "situation" created by such a genius, betting his life, his existence, entirely. It was ridiculous to think that he was inferior in resolve to him, but he had to admit the fact that he wasn't one step closer to insanity.

However, it is up to each one how responds to the "situation" is forced into. He didn't know how far the "faceless man" scenario went, but Otori simply followed his own beliefs.

He left the church.

In the sky high above his head, he enshrined a supernatural giant sword. It was neither black nor white, but a greyish "Sword of Damocles". A strong mist barrier had already been deployed in the surroundings. Sanctum, the sanctuary of absolute defense, the authority of Otori, the "Grey King". However, Otori's expression twisted at the feeling that the myth of "absolute" would collapse that day.

He headed to the edge of Sanctum.

The surrounding area was already screaming. Scared, lamenting and confused by impending death. Meanwhile, the Otori clansman desperately tried to lead the evacuation.

Even in the face of danger that threatened their lives, the clansmen were doing what they should with sincerity and resolve. It was a waste of clansmen for him. Responding to that belief was also Otori's mission.

He wanted as many people as possible to survive. That's why he was taking action.

Then, he came to an open six lane street. It was a vague "city" boundary. But at that moment, a thick fog, more than ten meters high, got in the way of what should have been an ambiguous boundary.

It was a wall of mist built by Otori. A shield with supernatural abilities that confused foreign enemies, crushed them, and engulfed them in smoke. But how much help would the Gray Mist, which had protected him and his clan so many times, be of any help this time?

"...No."

He was wrong. It was not enough to simply rely on the "power" obtained from the Slate. He had to do it himself.

Otori slowly raised his right hand and yanked it down.

At the same time, the wall of thick fog blocking the front split left and right like Moses' flight from Egypt, opening the way.

A heat waves rushed in.

Heat and fire were emitted by a group of men, all dressed in dark suits, who slowly approached the other side of the mist.

They were strange people.

Some were burning with anger, some were laughing, some were staring persistently, and some were crying.

"Purgatory".

Like Otori, they were the members of the Apostle Clan of Fire and Destruction, who were chosen by the Slate and crowned as the "King".

The black hordes approaching from far away could only be mistaken for demons from hell. Following the laws of purgatory that were not of this world, they were trying to invade the Sacred Garden.

"...Ha."

Otori snorted as if to cheer himself up.

He raised his voice, though he knew it was useless.

"From now on, "Cathedral" is a tributary of the royal authority! Those who enter without permission will perish! This is the final warning. Withdraw!"

Of course, it was useless.

After waiting a few seconds, Otori relaxed his shoulders slightly.

He then slowly reached his right hand between his waist and pulled a single revolver from an old holster.

+++++

Bam!

A dry sound and a vibration ran through his body like the beating of a heart.

A bullet was ejected, sucked into the distance, and smoke from the explosion shook the ground.

The greatest characteristic of "Purgatory" was its contempt for life. All those who were fascinated by Genji Kagutsu, the "Red King", yawned and threw away their lives out of boredom.

A debauchery that burns his own life and destroys the lives of others around them. Each of them was a single bullet that wanted to burn in an instant.

And at that moment, Otori was completely destroying the pitiful swarm of bullets with bullets with supernatural powers.

Every bullet fired from Otori's gun became a cannonball. Otori overwhelmed the enemy with firepower, like a heavy tank destroying infantry.

The "King's" arrow flew.

A soldier died.

There was no mercy or piety, just efficient work. Beyond the fingertips that squeezed the trigger, many lives exploded and disappeared. Otori was not a cleric in the official sense,

but a so-called "Moguri", but that did not mean that it was an acceptable act. He should go to hell. Still, Otori was willing to commit crimes if even one of the people he protected could be saved. Behind Otori, there were innocent people who only trusted him. Not a single strand of their hairs would be burned by the red fire.

Explosive smoke danced, fire danced, blood and flesh shattered, and mist was disturbed. Dodging the approaching scorching chin with a mist of supernatural power, enveloping it, and then simply pulling the trigger, he continued to pull.

"....."

The bullets are over. Silently and fluidly, he reloaded the revolver. He didn't even remember how many times. It did not matter. He had a lot of ammunition. Whether it was a full day, two days, or three days, he was prepared to see it through to the end.

Shoot, shoot, shoot.

Kill, kill, kill.

Amidst the roar and scorching heat, Otori acted cool and racked up kills. Still, the "Purgatory" march did not stop. Angry, laughing, silent, crying, they never stopped coming there.

The simple fact is that "Purgatory" was a gathering of eccentrics, but even so, the guard was down that day. His true nature, his essential "way of being," seemed to be exposed.

He didn't understand it.

At the same time, he felt that he knew something.

Those guys probably lived like that. That "ardor" towards death was probably their lives. Don't think about it, Otori told himself. All he needed to keep in his heart was his own mission. At that time, other distractions were not only useless, but also harmful. Otori mechanically squeezed the trigger.

At that moment, an explosion was heard.

It wasn't Otori's shots. Far. It was in the direction of nine.

Otori stared. In the distance he could see the walls of mist breaking apart. He didn't break through with a direct attack, but he slipped. An internal orientation, or a conspiracy. Of course, it had to be both. In any case, a red presence had invaded the Sanctum, Otori's shrine, though it was only a small part of it.

It seemed to be a detachment from "Purgatory". Furthermore, the "pressure" transmitted was greater there than that of the clansmen in front of him. There was a controlled presence that was not typical of "Purgatory", he could feel the "will" of the "unit".

"No way?!"

Was the enemy in front of him a distraction? However, it was hard to imagine that "Purgatory" would use such a strategy. He was about to make a quick decision, but before he could come to a conclusion, a man appeared in his mind.

Executive of "Purgatory", Hitoshi Soma. The number two of the clan and staff officer. If it was that man's command... it was very possible.

"Shit!"

After the invasion of "Purgatory" was revealed, Otori immediately prepared multiple escape routes. The wall of mist broke around the main route.

Otori clenched his teeth.

He then engaged the enemy in front of him and fired the remaining two shots in the magazine barrel in rapid succession.

The explosions chained together and the smoke swirled violently. Without even having time to see the result, Otori turned around and started running in the direction of the detachment that had launched a surprise attack.

However, his legs soon stopped.

The smoke caused by Otori's attack was absorbed by the rising heat wave and dispersed in an instant. The wave of heat surged like a raging wave, covering Otori's entire body.

Otori involuntarily turned around at the burning air and at the "sign" of even greater heat.

He then saw it.

"Kagutsu..."

Even the words that should have been embedded in his body didn't come out.

In that place was hell.

There were ruins, death and evil.

The "King" was there.

And then there was "something" that surpassed human understanding, melting and burning them all.

Beyond the gaping wall of mist. What he saw was a sea of flames. A scene from purgatory that resembles a religious painting. In the middle was the silhouette of a red and black pillar. At least the form looked "human". That fact turned out to be a bad joke or something.

Otori sighed in resignation.

He was there.



The owner of "Purgatory".

The "Red King" Genji Kagutsu.

Advancing until just before the attack might have been a distraction just as Otori had imagined.

However, that was, after all, the realm of "people". It was something that Otori and Soma thought stupidly, and it was not something that they knew. He shouldn't mind the speculation of "people".

So it couldn't be helped. Unfortunately, the frustration resolved itself naturally.

He regained his composure. On the other hand, his preparation "team" increased by one.

They had met before. He expected that from his experience. Exaggerated even by himself.

But apparently it was not enough. That was completely beyond his expectations.

So, as expected, it couldn't be helped.

"It's been a long time, hasn't it? God..."

The slowly approaching signs of fire, death, and destruction made the concept itself feel deadly. Both reason and instinct understood that it was "different."

In other words, Seigo Otori's life would end there.

Nevertheless...

It was surprising to him, and he was proud of it, but...

Otori was unwavering in his determination to protect.

That absolute mission supported Otori even in the face of an unprecedented threat.

Delight filled his brain. As "King", he seemed to be able to accomplish his mission. He seemed to be qualified for it. Conveniently, fear, sense of danger, common sense, and survival instincts were paralyzed in the face of unreasonable existence. In that case, he wouldn't think too much, just buy some time. To keep people alive, even for a fraction of a second, he would stop that. All he had to do was put all of his soul into that spot. That simple and direct conclusion gave Otori unexpected relief.

He couldn't put out that "fire" by himself. But he had no intention of giving in to despair. It was not black or white, win or lose. From the beginning, it was Otori Seigo's destiny to walk down that narrow path.

"Well. Do you want to do it...?"

Otori straightened his back and faced the distant ruin head on. He laughed, but it was even exhilarating.

He never dreamed that he would lead a life like that.

It wasn't bad at all. Otori thought honestly and smiled brightly.

But...

"It's useless! Otori!"

A cry of restraint was released from behind. Hearing that familiar voice, Otori flinched and turned around.

A person with a cane in his hand was running towards him. Otori asked him to be his right arm, and he was the only person he could trust "Cathedral" after his death. One of the executives who built the clan together with Otori. Otori's partner.

With Otori facing inevitable death, losing him was the same as losing the clan's future.

"Idiot! Run away!"

Otori's throat was hoarse, but his partner didn't hear a word and ran towards him.

Confusion spread throughout his body, causing confusion in his judgment. As if to take advantage of that fatal gap, of course, he shouldn't have paid attention to such a trivial matter, but a powerful wave of heat surged up like a tsunami.

Otori reflexively unfolded a barrier of mist. The heat waves easily covered the barrier and dragged Otori and his partner along with the barrier.

Hot and strong.

If he hadn't stopped breathing immediately, his lungs would have burned. Otori's body was at the mercy of being swallowed by a pyroclastic flow. Still, he desperately defended himself and his companion who screamed with the mist.

"No, uh...!"

Otori developed a thick fog like tar, resisting the torrent of red. Both feet on the ground. The soles of his shoes slipped violently, but he finally stopped himself. Otori manipulated the mist and shook off the wave of heat surrounding him.

He reloaded and reloaded his favorite weapon at lightning speed. With both hands sticking out, he aimed beyond the open walls.

He fired all the bullets.

Rapid fire at God speed synergizes military power and destruction. Six bullets hit almost simultaneously. Like an airstrike from a bomber, a roaring sound and impact swept through the surroundings, and smoke rose in the distance.

The hidden power of "harm" inherent in the "Grey King", which was originally intended to be "protection".

However, the smoke from the distance was expelled at a speed that exceeded the speed of expansion.

A red flame burst out violently.

Then, after thinking that it had exploded, he suddenly sank to the ground as if he had lost motivation.

Otori never looked ahead.

Beyond the disintegrating mist, he could still see the unchanging sea of flames and the unchanging silhouette. It was as if those attacks and counterattacks had never happened. He could feel the disappointment weighing down on his entire body. Otori swallowed his overflowing pain.

He felt that he was seeing a mythical giant who crushed the earth with a single sneeze. Otori reloaded the weapon as he laughed in his heart. There was no last moment in that movement.

It was very bitter.

But that was the reality. There was no change in the given resolution. There was only what he had to do.

Then his partner gasped and coughed from behind. In other words, it was proof that he was breathing. It was proof that he was alive. Otori once again shouted at his partner behind him without turning around.

"Do you understand? Run away now. I don't want you to die. After that..."

He didn't know if he was trying to say: Leave it to me.

Otori kept looking into the distance, bracing himself for the next heat wave.

"Eh?"

His entire body stiffened. He was so focused on the front that he couldn't resist one bit.

Otori's consciousness was forcibly harvested.

+++++

Otori, who boasted such mighty power, collapsed as if he were a normal young man who could be found wherever he looked. Looking at the "King" who was lying on the ground, the man trembled and blamed himself for what he had done.

But that was only for a moment. Before his eyes, infallible death was approaching step by step. The man threw away the stun gun he was given, at least it looked like a commercially available one, and carried an unconscious Otori over his shoulders. Then, without leaning on the cane, he frantically left the place.

As explained beforehand, the "Red King" showed no interest in him running away, even in the unconscious "Grey King". By taking the appointed route, the man escaped death, which should have been infallible, with astonishing ease.

The man walked out of "Cathedral" as he carried the "King" on his shoulders.

Eventually, his physical strength gave out and the man stopped and lowered Otori to the ground. Looking back the way he came as he gasped, he could see that the clan he belonged to, the dependent territory, was stained with red fire.

The man's body trembled once more at the size of what had been destroyed. He was about to be overwhelmed with great regrets... but he knew that even if he could do it all over again, he would make the same choice.

He wanted to save Otori, even if it meant abandoning his comrades and the people he protected, and betraying the trust placed in him. To this man, Otori was like a son.

"Forgive me..."

Immediately after muttering that, he felt ashamed of himself. He shouldn't allow himself that. He didn't even have the right to ask for forgiveness. He had no choice but to bear that sin.

That was why...

"Oh, God."

At that moment, what came out of his mouth was not a plea for forgiveness, but only a pure prayer.

However, as if he answered that call, the cell phone in his pocket rang.

The man shook his entire body. After a few seconds of stiffening, he pulled the cell phone out of him like he was touching a burned stone.

However, before he could operate on it...

"Hey, looks like it went well."

He heard a voice from the other end of his cell phone.

More precisely, he did not know if it came from his cell phone. Anyway, he heard voices. That alone was weird enough, but what was weirder than anything else was that the person he was talking to was already dead. The man was present with Otori at the time of his

death. Despite that, he could hear a familiar voice from his cell phone and it didn't change at all.

In other words, it was an "auditory hallucination".

That must be it.

"It was great that you were able to save the "King" as you wished. However, as expected, I wanted you to intervene a bit later. Even though I hit him to warm up, I didn't have enough time to adjust the "Red King's" W deviation. Well, the real thing comes after this."

"....."

The man could not understand the words spoken by the dead man's voice. The other side probably didn't tell the man either because he thought he could understand. In other words, it was a "complaint". However, the voice was clearly enjoying the "situation".

"The faceless man".

That "auditory hallucination" contained a different kind of madness and despair than the "Red King" that he had just glimpsed.

"Anyway, your job is done. Good job. Goodbye. Since it's a big deal, I'll give you one last piece of advice, but after this, you should run far away."

After saying that, the "auditory hallucination" disappeared.

While he was standing, the man slowly lowered the hand holding the cell phone and finally dropped it to the ground, it had never worked.

Before he knew it, all the blood had disappeared from his body. Although the fire spread a little farther, he couldn't feel the heat.

It was strange.

He wondered what he had done.

"Guh..."

Otori let out a low moan. The man came to his senses, shook off his sinister premonitions and great regrets, and carried Otori on his shoulders.

A car was parked up ahead. He would take Otori and leave that place. As for the advice they gave him, he would go as far as he could.

A few hours later, his beloved church clan disappeared from history and maps.

+++++

The tomb was on a small hill far from the city.

It was a place where you could see the sea. However, until fourteen years ago, it was not the sea. The Kagutsu Crater. It was a fateful place that claimed many lives. The tomb stared at the excavated land and sea as if in mourning for the lost past.

"It's been a long time, comrade. Come to think of it, the last time I came here was for a funeral, so this is my first time visiting a grave."

As he spoke to the tombstone, Iwafune held out the bouquet he had prepared in front of the tombstone.

He opened the lid of canned beer that he also brought and placed it next to the bouquet. After that, he took out another bottle, opened it and made a small toast.

"If it wasn't for Kagutsu Crater, it would be a nice place with a beautiful view."

With so much irony in his mouth, Iwafune put his mouth on the can.

"The other day, I was asked to talk about the old days... but I couldn't help but remember. Well, it's a good opportunity... I have a lot of free time..."

Iwafune slowly sat down in front of the grave while he made some embarrassed excuses.

Sleeping in the grave in front of him were two priests who worked in a certain church. One was a strong and compassionate giant, and the other was a naive "Moguri" who drowned in undesired dreams. They were both teacher and disciple, comrades in arms, and perhaps even father and son.

They both died.

Afterwards, he left behind a desolate shell that was only meant for good and sloth.

"It's been a long time. Actually..."

After saying that, Iwafune silently looked at the tombstone for a moment and tilted the can again.

"At that time, I couldn't forgive you. But... now I understand your feelings a little more."

Iwafune now has only one "King". The "King" that he helped and raised. He is the "King" who gave him a second life.

He wants to be the power of that "King". No matter what. The prayer that he once wished to save the weak was now directed at a single young man. So, he understood the thoughts of his partner at that time. The pain that tore through his body and the attachment he couldn't let go of.

"Well, you were tricked quite a bit, but it didn't change that you were adamant until the end."

Iwafune laughed, then slowly undid his smile. He stared silently at the tombstone with a piercing gaze.

If he was put in the same position as him, would he give everything to help the "King" as he did?

Everything, even betraying the will of the "King".

"It's a big deal, so let's go see it. What kind of decision will I make?"

After drinking the canned beer, Iwafune sat up, stretched out his body and looked out at the sea behind him.

The wind blew.

The weather was good. It was a comfortable place.

However, when he closed his eyes, what he remembered was the flames and mist of that day.

Otori Seigo died. However, his regret still burns slightly in Iwafune Tenkei.

"See you."

Bidding farewell, Iwafune left the tomb.

The future was still shrouded in a thick fog.

## **CHAPTER 8: WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS**

That day, that time... the night before. Niki Fushimi was drunk in the entertainment district.

Shimohameda Kabata is a city located on the southern edge of Tokyo, bordering Kanagawa Prefecture. If you go down one station, you will cross the Tama River and enter Kanagawa Prefecture.

"Excuse me for a moment."

The woman got up from the couch with a lazy attitude. With lipstick on her lips, she put a small cigarette in her mouth and lit it with the match that was on the table.

The man whose wife had been crying just now was standing in the bathroom. The man was Niki's partner, but all he knew was his name, "Sarashina". They approached him at the first bar and the conversation became animated. Niki, who was already drunk at the first bar, entered this shop when Sarashina gave him a ride.

If he was invited, he used to follow them without refusing. He wasn't trying to pry into the kind of place he was going, or whether the person he was talking to was trustworthy. A few years ago, he met Kisa at a party where someone asked him to come along.

After being born as a baby, humans seem to adapt to society by expanding the world towards themselves, parents and families, nurseries and schools in the process of forming their identities. In the process of growing up, Niki did not experience the "expansion of objects of interest". He did not arouse interest, emotion and therefore motivation in anything, including himself.

He could clearly recognize what he perceived with his five senses. To Niki, though, all of that was dry and unimportant.

Except for one thing that piqued his interest.

"Hey, client, is it true that you have a five-year-old boy? The client you brought in was talking about it earlier."

"Hmmm. That's right."

With a slurred response, Niki slid off the couch he was lying on to the floor. A high-end suit jacket and a fancy tie that Sarashina had taken off were hanging on the couch diagonally across from him.

Sitting on the floor he reached for the glass on the low table. Hesitantly, he shook the glass with his finger. The surrounding glasses were also caught and fell, and the marble table was wet with alcohol diluted with ice.

"Are you okay? I'll get you a new drink."

The guy immediately ran over and knelt by the table. He put the glasses on a tray.

"What will you do next?"

"I'll leave it to my brother."

"Then let's do something interesting."

He wore a dress shirt, a black tie, and a black vest with a boy's uniform, but he was a young man with hair dyed bright pink from the roots. In a nonchalant tone, he was holding a bottle of shochu and a bottle of beer in his left and right hands.

"How old were you when you had the child? You're still young, aren't you?"

"I was nineteen."

"That means you're in your twenty something years now."

"You're young."



The guy poured two types of alcohol into a glass with his skillful tricks.

"You're young too, aren't you?"

"I'm baby-faced. I've been in this industry for quite some time."

"Manato looks like this, but he's over thirty."

The woman who said that was in her mid-thirties, she was not young. Her long curly hair was luxuriously pinned up on top of her head.

The cabaret club on the outskirts of the city, where each table was separated by a U-shaped couch, was filled with vulgar talk. A stream of purple smoke rose from the yellowish illumination.

"I'm guessing he was given birth to by a random woman, you dumped her anyway. Client, that's what you seem to want to do."

"Ruriko-san is the one who was discarded in that situation. Yes, it's a way of drinking taught to me by a visitor from abroad."

The glass slid cleanly across the wet table and settled in Niki's hand.

"I have not abandoned her, I am well married and I love my wife. My wife, the president. Besides, my son is the most beautiful in the world."

He drank about half the glass in one go. The champagne of shochu and beer stirred in his brain and made him dizzy. He fell on the table with his head on the side.

"Ah... I hope to see you soon... my cute monkey..."

He dipped his cheeks into the puddle of alcohol on the table and muttered that with his tongue trailing.

"If you have such an important family, don't drink in a place like this and go home. I'm starting to want to go home and see my daughter."

"Ruriko-san is really preaching when it comes to children."

The woman's tone took on a serious preaching tone, while the boy's was flippant.

"It's still useless..."

"No, is there a reason you can't go home?"

"I might get bored if I see his face every day. Even the most interesting thing in the world might get bored me if I paid attention to it every day."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

He tried to tilt the glass with his cheek on the table, but his fingers were shaking. The liquid that didn't fit in his mouth wet his chin and dripped over the edge of the table.

"Client, are you taking medication? You are angry, right?"

"Drugs? He'll make you feel a million times better than that."

A month has passed since he saw Saruhiko's face. The inside of his body was dry. No matter how much alcohol he drank, he couldn't quench his thirst. His consciousness was hazy, his throat ached and his body was sending serious danger signals.

"I'll see the monkey after I have reached the limit of my withdrawal symptoms, so I'm going to climax... Seriously, I'm freaking out..."

+++++

He woke up with a thud.

He felt a strong source of light and heat beyond his eyelids. Something other than the cold marble table touched his cheeks, something rough and hard.

When he opened my eyes, he was outside. He was forcibly grabbed by his collarbone and lifted up by the summer sky piercing high. Immediately after that, he was struck in quick succession by the sensation of floating and falling, as if he was being knocked down to the ground.

"Hmm... where am I...?"

The voice stuck in his throat was hoarse. When he tried to get up, his whole body cracked in pain. In particular, simply putting too much effort into his stomach caused severe pain as if he was holding an iron ball to his stomach.

It was the seat of a wooden bench that he was resting his cheek on. When he rubbed his face at the red stains on the wood, he could feel the coagulated blood sticking to his temples and the corners of his mouth.

He didn't even know where he took off his shoes.

A glass bottle was suddenly delivered from the side.

"I'm thirsty."

A man sitting in a row of benches said that bluntly. With a long beard that covered the lower half of his face, he looked like a bum, but only the jacket he wore over his shoulders was disproportionately good.

Niki reached for the bottle without hesitation. He looked at the label on the square bottle of whiskey and put his mouth on it.

"What is it? It's water."

He took a sip and groaned.

"Because I put water in the bottle I picked up. Let's add a few drops of sake."

On the tips of the homeless man's emaciated ankles, there were familiar sharp-toed leather shoes.

Niki looked down at his feet, which were only wearing socks, but without saying anything in particular, he placed them under the bench and sat back down.

Beyond the clear sky, heading south, for a moment, he saw some kind of light. The sun was shining elsewhere. It wasn't even the moon. Like the flame emitted by the lighter of a hot air balloon.

Without further thought, he purred and drank water.

The high-pitched voices of the children resounded in the sky. Children gather around children's games, such as slides and swings, and their mothers take care of them. Only the area around the bank with Niki and the homeless was avoided.

At night, it was a small park surrounded by trees in the middle of the city, which became a busy entertainment district. Next to the entrance facing the street, there is a public toilet and a phone booth with a green phone.

Last night, in the shade of the trees, he could see the multi-tenant building where the store was located. He appears to have fallen asleep in the park a stone's throw from the store. Tenant signs protrude from every floor of the reinforced concrete exterior wall, but the neon tubes that gave off a garish pink and purple glow last night are now dead in broad daylight. He didn't know if it was last night because his sense of time was gone.

"Ah, you really were here, Client."

A figure stood next to the bench with a calm voice.

He was wearing a hoodie and a black mask, but his pink hair peeked out from under the hood. It was the boy from the night before, Manato.

"I got a call from Ruriko on my pager saying you were sleeping here. I've been wondering since I closed up shop this morning. He was a weird guy, and he hit you a lot. Are you okay?"

Having said that, he looked like he was last night drinking at the store.

"Ruriko-san."

As Manato said that, a mother who was standing by the gym turned around.

Her long, curly hair from the night before was tied up in a simple bun, and her makeup was light, but she was the woman in the store last night.

Ruriko smiled at Manato, who waved his hand and waved back, then quickly turned her eyes back to the jungle gym. A girl who could be her daughter was climbing a jungle gym.

"Yeah, this. It's mostly empty, but just in case. I hope you're happy to come back with just a brand name wallet."

Manato opened the leather wallet and gave it to him.

As he looked at the wallet on his lap, the memory of last night vaguely revived due to its slow effect.

Sarashina didn't come back to the table like that. Looking at his accounting, he was billed 300,000. There were no credit cards or cash in his wallet. Sarashina disappeared after taking out the contents of Niki's wallet, leaving behind his jacket and his tie.

He recalled how a physically strong man dressed in black appeared from the back of the store, was beaten and kicked, and was thrown out of the store.

The homeless man was looking at Niki's wallet. All that was left was a phone card anyway. Niki tossed his wallet on the bench next to him.

"It's a gift for the water."

The wallet itself was worth a reasonable price. The homeless man quickly stuffed his wallet into his jacket pocket and brought their foreheads together like a hug. When he looked back at him, he wondered if it was also something that he threw away along with Niki, it was the jacket that Sarashina had left behind.

He also lost his mobile phone, but it never came back.

"Client, the shoes and accessories look expensive and you seemed to be doing drugs, so they must have been duped. Be careful who you go out with and what stores you go into."

"Don't do drugs."

"Are you kidding me? Did you just do that? You suddenly broke a beer bottle and hit a black suit. If you hadn't acted violently, you wouldn't have been hit so hard."

"Is that so?" His memory of that part had slipped. "Could have been fine."

Niki's childhood was manic. He was restless all the time, making loud noises and destroying everything he could find.

When he entered high school, he became very depressed.

He skipped high school and studied abroad. While studying abroad, he fell back into an extremely manic state, indulged in debauchery at the invitation of his fellow players, and stopped attending university lectures altogether. With no hope of graduating, he was expelled and taken back to Japan.

"Ah, did you want to die? Then, I understand."

"I don't feel like dying at all. I have a wife and a son who love me."

"I don't quite get it. I thought you were the kind of person who wanted to destroy everything, but you say you love your family."

He squinted at the dazzling light that filled the open air and took in the idyllic landscape of the park. A girl slowly climbing up a jungle gym was crouched in a place that was not very high. Ruriko encouraged her daughter who was crying and looking back.

Another boy smoothly overtook the girl and made it to the top with no problem.

"Mom! Look!"

The boy let go of his hands and proudly greeted his mother.

But, the jungle gym suddenly shook vertically.

The boy's body was thrown into the void without resistance. He heard the cry of his mother.

"Eh?"

Immediately after Manato was shocked, the tremor reached Niki and Manato's feet. It was a huge vertical swing, as if a giant grabbed the edge of the ground and rolled it up. The bum fell off the bench next door. Niki's butt also bounced off the bench seat.

"An earthquake?!"

Manato crouched down and gripped the edge of the bench.

The launch itself lasted less than five seconds. In that short period of time, the earth trembled and the iron jungle gym, slides, and swings were distorted into a shadowless figure. All the children were thrown from the playground equipment, and all the mothers around the playground equipment could not stand up and fell.

The children began to cry as if they were on fire.

"Gish..." The warped jungle gym made an eerie noise and tilted further.

"Ruriko! This way!"

Manato raised his voice. Ruriko's daughter clung to the bottom and luckily avoided being kicked out. Ruriko, who had been on her buttocks, stood up as if repelled, grabbed her daughter from both sides of her, and pulled her out of the jungle gym.

Behind Ruriko, who started running with her daughter on her chest, the jungle gym tilted at a fast pace. Immediately after Ruriko caught up with Niki and Manato and covered her daughter, it completely collapsed as rolled a large amount of sand in the park.

Ruriko raised her pale face and looked towards the park that had changed the peaceful landscape of the day.

"The earthquake just now...? I've never seen an earthquake like this before..."

The launch didn't come after the first, but the remnants of the tremor still crackled in the air.

The road outside began to roar with the sirens of ambulances and fire trucks. Trees surrounding the park had also snapped or fallen from their trunks. Buildings emitting black smoke and buildings with collapsed exterior walls could be seen beyond the crooked trees.

There were also cracks in the walls of the multi-tenant building where Manato's store was located. The cabaret club sign on the 7th floor came off the wall, collided with the consumer finance sign on the 6th floor and they both fell. The brand name product recycling store sign on the 5th floor was covered in snow. There was a sign for a ticket shop on the fourth floor.

"Mom, what is that?"

The daughter supported by Ruriko's chest pointed to the sky over her mother's shoulder.

Manato's eyes traced in that direction and reflected a red light.

"Wow. What is it?"

Manato moved his hand to his chin and murmured.

Niki slowly looked up as half of his buttocks had slid off the bench.

A gigantic object suddenly appeared in the void. In the southern sky, it was the direction where he could see the light that he mistook for a balloon burner. A pillar-shaped object engulfed in swirling flames connected the ground and the sky.

The clear blue summer sky reflected the color of the pillar and was eroded by the color of blood.

"What's that...?"

"Was it really an earthquake? It's like the end of the world."

In contrast to Ruriko's trembling voice, Manato's voice was stunned, but there was something lurking in his voice that seemed to anticipate something.

It seemed that the mobile phone was getting difficult to connect. People flocked to phone booths and the lines were growing fast.

"Yeah... it's the end of the world... oh..."

The homeless man sitting in front of a bench knelt while he looked at the southern sky.

"Oh, it is the wrath of God. God has judged. I hope the stupid humans perish!"

He picked up a bottle of whiskey, which was just water, and danced out into the middle of the park. With Sarashina's jacket and Niki's leather shoes. Spinning around like a girl in a fairy tale who can't take off her shoes.

The children cried when they saw the pillar of fire. The mothers were shouting the names of their children.

People were cursing because their phones couldn't connect. Many people were running to the phone booth in a hurry.

A man whose heart was beating at the beginning of something extraordinary. A scared woman. A madman who toasts and dances.

Niki stared at the various reactions of the people in the park with emotionless eyes.

There was also an ugly human pattern unfolding in front of him. A strange sight that rose beyond the sky. The tragedy that was occurring just below that sky.

Nothing aroused Niki's emotion.

There was nothing there to move Niki's emotions.

The ringtone began to play in the pocket of Manato's hoodie.

"Oh, manager... Yes. Yes. I'm safe here. Ruriko-san is close now. Yes. See you."

Manato calmly ended the exchange and hung up the phone as he ignored the damn queue at the phone booth.

"It seems like the PHS tone is more connected. I was lucky I haven't switched to a mobile phone yet."

"Lend it to me."

Niki grabbed Manato's wrist, who was holding a small stick-shaped mobile device. Manato was slightly surprised by the sudden movement.

"Go ahead. Do you want to contact your family?"

He handed it to him.

He entered a phone number by pressing the number pad on a mobile device that fits in one hand with the thumb. Tsu, tsu, tsu, after an inorganic sound wandered looking for the destination for a while, the calling sound began to sound safely.

"Yes. It's Fushimi."

When the call was cut off, a professional female voice answered.

"Kisa-san. Where is the monkey today?"

There was a moment of surprise when Niki suddenly spoke, and then a high-pitched voice returned.

"I don't know. It's Sunday, so he's not home. I'm going to board now, so I'll hang up. Wait a minute. What was that? Aren't you coming back?"

Kisa's voice grew distant, and he could hear the rapid conversation back and forth. Kisa's voice came back on the line with a sense of bewilderment and tension.

"Something happened in eastern Japan. Thanks to you, I'm stuck here."

"Kisa-san, aren't you in Tokyo?"

"I'm going to Los Angeles from Kansai airport via Seoul, but today's work has been cancelled. Where are you now?"

"By the way, what about the monkey? Is he really home?"

"I'll check with Nishida-san. Should I call this phone back? I've been waiting. I'll call you back in five minutes."

The call was cut off. The line at the phone booth continued to grow, but the Manato PHS rang within a quarter of an hour. During that time, Kisa collected as much information as she could about the disasters that had occurred in eastern Japan.

A large explosion occurred somewhere in Kanagawa, and an earthquake was observed over a wide area of eastern Japan. It was reported that the entire Kanagawa area could be devastated.

According to the housekeeper, the earthquake was felt around Tsubakimon's house, but it wasn't severe enough. She saw Saruhiko in the house fifteen minutes before the earthquake occurred, but she noticed that he had run away from the house about five minutes before the earthquake occurred. He must have gone for a walk in silence as usual, and the housekeeper did not rush to find him, thinking that he was a smart boy and that he would come home alone.

"A five-year-old boy doesn't go far in fifteen minutes. At least he wouldn't have been in a place where the damage was so bad. However, Nishida-san is worried about his house, so he will go out today from work."

"I'm going home, I..."

"Are you worried about that child? I made arrangements with the dispatch company to send a representative immediately, and the area around Camellia Gate is safe. The transportation network is now paralyzed. I can't go home soon. It would be foolish that



you suffer a secondary disaster. In the event of a disaster, the smartest thing to do is not to run blindly home."

"No way!"

Niki suddenly screamed.

The voice organizing the correct arguments on the phone suddenly stopped.

"I'm going home. I have to see the monkey's face."

Kisa hung up before he could get his voice back.

"Are you going home? In a way, you're a father."

Manato, who received the PHS, shrugged between admiration and boredom.

"It's obvious. Anyone who becomes a father is like that." Ruriko looked at Manato and said to Niki, "Come back whenever you feel like it."

"Well, I don't know if I can continue with the business."

Manato put his hand to his forehead and looked out of the park.

The building in question was in a partially destroyed state. Signs on every floor had collapsed and most of the exterior walls had collapsed, exposing the steel frame.

"It's my rule of thumb, but I've never met a person as a customer "again". Even if you hear the news, he's already dead. Goodbye, take care of yourself and go home. If possible, may you be in good health for forever."

+++++

When he started walking in the direction of Camellia Gate, the railway was at a standstill and he couldn't even hail a taxi. The city was full of people acting the exact opposite of what Kisa called "intelligent behavior".

Eventually, the railways in Tokyo seemed to be restored, but he kept walking and in the end it took six hours to get to his house.

He was dizzy because he had only drunk the water the bum gave him six hours ago. He fell against the heavy door and managed to make a hole and roll inside.

He lifted his head as he knelt down. The dim light from the chandelier that did not reach the ground dimly illuminated the entrance hall of the atrium.

As he traced the stairs in front of him with his gaze, he saw a small figure sitting on the edge of the bottom step in a compact residence.

Nikki got up slowly.

The figure was the first to notice that Niki had returned home. The usual reaction used to be to run away, but this time he didn't run away and he was looking at him with round eyes behind the tortoiseshell glasses because of the smallness of his face.

"Are you lonely, monkey? What are you waiting for? Why are you lonely?"

"...Frankenstein."

Saruhiko opened his mouth vaguely.

"Hmm? What did you say?"

"Could it be that you're dead...? Did you die from an explosion...?"

"Eh?"

Saruhiko's eyes turned to Niki's feet.

Those were the feet that had been walking on the asphalt for six hours without shoes. His socks were torn and his toes were badly scraped and bleeding. The hem of his leather pants was also frayed. He still had blood on his temples because he hadn't washed his face since he was beaten in the store last night, and his clothes were a little dirty.

Frankenstein, he agreed with that. He didn't know where Saruhiko got that knowledge at that age.

"Oh, yeah. There was a big explosion today, right? It shook everything. Were you scared?"

Saruhiko shook his head once.

"No way."

"Did you see the huge pillar of fire? Didn't you get scared?"

"I could see it. It didn't scare me at all."

"I see. I was very close to the explosion. So, as the great monkey detective deduced, I died."

Niki spread her hands over his head and showed himself.

"Really...? Did you really die?"

"Oh, so I'll be going to the afterlife soon. Well, in sixty seconds."

Saruhiko's eyes widened. The light from the finely crafted chandelier shone brightly in his eyes. The color of spongy blood inhabited his pale cheeks.

It was clear that the light of hope had shone in Saruhiko's world.

"I came to see the monkey before I went to the other world. So please show me your face up close one last time."

Nikki turned around. Saruhiko hesitated a bit and covered his lips.

"Ok. No, I'm about to disappear. Look, my hand is transparent. You can see it, right?"

Saruhiko showed interest and lifted his hips off the stairs.

"I'm about to disappear! Hey, let's hurry up!"

He fixed his gaze on Niki's outstretched hand, pulled on his socks, grabbed the railing, and lowered himself closer to him. He stopped at the same height as Niki, who was waiting below, and grabbed Niki's thumb and little finger with both hands.

Immediately, his face changed.

Gyu-gyu, he squeezed him a few times to make sure he was real. "Understanding" spread across Saruhiko's face. His face, which had been glowing with hope for a moment, suddenly stiffened and repainted with despair.

"You're not dead!"

Saruhiko let out a hoarse cry and released Niki's chest. The recoil made his socks slip and he landed on the steps behind him. Niki didn't resist and fell backwards into the hall.

"Gyaahahahahahaha! No way! I'm sorry! I was kidding!"

Loud laughter echoed from the vaulted ceiling.

He came home feeling a bit regretful for not having "prepared" anything for that day, but he suddenly thought about it. Anything to scare, annoy or despair the cutest monkey in the world.

However, today seems to have been the best day to return. It was worth waiting until today to "give up the monkey" until he fell into the final stage of withdrawal symptoms.

At the edge of his field of vision, Saruhiko scrambled up the stairs on his back and escaped to the second floor. He couldn't help but laugh at how unnecessarily funny he was.

"Die, die! I'll die laughing! Ahahahahahahaha!"

On July 11, 1999, Niki Fushimi experienced an unprecedented disaster that affected the entire Kanagawa prefecture, outside the disaster area. But that in itself did not arouse any emotion in Niki, nor did it have any effect on him.

The man lived without mixing with the ups and downs of destiny that secretly moved the Dresden Slate.