



1K
One
Year
Later

K - ONE YEAR LATER

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN
RAWS: RIDIA

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CHAPTER 1: BUSY AND QUIET

A year has passed since then.

Kuro Yatogami got up before dawn. It's a long-standing habit and he doesn't need an alarm clock, his consciousness wakes up very naturally.

And when he got out of the futon, he washed his face without turning on the lights in the common space so as not to wake up his roommates, Shiro and Neko, he put on training clothes and left the room with his favorite wooden sword in one hand.

Looking back at the student dormitory where the three of them lived, it was dark and sunk in the morning mist.

If that were during the testing period, the lights in the rooms of the students who would be desperately studying all night might be on.

At that time, Kuro was in his heart,

(Do your best.)

He heaved a quiet sigh and headed off to morning practice.

Since he started living in Gakuenjima, it was a perfect place for sword training.

There were small forests, quiet sanctuaries, and rocky areas along the sea. It was perfect for training, meditating and running fast.

That morning, Kuro chose a small vacant lot a bit away from the dorm.

He shook the wooden sword he brought there, stood still and swung the sword again. In that way, he checked and corrected the subtle feelings in himself over and over again.

What is the optimal foot position?

What is the best grip?

He continued to search for the best physical treatment without getting tired.

Kuro gently closed his eyes as his body sweated a little and the dawn light shone on the wasteland.

(Yes.)

During training, the sharp sensation mixed with the darkness of the trees and he perceived the sign that someone was approaching there.

From then on it was the paid part.

(Two people... No, three people.)

He could see they were killing the footsteps. Holding their breath and gently reducing the distance.

Then...

(No murder instinct.)

The next moment,

"Oh!"

"He received it!"

"Sensei, be prepared!"

Three signals came at the same time as they shouted.

Kuro constantly moved.

As he swept his body left and right with a water-like motion that he could barely feel the force, he backed away from the gap, dipped his hips, and drew the wooden sword from the bottom up.

He heard pops in quick succession, and three bamboo swords flew high into the dawn sky.

"Well, I'm numb."

"Great!"

"Kuro-chan Sensei, as expected!"

Kuro sighed as he opened his eyes and reconfirmed the attackers.

"You guys are...?"

They were the members of the kendo club. One with black hair, one blonde, only one had a shaved head. They got up from where they fell and were picking up their bamboo swords which flew away while waving their numb hands.

"What are you doing?"

When Kuro asked with a scared face,

"We were on our way to volunteer training."

"So, we saw Kuro-chan Sensei training."

"I wanted a move."

They responded with a smile without being afraid.

The advisor of the Kendo club fell ill, and Kuro, recommended by the advisor, was supervising the activities of the club.

Furthermore, these three boys who were really bad boys were also dorm students at Gakuenjima, so they inevitably ran into each other almost every day.

Therefore, he was treated with an attitude that he did not know if they respected him or not.

One of them raised his hand.

"Hey, Kuro-chan Sensei. It's a good idea, so train me from now on."

Another person tugged on Kuro's sleeve.

"That's right. The tournament is close."

The last person clasped his hands together with a serious expression.

"We really want to win this time."

Kuro thought for a moment,

"So is."

There was no reason not to support the young enthusiasts.

"Ok. I'm going to go to the dojo."

The three people cheered.

Along the way, the students praised Kuro again.

"But Kuro-chan is amazing, right?"

"I am really a teacher."

The others clapped silently.

Kuro just smiled.

He knew better than anyone that he was still far from such a situation.

The previous move was also a bit stiff and a bit awkward.

Because they were at the student level, he was able to deal with it with a margin, but he didn't know what would have happened if they were skilled bullies to some extent.

(If was Ichigen-sama...)

Kuro suddenly thought.

(He would have immediately found out who they were when they got closer.)

No matter who the other party was, it was almost impossible for them to enter without Kuro noticing. It was possible to distinguish between the homicidal instinct of a killer and the childishness of those who were trying to make mischief.

However, he still hadn't reached the divine area where he could immediately see the identity of the other party just by signaling to approach like Miwa Ichigen did in his memory.

(I still need more.)

Kuro thought with a smile.

It was a quiet moment before dawn, but it soon changed to something dense and hectic as usual.

After finishing the instruction to the Kendo club members, he return to his room, take a quick shower, get ready and start preparing breakfast.

Steam came out of the rice cooker that had been set on a timer beforehand, and Neko started to wake up as the miso soup properly extracted from the soup stock started to smell really good.

"Kurosuke, good morning~"

Neko grew up and wore sleepwear.

"Oh, good morning."

"Wagahai, I'm going to take a shower~"

Neko went straight to the bathroom. She was still sleepy, but she showed her intention to get up and go to school.

"Compared to that."

Kuro sighed and headed to Shiro's room when the cooking process was complete.

"I'll go in."

Gently knocking, the silver-haired youth was still in a daze holding a pillow. Buried in a large number of books, it was a room that seemed to be that of a scholar.

"....."

Kuro put his hand on his waist and narrowed his eyes. When he was wondering how to wake him up, Shiro suddenly started to wake up. He yawned softly, looking at him,

"Hello, Kuro. I dreamed that you woke me up in a dream. Then I woke up twice in my dream. Is it really real now? Good morning."

Kuro had no choice but to smile at the soft words.

"No. You are the same as always, Shiro."

Even if they are sent to school, Kuro will continue to work shortly after taking a breather. Washing, light cleaning, washing. Kuro learned from Miwa Ichigen that the essence of training lies in the casual life of everyday life.

And there is no word "cut" in the Kuro dictionary.

Looking at the clock and judging that it was time, Kuro also went to school. Currently, Kuro was the deputy director of the school coffee shop attached to Ashinaka High School.

Twenty-five years of service. Stubborn. Excellent flavor. Jiro Tanaka, also known as "Tetsujin of Gakuenjima", who was fluent in everything from French to Japanese to Chinese, recognized his culinary skills.

At the time, Kuro was waving his arms in the kitchen as he made various recipes developed by director Tanaka Shokudo. He was working to inherit the "Tanaka Don", which is made by mixing fish caught in the sea near Gakuenjima with sesame sauce, and the "Mixed Food", which is very popular among the students in the sports club, and is a mixture of pork, garlic and fried food.

The public agreed that Tanaka, who will reach retirement age in about three years, was looking at Kuro as his successor and training him.

The student coffee shop is fast, cheap, delicious, and plentiful, which is quite different from the orthodox Japanese food that Kuro likes to cook, but he is diligent and enthusiastic. By the way, he was definitely building his position as a coffee shop cooking student.

Coffee shop work is not just about cooking in the kitchen. Before that, there are inspections of ingredients brought by the buyer, controls of the preparations made the day before, meetings with each staff about the menu of the day, preparation of kitchen utensils, etc.

And after that, we finally have a busy lunch like a battlefield.

The hurried student's stomach was filled with a kitchen knife, a wok, seasonings, and fragrant smoke.

Even after the lunch break was over and the satisfied students had disappeared, Kuro's work was still stacked. He washes the dishes, polish the pan, and get everything ready for the next morning again.

When the time limit came, he greeted the chef and colleagues, left the workplace and went to the Kendo room.

There, as a kendo trainer, he supervised a total of 40 members, including men and women, and also practiced himself if necessary.

After Kuro became acting director, he injected more energy into himself and it was hoped that he would be able to aim for a higher prize in team competitions and individual competitions in the next tournament.

After a tense lesson with the students, Kuro finished showering and changing his clothes, and this time he left the school island in a hurry.

Meeting with a supplier who will deliver new ingredients, preliminary inspection of the wholesale district to buy tableware, etc. in bulk, shopping as a housewife, etc.

For Kuro, who has always been actively refining himself since he was a child, such a tense daily life felt familiar.

And at dusk when he was about to finish such a busy but dense day, Kuro suddenly stopped in front of a small park and went inside. Rusty swings and slides. It was an ordinary park with only a few benches.

As he held a shopping bag containing daily necessities, he sat down on a bench placed under a zelkova tree.

He wasn't tired or trying to catch a break. Recently, he had been intentionally trying to loosen the tension on him.

In his busy daily life, he dared to find time to relax like that.

At the time of the decisive battle with the green clan a year ago, Kuro managed to win the battle against his brother, Yukari Mishakuji, with a sword. However, Kuro did not believe that his ability was superior.

That was only a good estimate of ten and he only managed to pick up a couple of wins.

It was more difficult.

Kuro, who was so distraught, had the idea to plunge into a calmer moment.

Miwa Ichigen's image was in his head.

(He was always a natural person. He was at the weak end of playing without strength.)

Inevitably drawing closer to the teacher, Kuro tried to practice quiet "inaction" as a likely way to improve himself.

Of course, at first he had a lot of time and felt awkward and guilty as if he was jumping, but recently that had gradually subsided. And...

(Ah.)

The wind blew.

(Somehow today, I get it.)

Kuro closed his eyes.

He could see that space was expanding.

He could see that the tops of the trees were shaking. He could see the clouds flowing.

Sound of insect feathers.

The smell of wild flowers.

The applause of children in the distance.

His body became transparent and on the contrary, he could feel the surroundings clearly and vividly.

The sensation did not sharpen sharply, but the consciousness engulfed the surroundings forever.

There was no boundary between him and his surroundings.

At that moment, the sound of approaching footsteps reached his ears.

There would be no harm.

He understood it very naturally.

It was a woman.

The voice came out naturally.

"Seri Awashima?"

When he opened his eyes, Seri Awashima from "Scepter 4" stood there with a surprised face.

"Long time not see you."

When Kuro said that,

"Fufu."

Awashima laughed.

"I came here because I saw you unusually vaguely from a distance... but it's different. Did you raise your arm again?"

"I don't know. But that's how it is. I think I kind of understand why my master kept writing haiku."

Kuro simply shook his head at the smile on Awashima's mouth, who looked suspicious.

"Do not worry."

Kuro and Awashima have only met a few times since the incident a year ago. It's nothing familiar, but it's not as confrontational as it used to be.

There was an atmosphere of recognizing each other as a comrade.

Awashima said,

"Give my best regards to the "Silver King"."

Saying that, she tried to leave easily, but Kuro asked behind her.

"Reisi Munakata hasn't returned yet?"

Awashima looked back once.

"Unfortunately not."

He smiled bitterly.

Then she turned forward and headed out of the park. Now she was under unimaginable pressure and there was a lot of work to do.

Kuro saw her back and then said,

"Well, I'll be back too."

He stood up slowly. The time to loosen up was over. Shiro and Neko were waiting for him.

He once again launched into the comfortable race of day to day.

CHAPTER 2: THE ABSENCE OF THE KING

A year has passed since then.

Reisi Munakata disappeared from "Scepter 4" and almost two months have passed.

For the members, except for a few executives, it was a completely overwhelming event, like a mist in the blue sky.

One morning, in front of the members who were summoned, Munakata said in the same simple tone as always.

"I'll be out of here for a while. After that, Awashima-kun will take over as acting director. Fushimi-kun will be deputy general manager. I hope you continue to serve in their roles."

The content was so sudden that the place fell silent.

Awashima and Fushimi standing to Munakata's left and right had worried faces and sulky expressions. Finally, Akira Hidaka, a person with common sense, raised his hand and asked.

"Does that mean you're taking a vacation?"

At that question, Munakata just smiled.

"Yes. In a sense, that is correct."

The members looked at each other.

Although the director is strong as steel, he has consumed some paid vacations for reasons such as his niece's birthday party and the university synchronization party.

What was the point of declaring a break now?

"So how long will you rest, Captain?"

This time, Daiki Fuse asked with a relatively calm demeanor. Munakata kept his mouth open.

"That's right. At least a month or more. Half a year or maybe a year."

Shock ran through all the members. There was a crack.

Munakata stood silently.

"Reason!"

It was Andy Domyoji who made a strong voice. He raises his hand to the front.

"What's the reason?! It doesn't matter how long it is!"

Everyone thought it was a break of about 10 days, from a week to a long time. Currently, "Scepter 4" is in charge of their duties by appointing a few former Strain to increase their strength.

Although the Slate has disappeared, their responsibilities have not diminished at all. Under such circumstances, it could no longer be an ordinary situation for the head of the organization to be absent for such a long period of time.

Munakata replied in a low voice.

"Framework."

"Eh?"

Munakata responded to Domyoji.

"I'm thinking of removing the frame."

Domyoji opened his mouth and everyone else looked confused.

They just didn't understand the meaning.

What was the Captain saying?

Wrapped in such a sign, Awashima's embarrassed expression and Fushimi's grumpy face grew stronger and stronger.

At that point, Himori Akiyama and Yujiro Benzai looked at each other slightly. Like Awashima and Fushimi, the two of them had been talking to Munakata about this matter for quite some time.

Akiyama confirmed on behalf of the two.

"Captain."

"What's going on?"

"You can come back one day, right?"

"....."

There was a gap for a moment. Eventually...

"That's how it is."

Munakata closed his eyes and answered.

"I want to do that."

Everyone in attendance felt that there was no clear conviction in Munakata's words, and the place calmed down as if he had touched water.

That was what happened two months ago.

Then one day, Munakata disappeared. They didn't know where he went or what he was doing.

However, due to careful transfer of work and division of labor by business class, the "Scepter 4" role continued to operate without being significantly affected.

Fushimi, on the other hand...

"Is it a journey to find yourself?"

Although he was ironic with his boss, he took the initiative to make up for Munakata's absence.

However, the agitation at work was minimal, but the feeling of each member was not.

Some felt uncomfortable and others were angry.

Awashima was trying to answer questions from various members, such as:

"Why did the Captain disappear?" or, "What the hell is he doing now?"

Of course, Awashima was properly convinced and supported Munakata. She believed that he understood Munakata's intent and purpose.

However, she did not know how to convey it to others.

In short, Munakata's reason for leaving was no doubt "a journey to find himself", as Fushimi mentioned.

However, the fate and future of this country may depend on the "journey to find oneself". Fushimi knew this too, so he followed Munakata's decision, even though he complained.

Awashima, on the other hand...

"The director has a deep thought. We will continue to protect the cause as "Scepter 4" so that he can return at any time."

That's what she said to inspire everyone and fulfilled her duties as interim director.

Actually, there was a mountain of things to do. Though the Slate's influence has waned, Strain's crimes have not gone away.

Negotiations with the public authority and supervision of the members. She went places she hadn't been before. She realized the greatness of the man named Reisi Munakata once again. Still, there were talented men like Fushimi, Akiyama, and Benzai as Awashima's assistants.

It was not painful to do the hard work every day due to the skill of the staff.

Just one point.

It was a small event, but there was an event that made Awashima very upset.

Namely...

She gained weight.

+++++

There was no doubt that Awashima got on a scale every morning to manage her physical condition. There were fluctuations in the numbers that had not changed in the last three years.

The rate of increase was a few percent, but it was a terrible situation.

At first she thought it was temporary, but there was no sign of the increased numbers slowing down at all.

What was the reason?

Was it due to changes in functions or increased stress?

It was not unthinkable, but Awashima herself immediately denied that possibility. She said it herself, but it wasn't that smooth. There was nothing wrong with that amount of work.

Awashima thought about the athletic club, so she decided to tighten her body right away.

She went to the "Scepter 4" dojo, she took a bamboo sword and sweated with the members during training. Since she meant it, Zenjo was there as a teacher.

"That's a good lunge. You've put your weight back on your foot."

She was praised, but...

(What's wrong with this person? Rubbing? Or rather, did I get fat enough to understand Zenjo-san?)

In Awashima's mind, such an idea seemed paranoid. She did the best she could for about two weeks, but the results were not very good. She had gained a bit of weight.

At that stage, Awashima was beginning to feel a bit impatient.

She reviewed her life in various ways. She especially examines her eating habits.

Awashima has been a frequent drive-thru since she was a student. She adhered to her parents' teaching that diet is important for physical and mental health, and she tried to get a good balance of nutrients like protein, fat, vitamins, and carbohydrates.

One night, Awashima remembered her day. First, she got up at 6 o'clock. After light exercise, she ate brown rice, vegetable soup, pickled bran with bacon, and egg in the dining room attached to "Scepter 4's" bedroom.

After that, she went to work and bought Cobb salad and tomato juice at a convenience store around 1:00 p.m.

She returned to the bedroom at 7:00 p.m. and ate corn and brown rice stew. A small amount of meaty potatoes and Chinese-style noodles. She roughly calculated the calories in her head, but she didn't think there was a fat factor.

Awashima took a shower, put on a bathrobe, and returned to the living room with a towel around her head, then pondered various things.

She didn't feel like there was a catch somewhere.

"Hmm."

It was the only time in a day that she could feel relieved.

She got a good bean paste, so she enjoys freezing it a bit to make anko ice cream with a crunchy texture.

Awashima thought as she poked the huge bean paste ice cream into the bowl with a spoon.

Where is the calorie well?

Although she was restraining herself every day.

And at that moment, Awashima's brain finally reached the answer. Her face was tight.

"Maybe..."

She brings a spoon full of red bean paste in front of her and looks at it.

"Is this the cause?"

It was a cruel truth.

Anko has calories.

That's pretty good too.

Awashima completely forgot about the fact that even elementary school students can understand it.

For Awashima, red bean paste was air and water. It was a necessary item to be ingested as a matter of course, and she was unaware that it contained such impurities as calories.

When she was still little, she ate an anko rice cake made at her parents' Japanese sweet shop and opened her eyes to the delight. Since then, she had been flattening a large amount of red bean paste. The anko was always with her when something was difficult and when she was happy. The anko was a friend, a healing and a life.

Namely...

That had calories!

What an unreasonable act!

Awashima suffered for almost a day, and her feelings for a diet exceeded her desire for red bean paste, and she decided to give up red bean paste for a while.

The daughter of a long-established Japanese sweet shop, she boiled red bean paste and brought it to school with her lunch when she was a student. Currently, she continues to consume more than 100 kg of red bean paste each year. One day, her mother said with a sigh.

"In your body, surely bean paste flows instead of blood."

Awashima, an elite of that genuine bean paste, rejected the bean paste, so the reaction was intense.

Her head and shoulders weighed more than they were, she didn't feel well, and the whole world looked confused.

Fortunately, the situation still hadn't hampered her work, but she was afraid of making some serious mistakes.

Anko?

Was it because of her weight?

One night, when Awashima, who was suffering from withdrawal, finished her work, she headed to the HOMRA Bar. When she noticed, she rang the doorbell and entered the store, but she was probably subconsciously trying to quench her thirst for red bean paste with alcohol.

"Oh, Seri-chan. It's been a long time."

Kusanagi, who was cleaning a glass on the counter, recognized Awashima and smiled.

Recently, they hadn't seen each other much because she had been busy with work, but sometimes as a place to gather information, sometimes completely private, Awashima visited this bar regularly.

After the final battle with the Green clan, the Red clan and the Blue clan did not have any particular conflict on the front or the back.

There's also a part where the clan members were able to talk to each other due to the experience of establishing a joint front, and probably the important thing is that Reisi Munakata and Anna Kushina aren't in a relationship where they bump into each other in the first place.

Both sides now have a sense of polite distance that draws a line. Between them, Kusanagi and Awashima continued in contact in a slightly special standing position.

Kusanagi is serious and sometimes asks Awashima out on a date with a tone that she doesn't know if it's serious or joking. Awashima also handled it well, and in some cases offered serious consultation.

They were the number two of each clan, they were the owner and guest of the bar, and they still had a relationship that they couldn't express themselves.

So, Awashima knew immediately.

"Kusanagi-kun. Are you a bit tired?"

She asked as she sat down on the stool in front of the counter.

"Yes."

Kusanagi smiled bitterly.

"Do you have a perspective, Seri-chan?"

"What happened?"

Awashima asked carefully. Kusanagi hesitated for a moment. So he looked a bit shy.

"No, it's not a big deal. I'm trying to quit smoking."

Awashima was slightly surprised.

It was a strange situation.

It didn't seem possible that Kusanagi wanted to leave something like "his favorite thing".

"It's funny. A good-aged adult acting like this... You may think it's just a cigarette, but after you quit, you get a weird feeling."

"No."

Awashima responded with a voice that killed her emotions.

"Yes, I understand."

Actually, she wanted to tell Kusanagi everything. That she was having bean paste withdrawal for a reason. However, that mysterious relationship with Kusanagi prevented her from saying so. Awashima clenched her fist tightly.

Kusanagi felt strange for a moment seeing Awashima's situation, but immediately asked cheerfully.

"Then what are you going to want? Somehow, Seri-chan, I felt that you would come today, so I bought anko right now."

Awashima bit her lips hard.

What a cruel temptation!

She really wanted to scream.

"Anything! Anything with red bean paste!"

However, Awashima, a strong-willed adult woman, replied:

"I'm not feeling like that today, so can I have a regular martini?"

Was it just a little?

It was completely self-controlled, except the ending wobbled just a bit.

Kusanagi had round eyes.

"Yes."

What's the matter? Is it bad for your body?

He believed that she wanted to hear that. However, Kusanagi immediately swallowed the word.

"I understand."

He smiled kindly.

Maybe he guessed the reason why Awashima didn't order red bean paste momentarily.

And not at all, pretending not to know or notice, he silently began to make the cocktail.

Kusanagi's side was a bit hateful and a relief.

Before long, Awashima drank the translucent liquid in the cocktail glass placed in front of her in almost a breath.

After all, that day, there were no customers at the bar, and Awashima spent time with Kusanagi one on one. It was a gloomy and strange space where the master and the client had few words and alternately sighed.

It was the moment when Awashima paid the bill and tried to leave the store at the right time.

Anna Kushina, the "Red King", walked up to Awashima and looked into her face.

"Ah, "Red King"."

Awashima nodded, but Anna was looking at Awashima with a frown that she was worried about.

By the way, she was behaving strangely earlier. The footsteps gently descended from the second floor, but as soon as she saw Awashima, she turned around, turned right, and went back.

She was wondering if she avoided her because of the heavy atmosphere with Kusanagi.

"What's going on?"

Awashima got suspicious and asked:

"Seri."

Anna said in a slightly scared voice.

"Did you go to a strange place recently?"

"Eh?"

Anna said like a tongue twister.

"You'd better go to the shrine. As soon as possible."

She could leave it as it was. No, she was running away.

Awashima opened her mouth and stiffened her back.

Kusanagi, who couldn't hear the exchange between the two, was sighing again at the counter.

Awashima knows that Anna Kushina has a special power.

What did that mean?

If she were to take the words at face value, Awashima would now be in a state where purification is necessary, meaning "something is possessed".

Could it be true?

Anna shook her head with a frightening face, no, to be exact, she was looking at the back of her face.

Actually, she didn't even remember.

In the last two months she visited an abandoned house where about three people died and a forest famous as a psychic place, depending on the circumstances of her performance.

It is true that after she went there, they took her away in the middle of the night.

She felt a strange signal when she was taking a shower.

Above all, her weight began to increase.

Fear in various ways began to dominate Awashima's head. But where should she go, what would the purification look like?

It was when she was thinking about it in the "Scepter 4" break room with so much trouble.

"Oh, Lieutenant, can we come in?"

A member called out with a loud voice. Looking at them, Goto and Hidaka stood up.

"What happened?"

There was still time on her original shift. Was it also a query?

"What happened?"

The worrying thing was that Goto was holding something like a strange machine.

The basic shape was a cylinder, but many colorful wire-like lines were twisted on the metallic surface. Should she call it a cutting edge object?

Also, a meter-like thing was embedded in the center, and it rotated all the time.

"What's that?"

Awashima frowned and asked.

"Oh."

Hidaka made a voice that seemed to be in trouble. Goto answered categorically.

"It's a ghost detector."

"Eh?"

Awashima made a harsh voice. Hidaka inserted the explanation as if he was in a hurry.

"No, sorry. Actually, Gotti... I was in Goto's room with two people, but all of a sudden this started working without permission."

Goto explained at his own pace.

"This is a device that detects and tracks spirits. I bought it at an antique shop in Shizume."

"So, if you follow the direction this machine is pointing..."

Hidaka looked at them with a complicated line of sight. Awashima was convinced.

"I was there."

The two replied with the same voice, "Yes." Awashima thought. She knew well that Goto was collecting mystery show goods and hidden goods.

It was suspicious no matter how she looked at it, and it smelled like dust.

Nevertheless...

(Maybe it really has some power?)

She casually touched the protruding wire-like tip.

At that moment...

A shock that made static electricity hundreds of times stronger with a ridiculous noise that could not be described as bachin, tomo, or zuban pierced through Awashima's body.

"Lieutenant?!"

"Now I'm acting as director!"

Hidaka and Goto hurriedly approached Awashima. At the end of the reflection on the retina, Awashima's consciousness cut off.

Since the conclusion, Awashima had been crushed for about 10 seconds. Awashima got up after checking on Hidaka and Goto, who were worried and apologized.

From that moment on, she felt as refreshed and lightened as she had never felt before.

After that, she asked her GP to see her just in case, but there was no problem.

Awashima had a premonition.

After work, she came home and got on the scale. And the feeling of relief, joy and omnipotence when she reviewed the result was indescribable.

Her weight was completely restored.

Awashima dropped to the ground, hopped on her toes, and did a pirouette. She then went straight to the fridge, took out the red bean paste that had been sitting in for a long time and enjoyed it to the fullest.

It was so delicious that tears came to her eyes.

Honestly, she wasn't sure what happened. Awashima was obsessed with something, and she weighed more by that. And, as a result, she was exorcised by touching Goto's spirit detector.

She could imagine that, but the facts were not very important to Awashima.

The important thing is that her body had been restored to eat red bean paste again.

By the way, it seems that the ghost detector on Goto was destroyed by that impact.

Awashima generously offered compensation, and instead she made Goto afraid.

And one night when she was visiting the HOMRA bar, as soon as she sat down at the counter,

"Kusanagi-kun. A Martini with anko. Anko. Twice as usual!"

She declares that. Kusanagi was still trying to quit smoking, with a face that didn't have much courage.

"Haha, Seri-chan. I think you're fine today."

Hearing that, Awashima clearly laughed.

"Yes. I am very happy to eat what I love to my heart's content."

Kusanagi smiled a bitter smile and closed his eyes.

CHAPTER 3:

KUSANAGI'S SMOKING CESSATION AND THE "HOMURA" DAYS

A year has passed since then.

Kusanagi thought that there were several reasons why he decided to quit smoking.

Smokers always feel the narrowness of his shoulders. Articles and news about health risks. The price is very small, but it increases year after year. It is common for bars to have heavy smokers.

"A little while ago a boy was born."

And,

"Kamisan is noisy."

He felt a bit lonely when he saw them coming out of the smoking category one after another. These factors overlapped in various ways.

He was clearly aware that he would quit when he went to the commercial district for business on a cold winter morning. He obtained the necessary documents to operate the bar safely and was hungry, so he came to a corner where the restaurants were lined up to grab a bite to eat.

When he first saw the procession,

"Is it a delicious ramen shop?"

So he thought, he glanced at first with interest.

And he was shocked there.

It was a public space for smokers. Several men were huddled in a glass-enclosed space, smoking.

Despite the centrally installed smoke exhaust device, the interior looked slightly cloudy with purple smoke.

The people queuing outside patiently waited for their turn while shrinking their backs as if they were cold.

(I wonder if smoking is that bad!)

Kusanagi agrees with the recent trend of smoke separation. Smoking should be done with good manners so as not to disturb others.

Nevertheless.

(I don't think it's wrong that there is a place where you can smoke a little.)

It was the real intention as a cigarette only.

And when he was looking at the procession as something mysterious, Kusanagi himself also wanted to take a break.

Although he thought it was stupid, he lined up at the end of the line. He had a hard time getting into the smoking booth as the Kogarashi was blowing, and when he tried to take out the cigarette, he bit his fingertips and dropped it on the floor twice.

Then when he finally lit the fire with trembling hands and inhaled the smoke.

(Not good. Consider quitting for a moment.)

He suddenly thought that.

+++++

It was the first time in a long time that the main members met at the HOMRA bar.

Izumo Kusanagi, the master of the bar, Anna Kushina, the resident of that building, as well as Shohei Akagi, Saburota Bando, Yo Chitose, Masaomi Dewa, Eric Surt, Kosuke Fujishima, brought sake and snacks and gathered in groups of three and five.

The purpose was to hear the story of a trip from Eric, who had been away from Shizume for a while.

Eric has recently become addicted to wandering hitchhiking. Like Tatara Totsuka did for a while, he traveled around Japan with his camera in one hand, and when he found something that caught his eye, he would turn the camera lens and take a picture.

From time to time, he would take pictures that were as beautiful as a professional, but at the time it was still a hobby.

And Fujishima, who he often sends the photos to from his travel destination, is now a disciple of a senior builder in Shizume, and was on his way as a carpenter.

Originally, Fujishima, who liked crafts and was skilled, seemed to continue his training quietly.

And Chitose, who wanted Fujishima to "build his house one day", finally met a woman he could seriously face, and has an innocent relationship with her as a teenager.

On the other hand, Chitose's comrade Dewa is preparing to enter university saying, "I can seriously study something.". Chitose bought him a beer saying, "If you're smart, it's an easy win.".

By the way, Rikio Kamamoto and Misaki Yata had told Kusanagi that they would be a little late.

Kamamoto has taken over the liquor store in earnest, and Yata has been busy with skateboard shop work and started being an instructor.

There were no particular toasts, and each of them divided into small groups and drank alcohol. As he looked around at those friends,

"They've all changed a lot. I wonder if they've grown up?"

Akagi muttered with deep emotion. He himself has recently become addicted to tropical fish and is increasing the number of aquariums through various trials and errors, but there is no particular change in the environment.

Hearing that word,

"Is that so? Everyone still seems noisy as usual."

Kusanagi laughed. Then he narrowed his eyes.

"Well, there are some guys who have changed to strange winds."

Saying that, from a distance, he pointed at Bando, who was warming up to his heroic story, at the reluctant Fujishima.

He has been active in online gaming competitions lately and has been winning decent prizes. So to speak, he is in a semi-professional state of the game and is in an easy to understand way.

The name when entering the game is "Sanchan".

His sunglasses as a brand also became eye-catching.

"However, when it comes to big competitions, it seems like the pressure has crushed you and you haven't been able to produce much results, and the essence hasn't changed at all, San-chan."

Akagi responded with a bitter smile. Later,

"What about Kusanagi-san?"

Changing the subject, they pointed at Kusanagi.

"Huh, me? I'm not that different either."

The person himself was bowing his neck a lot, but Anna, who was quietly drinking orange juice next to him, opened her mouth.

"Izumo. He started to quit smoking."

It was like saying that a great change began.

It was noted that Kusanagi himself took a big step.

"Yes. No smoking! I haven't for about three days."

"Eh?"

Akagi looked away. And the "Homura" members, who had been chatting with each other until now, stopped talking at once and looked over there.

Kusanagi was confused by the reaction.

"What's going on?"

The next moment, everyone started laughing as if they were going to explode.

"No, that is impossible!"

"Kusanagi-san is quitting smoking? That's really weird and hard to believe, right?"

"It hasn't even been a week, right?"

Kusanagi was surprised at first, but little by little,

"Oh, you..."

He seemed to be angry.

Originally, quitting smoking did not start with such a heavy feeling. If he could continue, he would continue, and he began with a light stance.

But...

Kusanagi had no choice but to be hungry if he was covered in moss like this.

"Ok! If you believe that, you will quit smoking decisively!"

And he firmly promised everyone that if he broke the ban, he would serve the best liquor.

They all cheered.

It was strange and not too painful for a few days when he refused to smoke without any particular concern. In addition, the psychological margin of being able to return to smoking at any time alleviated the obsession with cigarettes.

However, from the day after everyone had a big problem, Kusanagi gradually died from smoking. The more he realized that he shouldn't smoke, the more he reached for the cigarette box and was surprised.

He tried chewing gum as a substitute or applying a commercially available nicotine patch, but it had almost no effect.

(It looks like the withdrawal symptoms will go away in about a month.)

Until then, it would be a long way to go.

Overall, Kusanagi's job was not a very good factor to quit smoking. Although times have changed, there are still many places where smoking is allowed, not only in HOMRA but also in bars that serve alcohol.

Ironically, the HOMRA Bar, since then, had been properly licensed, and had turned it into a commercial form that allowed cigarettes to be offered and sold in the store.

Kusanagi quit smoking as an individual, but he couldn't remove all the cigarettes from around him.

It was painful to see customers smoking deliciously.

Also, recently, the anko monster that he had stopped ordering anko, appeared frequently and drank anko cocktails that looked really delicious. He was jealous that she enjoyed luxury items to her heart's content.

This was how various tensions were accumulated. Kusanagi had a dream.

Suoh and Totsuka were at the HOMRA bar when they were young and relaxing.

As the soft sunlight shone down, Totsuka was still playing the guitar he had learned with clumsy hands, and Suoh was looking vaguely at the ceiling as he smoked a cigarette.

"Hey, King."

Totsuka put down the guitar and asked.

"Can I have a little cigarette?"

"Ah?"

Suoh looked at Totsuka.

"You tried it the other day, didn't you?"

"I want to try again."

Suoh laughed.

"Do it yourself."

Totsuka, who got permission, took out the cigarette and lit it on fire. He inhales the smoke. And the next moment...

"Geh gaaak! Not good."

"Hehe."

Suoh shrugged.

"Don't say that."

It was a soft teasing voice that was unusual for Suoh. Totsuka had teary eyes.

"Well, I also want to be a man who looks good with cigarettes like King and Kusanagi-san."

"Stop this."

The nostalgic and tearful exchange between those two people. Kusanagi woke up there.

By the time he realized it, tears were actually floating around the corners of his eyes. Kusanagi climbed onto the bed and laughed helplessly.

Although it was in a dream, was he happy to meet his friends for the first time in a long time, or was it regrettable that he wanted a cigarette even in his subconscious mind?

The next day, before the bar opened, Kusanagi was thinking about it with a brand of cigarette that he had smoked since he was a teenager.

Strangely, soft light was shining in the store as he saw it in his dream.

Totsuka and Suoh weren't there, but Anna was sitting by the window, slowly turning the pages of a hardcover literary book.

Anna suddenly said without warning.

"I liked the look of Mikoto smoking a cigarette."

Kusanagi looked at Anna.

"I also like to see Izumo smoking, but if you're worried about too many things, stop. I think Izumo does what he wants."

Anna said that and fell silent again. A soft smile floated slightly on his mouth.

By the way, Anna hadn't expressed any particular opinion about Kusanagi quitting smoking. She didn't describe it as a good or bad thing.

"....."

Kusanagi silently lowered his eyes to the cigarettes again.

That brand had memories. Originally, Mikoto Suoh did not have a smoking habit until he met Kusanagi. As they were about to hit it off, he saw Kusanagi casually take out a cigarette when the two of them were alone.

"Is it good, is it a cigarette?"

He heard that, so he told him.

"Would you like to smoke?"

He gave him one and lit it up when it was in Suoh's mouth, it was an act that he couldn't believe it was the first time he did it.

"Delicious."

So he looked up at the ceiling and muttered a word.

Kusanagi's face was broken. At the time, he was convinced that he was a fun guy.

In fact, after exchanging cigarettes at the time, Kusanagi and Suoh quickly deepened their relationship. He didn't think it was a bond created by cigarettes, but it was also true that there were cigarettes at the end of the memories of him with Suoh.

At that time, he put a lot of effort into the hand that was holding the box.

"Anna. Oh, colored glasses."

The door was flung open and Neko of the Silver clan staggered into the room.

Kusanagi and then Anna looked at her with round eyes.

It was covered in muddy mud.

"Well what did you do?"

Anna ran over and got a towel from the bathroom. She was ready to get dirty with mud and cleaned Neko's face.

Neko seemed to be apologetic seeing the mud splattered on Anna's clothes and the mud pooled under her feet.

"I'm sorry."

Unusually, she was very apologetic. Looking at her, she was quite fashionable.

She was dirty with mud.

"The store is not a good place for that."

Kusanagi said it once and for all.

"Isn't this a good place for this?"

"Yes."

Neko started talking about the situation with tears.

He heard that she had come to Shizume with her friends to go shopping. When she saw a grandmother who was the victim of a robbery and tracked down the criminal, it seems that the robber had the power of a Strain and he was hit back.

"A Strain that manipulates mud?"

Kusanagi frowned. Then his eyes shone behind his sunglasses like a swordsman.

"Don't be playing in our garden."

He clicked his tongue.

Neko often comes to see Anna over the last year or so. The clans they belong to are different, and although they have different personalities, they are oddly matched horses.

Her friend, a girl, was muddy, so Anna was angry, although the others had a hard time understanding it.

She told him quietly.

"I'll do the cleaning. I'll take Neko to the bathroom, so go get him."

It was a strict decree of the "King".

"I'll teach him discipline."

Kusanagi nodded loudly.

Kusanagi ran through the streets of Shizume.

He knew any secondary road in that city. When he crossed paths with an acquaintance at a key point, he obtained information from witnesses and gradually tracked down the criminal.

Kusanagi was thinking as he tracked down the Strain.

Although the power of the Slate was lost, the number of Strains that had explosively increased once did not decrease that much, and some of them committed crimes that way.

For now, he wanted to discuss the problem with Shiro, the "Silver King".

Kusanagi moved deftly and finally cornered the Strain in a corner of the alley.

He was a small middle-aged man.

"You can't escape anymore!"

When Kusanagi yelled, he turned around and glared at him. The man was even wearing waterproof clothing with a hood, rubber boots and rubber gloves.

(Why do not you come?)

Kusanagi was so skeptical for a moment.

"Take this!"

He was convinced as he avoided the fist-sized lump of mud that the other party suddenly expelled from his palm as he bent his upper body.

(I see. Because he handles mud, he doesn't want to wear such heavy equipment.)

The man floated a ball of mud on his left and right palms and fired them one after another.

Kusanagi gradually closed in on the opponent as he avoided the attack with plenty of space.

"I see, that's the idea."

At that moment, the man finally laughed and stepped on. At the same time, an unprecedented amount of mud spilled around the man.

".....!"

Kusanagi took off his glasses.

When he thought it was bad, he was swallowed by the mudflow in no time. Tons of mud covered the top of Kusanagi and filled the back alleys. It was also a disaster that the left and right sides were sandwiched between walls.

The seemingly modest power of manipulating mud becomes a deadly attack when it comes to the amount of scale of the disaster.

Kusanagi was suffocating in the torrent of mud.

(This is not good.)

He couldn't die for something like that.

He held a box of cigarettes and a lighter that he had unknowingly slipped into his pocket.

Mikoto Suoh.

(It does not seem.)

He felt that he was laughing.

At that moment, something exploded in Kusanagi.

The Strain that used the power of mud, was the first to evacuate to a telephone pole.

Looking towards the alley buried in the mud with a look full of superiority. He was nothing to a man to the point of a handsome boy dying.

After checking that there were no signs of pursuit, he tried to leave the scene.

He had to escape before "Scepter 4" came, which cracks down on different abilities.

And at that moment, the surface of the mud trembled once.

The man looked at him suspiciously.

The mud began to boil in front of him. The next moment...

"Gyaaaah!"

A column of flames erupted in front of the man, causing a huge explosion. Hot mud sprayed in all directions.

"Uh-huh!"

The man fell off the telephone pole as he clumsily yelled. It had been blown up, but there was still mud in the back alleys, the size of a muddy paddy field. The man's half body was buried in it.

"Wow, oh!"

The mud was also fiercely hot. The man rolled over and managed to lift his upper body.

There was a shadow slowly approaching there.

He was messy.

It was Izumo Kusanagi who stomped through the mud and came closer.

The usual fashion clothes were full of mud. The hair that was carefully combed was also covered in mud. A small amount of mud also adhered to the sunglasses.

However, Kusanagi had tremendous sex appeal and power. He smoked a cigarette and looked up at the sky.

Then, when Kusanagi saw him flinch, he stared at the trembling man and gently twirled the end of the cigarette he was smoking.

At that moment, several fireballs rushed out from there and exploded with a conspicuous sound in front of the man.

The man got scared.

"Ugugugu."

He blew bubbles, lay on his back, collapsed and passed out.

The case was too different.

Kusanagi lit the cigarette again.

"After all this is my style."

He laughed and lied about it.

In the end, Kusanagi was forced to buy high-quality sake for all the people in "Homura", but he was still in a good mood.

CHAPTER 4: NEKO. BEFORE THE TEST. CANNED

A year has passed since then.

Neko was determined.

She said that she would not go anywhere all day and would continue studying.

She has been a year since she transferred to Ashinaka High School. She managed to keep up with the class itself, but she still wasn't good at studying.

Also, recently, she went out for a picnic with Shiro and Kuro, she went shopping with her friends in Shizume (although she was terrified of the Strain manipulating mud there), and she played a lot.

Therefore, before the final exam, on the last Sunday, Neko rejected various temptations and invitations to play and decided to stay at home for a whole day.

The necessary preparations for that were made from the day before, and she was in a good mood and physical condition.

First, she got up early at 6 am.

Normally, on holidays, Neko would rumble in bed until 10 o'clock, but that day, in addition to the alarm clock she usually uses, she also set an alarm on the PDA, rubbed her sleepy eyes, and left the room.

Surprisingly, even though it was so early in the morning, Kuro had already done all the housework and was about to leave the house.

"What, Neko. You really got up."

Kuro said as if he was slightly surprised. She then got a friendly look.

"That's good, that's right. The sandwiches I made are in the fridge, so eat them later. And don't get too rooted."

He told her that and left. Kuro was busy with various things because he was approaching the tournament of the Kendo club, which he was taking care of as a temporary advisor.

Neko waved her hand at him, saying that he should go, and Kuro again thought that it was weird.

She then returned to the living room and began to eat the breakfast that Kuro had prepared for her.

She thought that she would wait for Shiro to wake up, but she wanted to get something in her stomach early.

Neko was the type that she couldn't think of anything when she was hungry.

After flattening the white rice, miso soup, pickles, and salmon fillets, she takes the dishes to the sink and gives them a light wash. She then boiled water, added green tea, placed textbooks and notebooks in the chabudai and a timer, which was an essential item for Neko to study.

"Ok, I will!"

She raised her arms and began.

The timer sounded.

It meant that quite a bit of time had passed. Neko stretched, craned her neck and twisted her wrist. Then she yawned, she drank tea and looked at the textbook exactly three minutes later.

Concentrate enough.

And take a three-minute break. At that time, be sure to drink a sip of tea.

This was Neko's study routine.

It wasn't something she had created herself, but it was the optimal on-off rhythm created by Shiro, who took the trouble to take her to a specialized research facility and thoroughly analyze the trend of Neko's brain waves and her DNA.

Neko transferred to high school a year ago, but until then she had barely received a school education.

As a bonus, Neko who had just entered school was not bad at all, but she was tired and lacked concentration.

Therefore, Shiro first gave her a comprehensive lecture on how to study, and then taught her the knowledge one by one following the fields and stages of elementary and middle school students.

Shiro's lesson policy is:

"Efficient iteration and clear choice."

Shiro, who is in the genius category, spent a considerable amount of time acting as Neko's exclusive tutor.

As a result, she had managed to reach the level of academic ability to study on her own for high school exams.

Of course, Shiro's guidance was good, but this result was obtained because Neko was desperately eating.

When rang the third bell and suddenly raised her face, Shiro was smiling.

"Shiro!"

Neko happily raised her voice.

He was already up, and he was changing out of his nightwear for a nice jacket.

He must have been gently killing the sound and preparing not to interfere with Neko's study.

"Good morning, Neko. It's a good concentration. If you do six sets correctly, you'll rest for thirty minutes."

"Yes, that's fine."

Neko gave a thumbs up. And three minutes later, she went back to lawfully studying.

Shiro continued to observe the situation from the other side of the chabudai.

Then, when Neko finished six sets of study time focused on math review, Shiro had breakfast at the end of the break.

At that time, Neko also took out Kuro's special rice cake from the refrigerator and ate it as a snack. She was happy to feel that the sugar had settled on her tired head.

Shiro had a friendly chat with Neko, and when he finished eating the rice, he washed the dishes in the sink and walked out as Kuro.

Neko did the same as when Kuro left.

"Iterasshai!" (See you later!)

She saw him leave. Now Shiro is not only a teacher at Ashinaka High School, but he also has various responsibilities and is busy every day.

Neko knew that he was in frequent contact with "Scepter 4" and the "Tokijikuin" hospital to do a great job.

She doesn't know the details, but she believes that it is very important for the future of this world.

And Shiro had postponed starting the big business until she got acquainted with the school, filling in the academic ability that Neko lacked.

Of course Shiro never said that, but Neko intuitively realized that.

That's one of the reasons why Neko makes an effort to study.

(Shiro, do your best at work. I'll do my best to study so you don't worry about it!)

This is how Neko wants to thank him.

Even after Shiro left, Neko continued to make her way to the desk, but the tension didn't last long after all.

Especially the environment where there was only one person in the house, shook her concentration.

If there is something she doesn't understand or is difficult to understand, the number of yawns will inevitably increase, her sitting posture will collapse, and she will eventually fall on the chabudai.

And she began to sleep as she was.

It was then that,

"Neko, what are you doing?"

The door opened and a girl entered the room.

"Hmmm, Nya?"

Neko woke up with sleepy eyes, she wiped the drool from her mouth with the back of her hand and looked at the other person's face.

Immediately, Neko's face suddenly lit up.

"Haru-chan!"

She is Harumi Nakayama, a classmate of Neko, who became a great friend of her.

She is quite tall and has a slender body. Her eyes are sharp and her hair is dyed a color close to gold, so at first glance it may seem awkward and scary, but in reality she was a naive and kind girl who loved reading and camping in solitary.

"Hmm."

Nakayama pushed the paper box in her hand towards Neko.

"Here. Cake. Let's eat it together later."

"Wow, thanks. I love Haru-chan."

When Neko came over and hugged her, Nakayama seemed to push her away, but her cheeks were a little red. After,

"There is no time, I will do it immediately."

She put the cake in the refrigerator as if it were her own room, made instant coffee, and spread out the study tools on the chabudai.

"Is it okay to start with Japanese history?"

She confirms that. Neko nodded with a smile.

Then the two of them silently dove into their textbooks. Like Neko, Nakayama doesn't like to study at all, so she agreed to hold a study session to help each other not skip study.

Every time Neko was about to fall asleep, Nakayama would stab her with her finger and wake her up, and every time Nakayama was about to lose focus, Neko would encourage her to do her best.

And so about two hours passed.

Once she had a break, Nakayama stopped in the kitchen and made fried rice and egg drop soup. She prepared food for two people and they took a break.

Meanwhile, Nakayama asked:

"No teachers today?"

"Yes, they both went out."

Nakayama nodded when Neko answered like this.

"These two seem to be busy as usual."

Nakayama is a close friend of Shiro and Kuro. She is not just a person from the school. For Nakayama, Shiro, Kuro and Neko are benefactors.

She is a student at Ashinaka High School and at the same time one of the Strains who awakened the power of a different ability in the incident caused by the Green clan and continued to have that power even after that.

Nakayama's unique ability is that her body expels toxic gases when emotions run high.

Nakayama was depressed enough to think about committing suicide since she once endangered the people around her with that power. Shiro, Kuro and Neko took care of it, taught her how to control her different abilities and learned how to deal with society.

And at that time, Neko told Nakayama everything without hiding her half-life.

As a result, Nakayama, who was desperate and confused for "having such extraordinary power", was able to gain great courage.

Neko, who has lived a much more terrible life than her, is making bright and positive efforts and trying to enjoy her school life.

She thought that she couldn't lose, so she accepted Strain's power and decided to live.

Since then, the two have become close friends.

After the break, they started studying again. After another break, they ate the cake Nakayama brought and went back to looking at the textbooks and notebooks, and was completely dark.

Nakayama, then,

"I will be back soon."

Saying that, she stood up. She was not a dorm student, but a commuting student with a house near Shizume. Neko walked out the front door.

Nakayama finished putting on her shoes, looked back slowly,

"Neko is..."

With flushed cheeks, she said half-shyly.

"I think you're really amazing."

That's what she said.

In just one year of the harsh environment of little education, she was keeping up with the studies of high school students.

Nakayama praised her efforts in a forceful tone. but Neko...

"Nya?"

She didn't understand and just tilted her neck. Nakayama smiled bitterly.

"Well, no. Anyway, we'll do our best to help each other pass."

After saying that, she went home.

Neko no longer studied after Nakayama returned home. Shiro pointed out that learning for more than a certain amount of time would be inefficient, so she completely put away her study tools and turned around on the couch.

She had finished her quota for the day, and she was tired. She would take a nap anyway.

As she was about to fall asleep, the rang doorbell with a ping pong tone. Neko hurriedly got up and headed for the front door. It was neither Shiro nor Kuro.

They should have used the key to enter normally.

Takkyubin?

(Note: It is a very common courier service in Japan that consists of sending packages from one place to another in the country.)

No.

(Haru-chan? Did you forget something?)

Neko opened the door without suspecting anything.

The one who was there was...

"Oh? Miyabi-chan? Good evening. Is Kuro-chan home?"

A tall and brilliant man.

It was Yukari Mishakuji, Kuroh Yatogami's brother. Neko yelled, "Nya!".

CHAPTER 5: BEAUTY DRIFTER

A year has passed since then.

"Miyabi-chan?"

"....."

"Eh, you?"

"Is Kuro-chan home?"

Yukari Mishakuji smiled gracefully and asked that.

Neko was completely silent.

First of all, she is not afraid of anyone, she has experienced much more problems than girls of the same generation as her, and she is confident. But she stiffened at the visitor as she was too surprised.

"Well, it looks like he's not here."

Yukari waved off Neko's answer, and he took off his shoes.

"Then, I'll wait a while."

Yukari walked past Neko with a tension not like that of a family member who comes often to play, and he headed to the living room.

Neko still stood still, but the scent of the sweet and seductive perfume that slid gently after Yukari walked past her came back to her.

"Hey! What are you doing? What do you mean?"

As she waved her hands, she asked him with a confused language.

Meanwhile, Yukari scratched his crossed legs in front of the chabudai, and put aside the cloth bag that he was carrying with his sword, "Ayamachi", that he had on his back.

He then she put his hands on his knees naturally, and...

"No matter."

He mumbled that and closed his eyes.

After that, there was no movement.

Neco was...

"Nya~~~!"

She pressed both fingers against the temporal region and thought desperately.

What does it mean?

What is his intention?

Did he come to harm the Silver Clan again?

Nevertheless...

Yukari with a slight smile on his mouth and meditating did not seem to be harmful.

(He used to say that he was Kurosuke's brother...)

Honestly, she didn't even know how to deal with it, or even what kind of emotions she should have for that beauty that suddenly appeared.

Yukari Mishakuji.

Former executive of the Green Clan and brother of Kuroh Yatogami.

During the turmoil caused by the Green Clan, he was the man who stood up and worked most spectacularly as a working unit of the "Green King" Nagare Hisui.

But now, it was different even for Neko, who used to be actively hostile towards him.

In the first place, even when she was seriously fighting with the Green Clan, wasn't hate or anger, but incompatible sadness and impatience for Nagare and others who were rushing to extreme actions.

When Neko was in the middle of the incident, Shiro muttered under breath,

"They are just like us. If I had made a mistake, I could have done something like Nagare."

She couldn't forget those words.

Like Nagare Hisui, she lost her family in the Kagutsu incident and has lived an unspeakable life. The insatiable desire for change that Nagare had accumulated was not clear.

However, it was not the case for Yukari Mishakuji, who appeared in that place, and he could be received without any shackles.

Honestly, Neko was in trouble.

She was afraid to go out, but it was uncomfortable to stay as she was.

Yukari was unfazed as usual.

Aside from the inner sympathy for Nagare and his group, there was also a slight soft spot for this man named Yukari Mishakuji.

A man with a striking face and style, who speaks words against his brother and is obsessed with "beauty", while he is a transcendental swordsman who overwhelms Kuro.

"Wagahai, it's amazing, I feel like you're an interesting person."

She believed that he was.

However, the other members of the Silver Clan, especially Kuro, were facing Yukari, and there was no tsukkomi at the "interesting point" that Neko thought, so Neko had somehow not talked about it until now.

Neko thought for a moment, but soon sighed and...

"So, you're not really bad."

Saying that, she sat down in front of the chabudai and continued studying. She took a break, but it wasn't long.

She thought of Yukari as if some strange youkai had walked in and was sitting there.

When she turned the reference book over for a while,

"You're studying. It's great."

Yukari, who had opened his eyes before she noticed him, was winking at her as he looked at her.

"Would you like to tell me that you study?"

(This person is a strange person after all.), Neko thought.

At first, Neko had a failing attitude, but as Yukari began to play the role of tutor in the middle, she reluctantly decided to obey.

Nevertheless...

".....!"

After ten minutes, Neko's eyes widened. Yukari's teaching was really precise and wonderfully easy to understand.

The problems that she had been struggling with until now could be easily resolved.

The concept that was difficult to understand fell easily into her mind.

It was a completely different approach than Shiro.

Although, Shiro's teaching method wasn't bad at all. Systematizing a girl who lacked all basic academic skills like Neko, that theoretically learned learning method is worthy of special mention.

However, Shiro's teaching method, which emphasizes understanding and rationality, left some parts that couldn't fit a special girl like Neko.

And in that sense, Yukari's teaching method was perfect for Neko.

Lots of metaphors. A solution that conveys only the main points, regardless of any corrections.

Still, sentiment is important.

Neko felt admiration for Yukari, who teaches everything from modern history to math by chewing on the dots with beautiful rhetoric and vivid expression.

That person is not just a strange person.

He is a very smart and weird person!

"What?"

Neko choked because Yukari tilted his head.

"Um... Thanks for teaching me. It's very easy to understand."

"Hmm."

Yukari laughed mischievously.

"If it was a sword, it would be more spartan. I didn't like studying at school because it wasn't beautiful. I was always trying to learn more beautifully and gracefully."

Neko wondered if such a place would be 'beautiful'. Yukari had tender eyes.

When Neko opened her mouth to ask more questions,

"I'm home! No, sorry. The meeting dragged on."

As he said such a thing, Shiro, the owner of this room, came back.

He washed his hands in the bathroom, gargled, went to the kitchen, opened the refrigerator, and poured barley tea into the cup.

"By the way? Did you study?"

When he gets to the living room,

".....!"

He finally noticed Yukari's presence.

Yukari giggled and when he stood up, he made an elegant bow.

"I haven't heard from you, "Silver King". Please forgive me for the inconvenience."

The words included deep respect.

Shiro opened his eyes and froze. However, although he is usually fluffy, he is the founding "King".

He then he laughed lightly right away.

"It's been a long time. I was surprised. I never thought you would come to my house."

At first glance, he seemed to have a calm demeanor, but he had a sharp sense of tension in the back of his eyes. His gaze then moved over to Yukari's sword.

Neko was tired.

Yukari put his hand on his chest and bowed his head again.

"....."

He remained silent. It seemed like gratitude for being disrespectful, an abrupt reopening, or a refusal to speak.

Shiro was confused.

"You... You and Sukuna Gojo are now officially wanted by "Scepter 4". You can't ignore that, right?"

Yukari had a smile on his lips. Shiro closed his mouth.

"Should I capture you here now? If you still feel uncomfortable with us."

At that moment, Yukari screamed.

"Uh, "Silver King"."

Yukari pushed his knees up, reached into the sack he was wearing when he came there.

Shiro grew stronger and moved like a cat on his back.

However, Yukari was smiling.

"Do you know the brand of rice "Pearl of Heaven"?"

Shiro was confused.

"Huh? "Pearl of Heaven"? I know it."

Track accumulated knowledge.

"It's a brand rice completed by a farmer in Aomori, isn't it? It has been rated Special A for five consecutive years in the rice flavor ranking, but the rice fields where they can be grown are very limited and almost is never in the rice market."

"Yes. Personally, while I was bleaching the grass on the pillows for the past year, I was able to connect with an old man who was making "Pearl of Heaven" by chance."

Yukari took out a bag of rice that contained 5 kg. On the package, it was written as "Pearl of Heaven" in a bulky brush character.

"I thought it was rude to visit the residence of the "Silver King" without bringing anything, so I asked him to share it with me. I would appreciate it if you could accept it."

Head bowed, he offered her the bag of rice. Shiro had a difficult face for a while.

Then he suddenly changed his facial expression.

"Yes. You've come a long way. I think Kuro will be here soon, so take your time."

Speaking so lightly, he received the bag of rice in a hurry. Neko sighed lightly.

It was written on Shiro's face as follows.

"I wanted to try this once!"

Yukari laughed softly.

When Kuro appeared in the room, the three of them were in the middle of a peaceful chat.

Shiro offered Yukari a special rice cracker and tea, and Yukari recounted his memories of the trip while enjoying the tea served with elegant demeanor.

It was the composition of the guest and the master who fully welcomed him.

Neko also stopped studying and listened to Yukari's story. Kuro, who saw that situation, had a bitter face from the start.

By the way, Kuro felt Yukari's signal before entering the dormitory building as a matter of course, and he was ready for battle. However, when he realized that Yukari was not harmful at all and that there was no particular danger to Shiro and Neko, he relaxed his shoulders and came directly to that place.

30% shame. 30% of sudden annoyances with Yukari. 10% of Shiro and Neko's emotions that carelessly receive their former enemies. The last 30% is probably something close to interest.

Kuro appeared in the living room with no sound and said the opening first.

"Yukari Mishakuji... what did you come to do?"

Shiro and Neko were surprised and looked back at Kuro's sudden return home, but Yukari noticed that he was approaching at the same time as Kuro, so he didn't move at all.

"Oh, you came home, Kuro-chan."

He waved his hand in greeting.

"....."

Kuro was cold and looked down on his former brother. Shiro and Neko looked at each other and shrugged, leaning back and taking some distance from the chabudai.

It was for the motivation of not getting in the way of the two people who were related to each other.

"Well, don't stand in a place like that and sit down."

Yukari hit the ground with a funny saying.

"....."

Kuro remained serious and quiet, but as he was told, he sat down with Yukari.

Shiro and Neko placed tea and rice crackers in front of him and quickly returned to the wall. Kuro never took his eyes off Yukari.

"....."

Yukari tucked his elbows into the chabudai, placed his chin on the back of his hand, and narrowed her eyes beautifully as he lost his posture a bit.

He seemed like he was appraising Kuro, ridiculing him or looking at him with love after meeting his "little brother" for the first time in a long time.

Kuro's expression towards him didn't change at all.

Though he didn't resort to passion-driven hostility like before, he was too alert.

Now, even if Yukari suddenly changed and attacked, it would be possible to deal with him without interruption.

"You have grown."

Yukari sighed.

At that moment, Kuro finally opened his mouth.

"You too."

The voice was bitter, but there was also a slight admiration. It was clear why Kuro had exceeded his limits.

In the final battle at the Green Clan's hideout, he managed to win against that man due to various luck.

And Yukari had also sharpened his skills since then.

Not that he would lose if he fought now, but it would definitely be quite difficult to win.

"Did you ask me why I came here? There's no big reason for that. Kuro-chan, I wanted to see your face."

Kuro looked confused. Yukari continued.

"You beat me. I wanted to meet you again to find out if you became proud or corrupt."

He said that with a light laugh.

"I was wondering if I could cut you down."

Kuro stiffened. Yukari laughed.

"It seems there is no need."

Kuro was confused.

"Are you kidding?"

"Oh, I'm serious. I also wanted to see Miyabi-chan and the "Silver King", as well as Kuro-chan."

He looks at each one, Shiro and Neko. Each of them mysteriously pointed to themselves.

First, Yukari told Neko.

"What kind of life does the girl called Miyabi Ameno currently have, who has survived the same circumstances as my lord, Nagare Hisui?"

He laughed softly.

"Are you really happy? How are you?"

Neko remembered it again.

Yukari lost the "King" he believed in. She could not sympathize with Yukari Mishakuji's meaning, thought or principle of action, but she could only understand the pain of losing an important person.

Neko answered out loud as much as possible.

"I'm happy!"

Looking at Shiro and Kuro. Neko clearly said it again.

"Wagahai, I'm so happy now!"

"Yes."

Yukari had a soft voice.

"I'm sure Nagare-chan is happy too."

Silence enveloped the place for a while. Yukari was silent, and Neko was looking at him. Kuro cleared his throat slightly.

While Shiro hesitated a bit.

"Is there something you want to ask?"

Yukari turned his gaze to Shiro.

"Yes, but..."

After cutting the words once,

"...I feel like I have the answer. I've been walking around the metropolitan area for the past few days, seeing things with my own eyes and seeing your face."

Shiro tilted his neck.

"What do you mean?"

Yukari laughed more brightly.

"I think that question is not so beautiful anymore. I think the answer is unsightly."

Saying that he quickly stood up.

"Uh, "Silver King", continue what you were doing. Please stay healthy. I think you're busy, but thanks for everything."

He bowed deeply with a movement so beautiful as to sigh. At that moment, Shiro opened his mouth as if he realized something.

Yukari then...

"Sorry."

He turned his back on him and walked away.

"Yes."

Then, he told Kuro,

"Kuro-chan. Someday. Let's bet our lives and fight each other."

He just looked at his face and laughed. And when he walked down the hall without a sound, he walked out the doorway.

Kuro had a sullen face and Shiro a bitter smile. Neko asked Shiro.

"Hey, what did he say at the end?"

The exchange between Yukari and Shiro was not very clear and she was confused. Shiro scratched his head.

"Hmm."

He laughed as if he was in trouble.

"Well, he probably meant this: Did they really beat the man named Nagare Hisui?"

Neko and Kuro looked at each other. For Neko and Kuro, it was obvious. Because Nagare Hisui lost to them, he was swallowed by a large amount of earth and sand and died with the "Grey King".

However, to Shiro, that question seemed to have a different meaning.

He continued to laugh with a complicated expression.

Yukari walked out of the bedroom and looked up at the sky. The full moon, which was surprisingly beautiful in shape, brilliantly illuminated the area.

"Oh, it's a good month."

The poetry suddenly made a noise in Yukari. He smiled and decided to go out on the town for the time being.

Because it is an island of learning, he couldn't get what he was looking for.

And shortly after that...

Rikio Kamamoto, who was closing the liquor store at his parents' house,

"Sorry for the night. Are you still doing it?"

When he called out to him, he took his hand off the crate of beer he was lifting and looked back.

Then he was amazed.

".....!"

Standing there was Yukari Mishakuji, a former Green Clan executive. He will never forget the fierce battle at the Mihashira Tower. He stood up with the same striking face and style as at that moment.

"Eh?"

It seems that Kamamoto noticed it there too.

"It's strange. You're a member of "Homura", right? Is this your store?"

Kamamoto swallowed his saliva.

"What are you doing?"

"Greetings. I only came in because there was a nice store. I want some delicious sake."

Kamamoto was just as confused as Shiro had been at the time. However, he had also cultivated his courage in many shrines.

Judging that Yukari had no particular damage,

"What kind of flavor do you like?"

He decided to treat him like an ordinary customer.

"Yes.", Yukari laughed.

"Dry... Sake that looks good to see the moon."

Kamamoto used the best knowledge as a decanter and chose a bottle of sake for Yukari.

Yukari thanked him and casually walked out, carrying the sake in one hand.

"Throw a party for the moon. Love the beautiful moon."

CHAPTER 6: RIKIO KAMAMOTO'S QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

A year has passed since then.

"Hey, are we dating?"

Rikio Kamamoto's words instantly froze the previously peaceful atmosphere of the dining table.

The smile of his father, who was in a good mood after drinking alcohol, faded, and his mother, who was always kind, looked at Kamamoto with a confused face. And then his childhood friend, Nunohashi Ayumi, who was sitting next to Kamamoto and trying to serve him food wearing an apron, froze in the air of the room and couldn't move at all.

Kamamoto was the one who was surprised by her reaction. He even thought that he had said something weird.

The sight of Ayumi helping the Kamamoto family with dinner and sharing with them had become a daily sight. They were originally close to each other like family, but after last

year's decisive battle with "Jungle", they started to go back and forth with the Kamamoto family. Ayumi was on good terms with his parents, and they often ate together, so she didn't really care, but...

It all started when the topic of marriage came up a lot recently.

A friend's sister got married, this type of ceremony is popular these days, wedding rings are inexpensive and should last a long time, etc. Not only Ayumi, but also Kamamoto's parents were eager to bring up the subject.

Kamamoto was just listening to the story; he ate quietly without thinking about anything. Will Ayumi turn 17 or 18 this year? Marriage is still a long way off, and she'll probably be single before then, but he wondered if it's just the girls who get excited.

The weather turned weird when his mother touched Kamamoto on his shoulder,

"Stay strong too, okay? I won't forgive you if you make Ayumi cry."

He wondered why she said that.

Huh? He thought. Why would he be making Ayumi cry? She is a childhood friend who is almost like a little sister, and although he has protected her from being bullied by the bad guys in her neighborhood, he had never made her cry.

And his father, who was sitting at the dining room table drinking beer, was making fun of him.

"That's right, you! Don't fool me! If you do something like that, Nunohashi's old man will beat you up!"

"I'll kick you out of my house too! If you're so inhuman, you're not my son anymore!"

Then Ayumi, who was sitting next to Kamamoto, interceded with a smile.

"Okay, father-in-law and mother-in-law. Ri-chan doesn't do that. For a long time, he's always been by my side."

"Is that so? Well, it's fine if Ayumi says so."

"Please take care of this boy, Ayumi-chan. Even though he looks like this, he is a bit careless. Keep putting him in his place."

"That's... Ah, Ri-chan, you'll eat more. Do you want a large portion?"

His doubts kept piling up. These three seemed to know a truth that he did not. To confirm that, Kamamoto opened his mouth...

It seemed to be related to what he said at the beginning.

Beyond that, he didn't want to remember too much. The crockery flew with a roar, the father grabbed Kamamoto's head and rubbed it against the tatami, and he bowed. His mother's face turned bright red with anger, and Ayumi gently wiped away her tears with the edge of her apron, but she still wore a stubborn smile.

He dragged himself away from his furious parents, which was how Kamamoto finally rushed to the HOMRA bar.

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Kamamoto asked with a serious expression after he finished telling the story.

"So what's the bottom line? Are you and Ayumi dating?"

"I do not know!"

Bando slammed his fist on the counter and yelled.

"What are you doing, Kamamoto-san, are you selling a fight?! I buy it, no matter how old you are, there are good things and bad things about it!"

"No, it may not be like that... Did I say something wrong?"

Bando's mouth opened wide and he was speechless, and began to tremble. His eyes were so full of murderous intent that he could tell even through his sunglasses.

"It's frustrating...! Why does such an insensitive bastard have such a cute childhood friend and I don't have one? Why does God allow such an imbalance?!"

Seeing Bando cry, Kamamoto scratched his head in embarrassment. Chitose, who was sitting next to Bando, muttered in amazement.

"You shouldn't consult with Bando..."

"Is that so? I'm sorry, Bando."

"Don't apologize, it will make me miserable!"

"Kamamoto. Don't insist."

"Oh, sure..."

He didn't quite get it, but Kamamoto decided to leave Bando alone anyway. He asks Chitose who was lying down.

"Hey, what do you think, Chitose?"

Chitose shrugged, stirred the coffee lightly,

"No, I don't know either. I don't even know Ayumi-chan."

"I see... Well, that's right."

"Well, there were times when I didn't know if we were dating or not. I've said the same lines as Kamamoto. I got beat up most of the time."

After saying that, Chitose laughed. He is playboy enough to compete with Kusanagi in "Homura". In fact, he must choose who to consult with. Asking Bando about women is the same as asking Yata about math problems.

"But those kinds of things usually happen, well, they happen after you've done something. Kamamoto, you didn't mess with Ayumi-chan, did you?"

Kamamoto responded sullenly.

"Obviously not! She's not like that, she's like a little sister!"

"Don't be mad at me, I just wanted to confirm. So, well, if you're doing nothing, is your relationship nothing? I don't know what the other side thinks."

"How are you like this? Chitose..."

With a voice that echoed from the depths of hell, Bando rebooted. He looked at Chitose with eyes that looked like burning flames and brought his face close to him.

"I know, recently there's a girl with good feelings! And besides! She's not like you! Are you saying that you're seriously dating?"

Unusually, Chitose's face suddenly turned red.

"Eh?" Kamamoto thought unexpectedly, stepping aside. Kamamoto knew it, but judging by Chitose's reaction, it seemed like a serious relationship.

Chitose said he was a playboy, but he was a womanizer at best. He should have repeated it over and over, just to spend the night together, but what kind of exchange did he have in mind?

Chitose turned his head away as if to hide his embarrassment from him.

"I don't care; it doesn't matter what kind of relationship people have."

"Not good! You're Chitose... if you're a womanizer, that's fine! It's fine if you take women around! It's good! I'll envy you too much!"

"You're such a scum..."

Chitose said that since he was quite shocked, while Bando fell on the counter and started crying.

"Tell me! No, I'm sorry, please tell me! I might find it useful...!"

"Ah. Well, that's fine."

Chitose said that as if he had lost his mind, and then started talking about his encounter with the woman.

That person is a teacher. She is also a primary school teacher. She was invited by an acquaintance to a joint party, and she was sitting across from him. She had just arrived as an escort and, to begin with, she did not seem very enthusiastic. No matter how much Chitose tried to talk to her, he couldn't help but give in to half of her saying, "This isn't good.", and changed the target from her to another girl.

But when they got to the second party, the colors began to change.

Arriving at the second party together meant that there was a certain expectation. Chitose, of course, joined in, but was surprised that the girl was there. Chitose, who was sitting next to her in the karaoke room, asked playfully.

"I thought you were going home because you didn't seem too keen on it. Are you targeting someone?"

The girl showed a small smile as she drank a prepared cocktail.

"You."

"What?"

"I want to know more about you."

Chitose had no idea what the girl was thinking.

After the second party, Chitose and the girl appeared as couples made up and broken up. Normally he would have gone straight to the hotel, but for some reason, he didn't feel like it. They entered a bar and talked there. It was Chitose's story, just as she requested. What kind of work did he do, where was his family's house?

Having said that, Chitose suddenly stopped talking.

"...And?"

To Bando, who urged him to go ahead, Chitose said bluntly:

"When I woke up, I was sleeping at the girl's house."

"Oh, you!"

Bando suddenly stood up and grabbed Chitose by the neck.

"What the hell did you do to her, idiot?!"

"No, I didn't! No, I was so drunk I don't remember! I didn't!"

"Okay, calm down, Bando. And then?"

As Kamamoto pushed Bando away, Chitose took a deep breath and rested his chin on the counter.

"Well, that's it. When I woke up, she was there and she was making coffee. At the time, she was wearing a suit. She told me to go ahead because she had schoolwork to do, to put the keys in the mailbox, and then..."

Chitose's face gradually turned red and he turned around again.

"...She patted my head like I would a child. And she said: See you later."

"....."

Bando pursed his lips and calmed down. He looked at Chitose questioningly.

"That is all?"

"That is all."

"How about a date? Go out to eat, go out to play."

"The other side seems to be busy, so we have lunch twice..."

Kamamoto and Bando muttered in unison.

"Are you dating her?"

"I don't know, not even me!"

This time it was Chitose's turn to stand up and shout. Holding his head, he squats on the spot.

"If it was another girl, the story would move on more easily, but come on! Somehow, when I'm with that girl, I can't speak properly. I'm going crazy! She seems to enjoy listening to my story. I can't go any further than that. I would love to go out with her! But what will I do if she rejects me?"

"Ah.", Bando exhaled in surprise.

"You like that girl."

"That's right! Is it bad?!"

"No... But, I never thought that I would hear a story like that from you..."

"Oh, no! That's why I didn't want to talk about this!"

Showing his frustration, Chitose sat down violently on the stool. He looked at Kamamoto with angry eyes.

"It's all your fault, Kamamoto! Because you bring stories you don't understand."

"Huh, I...?"

"Listen! It's not whether you're dating or not that's important! It's whether you like her or not! She likes you and wants to be your lover one day! So what about you?!"

It didn't matter what they said,

"I really never imagined such a thing..."

"Then imagine it now! You're already at that stage!"

As if to distract the embarrassment from him, Chitose slammed his hand on the counter.

"From what I've heard, there's no doubt that Ayumi-chan likes you. So what about you, Kamamoto? Do you like her as a girl, or don't you see her that way? Make it clear!" Otherwise, nothing will progress!"

Bando shook his head slightly.

"Oh... that's the sincerest comment you've made today..."

"Shut up! I don't want someone who doesn't even have a date saying that to me!"

"Eh?! You know, there are good things to say and bad things to say!"

Chitose and Bando started an ugly fight. Even facing them, Kamamoto remained silent and deep in his thought.

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In the park at night, Kamamoto absentmindedly sat on a bench.

When he was a child, it was the park where he often came to play. Swings and children's games in the sandbox. The seesaw was removed when Kamamoto was in high school. They all seemed very small compared to his memory. It was enough to make him feel like he was a giant.

No. In fact, he was getting bigger. Much more so than when he innocently played around here back then. So it may not have been an illusion that you tend to have.

As he toyed with such a ridiculous idea, he suddenly noticed a figure approaching him.

It was a ride.

She had a large paper bag. Peering out from there, Ayumi timidly appeared.

"S-sorry, Ri-chan. I'm late."

"Oh, no, it was me who called you. By the way, that's..."

"Ri-chan, you liked the "Usagian" taiyaki, didn't you? We were halfway through dinner, so I was wondering if you were hungry."

"I'm hungry! Thanks, Ayumi!"

Ayumi sat next to him and offered him a taiyaki. After receiving it, Kamamoto ate it all in just two bites. Ayumi offered more taiyaki, and Kamamoto ate it, offered it to him, and ate...

When he received the fifth, he finally came to his senses.

"No, no, no. I didn't call you for this. It was fine though."

When he tried to stop her, she made a sad face and lowered her head. Kamamoto scratched his cheek. It was hard to do, but he had to find a way out somehow.

Ayumi suddenly raised her head and looked directly at Kamamoto's face,

"Sorry!"

She yelled that and bowed her head again.

Kamamoto blinked. Why did Ayumi apologize? She hadn't done anything that required an apology.

However, Ayumi seemed to have a different opinion. She clutched the paper bag so tightly that she crinkled up and lowered moist eyes.

"It's my fault that uncle and aunt got mad. Ri-chan, uh, recently, I've been visiting your house all the time, so they misunderstood what I was to you. Ri-chan, even you didn't understand."

"Oh..."

"But it's also my fault. Um, it's really hard to say..."

Ayumi squeezed her eyes shut and her ears were bright red as she strained her voice.

"Honestly! There was a hole! I was trying to fill it up!"

"Yes.", she yelled.

Kamamoto involuntarily looked around him. A park in the middle of a quiet residential area. It was a voice as loud as he had never heard before, so much so that he couldn't help but groan.

Ayumi's complexion changed rapidly. With trembling lips and tears in her eyes, she exhales.

"I don't want to intentionally deny that uncle and aunt didn't get it right, so, um... I thought it would be nice if I could feel this way before I knew it. I got scolded... I'm embarrassed and I'm sorry... that's why..."

"A while ago..."

Kamamoto silently interrupted Ayumi's words.

"I was talking to my friends at the bar, because I don't know anything about that kind of thing. I asked someone who knew about it: what does it mean to be in a relationship, what kind of person should you date, etc. Well, that kind of history."

"....."

Ayumi looked scared at Kamamoto's profile. Every time she blinked, tears fell down her cheeks.

"Well, I really don't understand if we're dating and not, but that guy told me that, it seems that the important thing is whether I like you or not."

A childhood friend with whom he grew up as a family.

There was no doubt that she was an important person. However, as a member of the opposite sex, as a girl, he never thought of it strangely. All Kamamoto had was "Homura's" companions and his appetite, and Ayumi was in the same frame as his family.

"So, well... I thought about that too. About you. I never thought about that before, but when I thought about it, I wondered..."

Ayumi's already small body shrank even more.

"I probably like you."

With those words, it seemed that even her breathing had stopped.

However, Kamamoto spoke in a relaxed tone.

"Even a little while ago, you brought me taiyaki when I missed dinner. For some reason, I thought that was really cool. I'm sure you understand me well."

"Ta-taiyaki..."

Ayumi looked down. Deep, as if she wanted to bury her face in a taiyaki paper bag. Her shoulders were trembling slightly. Just when he was about to worry if she was alright, she said in a thin, trembling voice:

"Um... Ri-chan..."

"Eh?"

"I'm really... happy... but... would you like to be a little more romantic?"

Even if she said that...

Kamamoto scratched his head and thought for a moment before uttering a line that he had seen in a drama.

"So, Ayumi. Under the premise of marriage, go out with me."

"Yes!!"

Ayumi yelled, raising her head, her eyes shining and taking Kamamoto's hand.

Kamamoto didn't know if that was okay, but he let her shake his hands.

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"...And?"

A few days later, at the HOMRA bar.

Yata finished listening to Kamamoto as his eyebrows arched.

Kamamoto nodded firmly.

"That's why I decided to get married. I hope you'll support me."

"....."

For a moment, everyone was speechless and looked at Kamamoto's face.

At the bar were Yata and Kamamoto, along with Akagi, Bando, Chitose, Dewa, Eric and Fujishima, the main members besides Kusanagi and Anna. It all started when Kamamoto told them that he had something to talk about, but they never thought that he would drop a bombshell on them like that. They were all so desperate to chew on the facts that they couldn't say anything.

Meanwhile, Yata sighed deeply and touched Kamamoto's shoulder.

"Congratulations."

With that single word, something collapsed.

"Wow, are you serious?! Congratulations, Kamamoto!"

"Congratulations, Kamamoto-san! Oh, you're getting married...!"

"Congratulations!"

"Bando, that's not a congratulatory face at all, huh."

The members congratulated Kamamoto all at once. They tapped him on the shoulder, grabbed him around the belly, and began rubbing his head. Despite receiving a typical harsh blessing from "Homura", Kamamoto still laughed, "No."

"I think there is still a long way to go. Ayumi also wants to go to university. I also have to work hard."

It's not that he was particularly depressed, his attitude was that he was talking about the future that would come naturally. Bando and the others felt as if frightened by the adult atmosphere that was emitted from the big smile.

As everyone made a fuss, Yata laughed weakly.

"I mean, you, you get married suddenly, I'm sure there's a little more than one stage. It's too sudden."

"Eh. Is that so?"

"Do you have something like that, well no. Congratulations again, Kamamoto. Come to think of it, you are the most determined of us."

Kamamoto laughed "Hehe." and he rubbed his nose.

"Oh, but even if I get married, I'll still be a member of "Homura"! Of course I'll take good care of her, but, you're all important partners too!"

"Kamamoto...!"

Excitement spread among the members. Akagi winked at Fujishima, they walked around the counter and began lining up Kusanagi's precious sake.

"If that's the case, then let's go! It's an engagement celebration party!"

"I'll tell Kusanagi-san later. If he asks what happened, he should be able to forgive us."

"Oh! That's right!"

Everyone raised their fists in delight at the commander's order. They each emitted a red aura and yelled, of course,

"No Blood! No Bone! No Ash!!"

After the call, there was an outburst of laughter. He opened the bottle of whiskey, poured in sparkling water, and just as he was about to start doling out...

The PDA's dial tone sounded at the same time.

One was Kamamoto's PDA and the other was Chitose's PDA. The members, who were about to get excited, looked at the two with their glasses in their hands. The two left the words "I'm sorry." and received the call from the PDA.

"Oh, Ayumi? What's wrong?"

"Hi?! It's me, but what is it?!"

"Huh? Really? Is that so? Ah... I see."

"Eh, really? Yes, that's right! Yes, then..."

"Okay, then I'll go there right away. Oh, oh... See you later."

"There I come! I'm definitely coming! Wait a minute, I'll be there soon!"

And then, they both hung up at the same time.

The two of them looked at the group of people standing together without even blinking.

"Umm... I'm sorry! I'm sorry for saying that! I got a call from that girl."

"Ah, I'm out of here too! Thanks for everything!"

Then, without looking back, they triumphantly walked out of the HOMRA bar.

The remaining men were silent for a while. They couldn't even move. Yata, Akagi, Bando, Dewa, Eric, and Fujishima stared at the doorbell that was still shaking with eyes that seemed to stare into the distance.

Of course, Bando was the first to act. He gulped down the extremely thick highball, which was made in a roughly 1:1 ratio, and slammed it against the counter while he screamed as if he was vomiting blood.

"I wish I was dead!"

That day saw the most frantic party since the start of the HOMRA Bar, and Kusanagi, who arrived the next morning, was furious like a raging fire, but that's another story.

CHAPTER 7: NIGHT OF MEMORIES

A year has passed since then.

The sports store where Misaki Yata is currently working is not a famous store nor is it located in a large shopping mall, it is an old-fashioned two-story community store in a corner of the shopping district.

The store manager is a former professional baseball player and took over the sports store, which is a family business, after he retired. Inevitably, baseball tools are the most substantial, but there are plenty of other sports supplies.

Also, Yata participated in a skateboarding competition, so he was willing to take a break from time to time, and he actively supported him.

In a very understandable workplace, Yata, who had held relatively different part-time jobs, has been working very seriously.

That day, he worked from ten in the morning until night. After getting off work, Yata felt a little peckish, so he ordered a menchikatsu from a nearby garnish shop, and strolled through the shopping district while he munched.

This shopping street in Shizume has many old-fashioned shops, such as a rare cafe, a second-hand bookstore that has been in business for fifty years, and a fishmonger run by a kind-hearted general.

Among them, Yata found a store that caught his attention. It was a toy store with a retro-toned neon sign that said "Retro Store".

If you look in the splash window, you will find the retro anime Chogokin that aired about 20 years ago and board games that have been discontinued long ago.

Yata was curious and entered the store.

Glass covered shelves act as partitions to form narrow aisles. And on the shelves, monster figures, plastic model submarines, and sofubi dolls that couldn't be seen at all, but the characters were stacked and neatly lined up.

To be honest, young Yata did not feel any homesickness because there were only antiques that were out of reach.

However, Yata, who was looking at it with a feeling of "Oh, there is such a thing.", suddenly stopped and said:

"Wow!"

His eyes lit up.

At the end of his gaze was the hardware and some of the computer game software that had once ruled the world. Those mysteriously increased Yata's heartbeat.

"Oh, how nostalgic."

He said that unintentionally. To be precise, these game consoles were top sellers when Yata's parents were children.

However, Yata had a special feeling for this game console. When he first entered "Homura", he got these games in the retro genre at that time, and he was very addicted to staying up all night.

And the existence of a close friend who kept him company even though he complained about his stupidity.

It was an exciting day for Yata.

When he noticed, he was calling for the bearded manager, who was at the counter.

"Hm, how much does it cost to buy all this?"

+++++

After finishing his shift, Fushimi Saruhiko dressed in civilian clothes and bought chuhai, beer, and some snacks at a convenience store, then headed to a multi-tenant building on the outskirts of Shizume.

It was 9:30 at night.

Stainless steel tenant signs at the first-floor entrance were lined with obscure company names such as "Waraji Specialty Sales Company", "Ponpon Mail Order" and "Goriki Shoji".

Fushimi took an old-fashioned elevator that made him hesitate to go up and went up to the top floor.

"You Law Office" was written on the frosted glass in front of him. However, it seemed that everyone had already left work, and it was completely dark inside.

Fushimi walked up the stairs on the side of the building slowly and with a serious look.

He pushed open the heavy door. Then, immediately, he could see the ceiling covered in moonlight.

"It's still a strange place."

Fushimi laughed.

The rooftop of this multi-tenant building, about 90 square meters, was the entire residence of Yata Misaki. The only space he could really live in was a small attic in the back that looked like a mountain lodge.

Also, a little further away, there was a locker room-sized bathroom and shower, placed side by side.

In the back space, there were benches and old tires that existed before Yata moved in, bus stop signs for some reason, tattered mannequins, heavily-graffitied beach umbrellas, stone chairs, and large foliage plants.

It was too incoherent and a little scary.

Fushimi said:

"Didn't the real estate agent cheat on you?"

Despite what he told him to his face, Yata liked this living environment.

The reasons can be broadly divided into two: One is that the rent is ridiculously cheap.

Another thing is that the ground floor is unpopular at night, so there were no complaints, even if he was a bit noisy.

Therefore, recently, Yata enlisted the help of Kamamoto and Fujishima, who is good at carpentry, to build his own skateboard track and practice tricks night after night.

Fushimi walked up the handmade wooden skateboard ramp (a structure that looks like an ellipse split in two, which allows for tricks like jumping while sliding left and right on a curved surface) to the attic in the back, then called at the door of cheap construction.

Almost immediately,

"I'm going!"

Yata opened the door with a big smile on his face. As he exhaled, his eyes lit up and he beckoned him with a "pon, pon" gesture.

Fushimi laughed a little, thinking that he was like a dog patiently waiting for his master to return.

The attic where Yata lives has about eight tatami mats, but it also has a mini kitchen and a small loft space. Yata usually puts a futon in the loft space and sleeps there.

Inevitably, the space below was the kitchen, dining room, and living room. Eating and drinking is done at a small chabudai. There are two cushions next to it. One had a cool arabesque pattern and the other was elegant with a cat character.

The difference is that both are gifts.

Speaking of gifts, the big screen television that occupies much of this room was an heirloom from Izumo Kusanagi.

The shelf along the wall is made of pipes, and above it is a wide range of items, from laundry baskets to clear jars filled with sweets once collected, a collection of battle-focused manga, and a wide range of skate magazines.

The small refrigerator was decorated with photos of "Homura" members taken at their travel destinations sandwiched between magnets.

The room was messy as a whole, but the room had a somewhat tidy impression, perhaps reflecting the owner's temperament.

Yata has long since grown up, but his youthful mischief still lingers in the atmosphere of the room.

Fushimi thought, "It's still like a child's room."

Yata took the plastic bag that Fushimi gave him and...

"Oh, alcohol? Thanks, Saruhiko. But I don't feel like that today."

He said that while he was putting alcohol in the fridge.

"Huh? So how do you feel?"

He invited him saying, "Let's have a drink party.". Fushimi's face turned a bit sullen. Yata was...

"Hehe."

With a mischievous look on his face, he handed Fushimi a can of juice instead of alcoholic beverages.

"A drinking party is a drinking party, but today is this."

Fushimi took the item that was handed to him and...

"Watercarian? Is there a place that still sells this?"

He couldn't help but laugh.

It was the carbonated drink that Yata and Fushimi had become addicted to when they started living together.

The name of the product is Watercarian and the can packaging has red and green stripes, so it looks like watermelon juice, but the aftertaste is strangely medicinal. A strong sour taste hit his nose.

It is still a hot topic on the internet as a representative of "bad juice". At first, both Yata and Fushimi drank it as a punishing game with each other, but they gradually became captivated by its strangely addictive taste and eventually drank it regularly.

"Well, naturally, I somehow stopped drinking Watercarian."

Fushimi muttered under his breath.

It was before the two entered "Homura" together.

He didn't stop drinking that peculiar juice before he knew it.

"Besides, that's not all."

Yata was in a good mood and threw another snack in front of Fushimi.

"Takoyaki and grilled squid sandwiches, huh?"

That was also a sweet that both of them were addicted to at the same time. The rich flavor of the sauce laced his mouth, and it was an odd combination with the watercarian, which tasted extravagant.

"Finally. Check this out."

Yata then pointed to a retro game console that had already been set up in front of the TV.

"Isn't that great? I've already confirmed that it works properly."

"I see."

Fushimi's eyes narrowed as he realized what Yata had prepared for tonight.

"In other words, let's dive into nostalgic stuff."

"Oh, that's right."

"Tsk."

Fushimi clicked his tongue once.

"What nonsense."

But his tone was never harsh.

Fushimi received a set of jerseys from Yata and exchanged them. Instead of wanting to be relaxed, he didn't want his clothes to get dirty while he ate snacks or juice.

Yata also had a similar appearance.

Now that he thought about it, even when they lived together, there was a time when they spent the whole day casually chatting with each other in casual clothes like that.

"Good. This is the first."

Yata first chose a fighting game. He inserted the cassette into the retro game machine.

After turning on and waiting for a while, an old-fashioned dotted image appeared on the TV screen and cheap electronic sound played on the speaker.

"Certainly, it's nostalgic."

Yata laughed when Fushimi muttered that under his breath. This fighting game is a popular series that continues even now, and Yata and Fushimi were direct hits around the fourth and fifth generations.

He recalled that when he was in high school, he honed his interpersonal fighting skills on the Internet and in game centers.

What is currently being shown on television was the first generation of that work.

"Then I'll take this guy as usual."

A macho character to whom Yata makes thorns sprout from his body.

"Well, according to theory, I'm this one."

Fushimi chose a magical character with complicated moves.

Each of them is a popular character that continues to be used in the current series. The game starts with stage selection and the start button.

Yata leaned forward slightly, while Fushimi corrected his posture and concentrated on the game. Every time they waved their fingertips, the characters flew around the screen, throwing punches, emitting beams of light, and burning their opponents with waves of heat.

"Shit, this!"

"....."

Yata's style of play is attractive. Fushimi is cool, but when he's outnumbered, he frowns a bit.

The arms of the two men were even. Currently, in this fighting game, where the player population is spreading all over the world, it is to the extent that it is a good thing.

However, that was enough for the two of them to enjoy themselves.

Initially,

"Oh, yeah! I won."

Yata narrowly won the auction, and then...

"Fu."

Fushimi took advantage of Yata's silly mistake and attacked everyone at once. After that, he enjoyed the game, winning and losing for a while.

Oddly enough, the victory or defeat of these games has rarely caused a dangerous atmosphere for both of them for a long time.

Both Yata and Fushimi weren't fully trained as humans as teenagers, but for some reason, losing to each other didn't bother them as much.

Yata laughed when an unusual move came out, and Fushimi also shook his shoulders in an unusual way, and the game was temporarily interrupted.

And then they took a break.

They ate takoyaki and squid sandwiches and drank watercarian.

The takoyaki and squid sandwiches were delicious even now, but the problem was that they fell apart and the sauce stuck to your hands.

Fushimi frequently wiped his hands with a damp handkerchief, while Yata once vigorously spilled it on the chabudai, then wiped it with his hand and threw it into the trash can he had brought nearby beforehand.

And the watercarian tasted weird like always.

"It's really bad."

"Yes."

Yata and Fushimi nodded to each other, yet drank their respective portions with oddly satisfied expressions.

After eating and drinking, the fighting game resumed.

The two of them enjoyed playing shooting games, racing games, and even novel-type horror games by replacing the cassettes and forgetting about time.

A few hours later, the two of them left the attic and found themselves under the starry sky of the city.

It's not that they were "tired of the game" or "got tired", they were just "satisfied with the game".

It was a feeling of satisfaction.

On the other hand, they were lounging on the couch, which had been out in the open for some time, and were rambling on.

The drinks were chuhai and beer that Fushimi had bought from a store. The snacks were also changing to something that went well with sake, like a variety of nuts and salami.

"It's stupid, why are we so obsessed with such old games?"

Yata looked up at the night sky and said something a bit strange. Looking back, he felt that the time he was actually working was a very short period of time, around three months.

However, during that time, he remembered staying up all night many times.

"Uh."

Fushimi lightly sipped the chuhai before replying.

"I guess it's the same feeling as if you were making fun of a movie. Because it's cheap, there are several complaints, but on the contrary, it's interesting."

"Oh, I kind of understand that."

Yata said that in a slightly sleepy tone.

"That's why it wouldn't be very interesting to do it alone."

Fushimi didn't reply, but Yata didn't seem to care.

He sat up and looked at Fushimi again.

"By the way, how are you doing lately?"

"Eh?"

"In fact, the store manager is inviting me to become a full-time employee."

Fushimi was silent for a moment. Later...

"Isn't it okay if you do what you like?"

For someone who doesn't know Fushimi very well, he gave an answer that sounded cold.

Yata smiled slightly.

"There will be a big competition next time. Either way, I'll wait until it's over. I'll reply to the manager after that."

Fushimi silently tossed the nuts into his mouth. Next, he looked at the skateboard ramp made by Yata and the others.

"So how are you for the final?"

Fushimi asked.

"Nothing bad."

Yata hit his left palm with his right fist. His eyes had the same glee of a bad boy that hadn't changed since they'd met.

"I'm able to do the part I was stuck on before. I'm going to win."

"Uh."

Fushimi said that without any interest.

"Well, do your best."

"Of course."

Yata smiled and showed his white teeth. Later...

"And what about you?"

Fushimi's face became a bit troubled. However, since Yata was looking at him, he couldn't help it.

"I do what I have to do. But that's it."

He responded very nonchalantly.

He looked lethargic as always. However, deep down there was a will that was cold and hard as ice.

Yata nodded loudly.

"You've always been like this, Saruhiko."

At that moment, Fushimi, who had been looking uncomfortably at that conversation, suddenly realized that it was already there and pointed his finger.

"Look. It's dawn."

"Oh, really?"

Yata headed for the east end of the rooftop. Fushimi also followed him. It was certainly dim, but twilight was slowly filtering in from across the street from the building.

Yata and Fushimi watched the scene in silence. The two of them were fascinated by the process in which the city was filled with power as if by magic, as light hit the gradually dawning sky.

Grabbing the rusty handrail, Yata said a bit embarrassed as he looked ahead.

"Saruhiko. Let's be stupid like that again, okay?"

Fushimi answered in an equally soft voice.

"Oh, that's right. Misaki."

"Yes, let's do it!"

Despite those words, Yata energetically raised his arm. Fushimi also swallowed his small yawn.

After sleeping for about three hours, he finished showering and quickly washed his face, and went down to the back of the multi-tenant building. It was eight o'clock in the morning. The streets were already full of travelers.

Yata had to go to work and prepare to open the store. Fushimi returned to the dorm once, changed into his uniform, and had a regular meeting with Awashima.

When they first entered "Homura", it was common for both of them to fall asleep and stay asleep until the afternoon.

But now it was different.

Even when they tried to recreate a nostalgic night, his eyes were already grown-up and sleepy.

"See you later."

Yata raised a small fist. Fushimi hit his fist with his fist.

"Yes."

Then the two started walking in their respective directions. Because there was definitely something in their hearts and they could trust each other.

CHAPTER 8: THE PLACE WHERE I BELONG

A year has passed since then.

The next morning, after messing around with Yata overnight, Fushimi returned to his room in the dorm, changed into his uniform, and headed straight to Awashima's office.

She was not very proactive about getting a private room, saying that she was just acting as the head of the department.

"Isn't there something you don't want other people to hear? Isn't that what it means to be on top?"

After being persuaded by Fushimi, she started using the room that had been used as a reception room as her own room.

The only furniture is a desk and a document management rack, which is rational and calm, but the only thing that stands out is the flowers arranged in a vase by the window (several office workers who admired Awashima took turns choosing them) that create a glamorous atmosphere.

When he entered the room...

"...Fushimi. Are you tired?"

Awashima turned to Fushimi and asked that. Fushimi put his finger on his neck, while he looked sideways.

"Well, yes."

He gave her a careless reply.

"I have no problem with my job."

Awashima smiled.

After that, she quickly checked various items on the tablet without further comment. Fushimi was impressed with the speed with which Awashima worked.

With the exception of Reisi Munakata, who is the head of the office, Scepter 4's administrative processing ability is by far the highest.

(Well, that's just my second point.)

Neither pushy nor cocky, Fushimi picked up on his own abilities.

"By the way, Fushimi. What's going on with that Strain's case?"

Awashima's voice lowered slightly.

"Oh."

Fushimi narrowed his eyes.

"You mean the Black Iron King, right?"

Awashima nodded.

"Excuse me. Akiyama, can I temporarily mobilize Benzai?"

When Fushimi said that...

"...Domyoji and others are already working exclusively, but isn't that enough?"

Awashima's words were mixed with slight surprise.

Fushimi laughed bitterly.

"I thought he was just an idiot. But he is quite a troublesome idiot."

Fushimi Saruhiko is like the incarnation of a powerful officer. He has continued to deal with the crimes caused by the Strains very efficiently and effectively.

It was extremely rare for Fushimi to use the expression "troublesome".

Awashima's face showed something close to tension.

A Strain, the self-proclaimed Black Iron King, Kamimori Katsuya's prominent activities coincided with Reisi Munakata's temporary departure from Scepter 4.

At first, he wasn't even thought of as a threat.

The contents of the crime include destroying the door of a candy factory and stealing a large amount of products, as well as writing on the wall of the building: "The Black Iron King was here!". There was a strong tendency to be messy and obnoxious, such as writing in large letters.

"A boy, huh?"

After receiving the report, Fushimi muttered under his breath.

Hidaka was initially the only person in charge, and after several days of investigation, he immediately identified the culprit.

Katsuya Kamimori, 26 years old.

A former long-distance truck driver who lived in an apartment in Shizume City.

However, after activating his ability as a Strain, he was fired from his employer's transportation company and, on top of that, he got in trouble with a nearby resident and had to move out of his apartment.

Hidaka identified his whereabouts without much difficulty and headed off with Enomoto as backup to contain him.

What was miscalculated was that Kamimori had a non-standard strength that was far from a normal Strain.

As the self-proclaimed Black Iron King, his unique ability was to harden his body to the extreme. Hidaka and Enomoto's attacks did not succeed at all, and instead they were swayed by his strong arms, and after being injured, they ran away to call for help.

The capture took place in a certain internet cafe, but after it was over, the inside of the store was in chaos, as if a big storm had broken out.

Hidaka's voice was very weak when he reported this incident. Thankfully, in the midst of the mishap, no civilians were hurt, but it should have been close to an apologetic mistake.

However, Fushimi did not particularly reprimand him.

This is because he didn't think there was anything wrong with Hidaka's answer. He hardly ever lost in a one on one fight with a normal Strain.

Even if Enomoto joined them, he would have been defeated.

Fushimi immediately put together a team to deal with Katsuya Kamimori, centered around Domyoji, who boasts one of the best abilities in Scepter 4.

(Based on Hidaka's report, he's probably stronger than me, huh? Depending on the situation, it's probably safer to think of him as an extra-large irregular on par with Yatogami Kuro of the Silver Clan.)

Fushimi never underestimated his opponent and carefully crafted countermeasures.

However, the situation affected by the Black Iron King far exceeded Fushimi's imagination in a few months.

After he got Awashima's approval, Fushimi summoned the members of Scepter 4 to a room.

Akiyama Himori, Benzai Yujiro, Kamo Ryuho, Domyoji Andy, Enomoto Tatsuya, Fuse Daiki, Goto Ren, and Hidaka Akira.

And Fushimi Saruhiko.

Seri Awashima sat a short distance away, entrusting him with the role of organizer.

This may be the first time since the turmoil caused by the "Green King" Hisui Nagare, that all of Scepter 4's elites have come together for a single incident.

The expressions of Akiyama and the others, who had not participated in the investigation until now, showed some bewilderment.

They wondered if a single Strain could pose such a threat.

"Well, a picture is worth a thousand words. Check this out."

Fushimi said as he operated the remote control, and the image was displayed on the projector behind him.

"Four days ago. A commercial facility in a certain region. It is midnight. This is the image from the surveillance camera installed outdoors."

A wide camera with a fairly wide angle showed a large parking lot that is typical of a local city.

Everyone kept their eyes open for a while. Nothing suspicious. After...

"Oh."

Goto, who has keen senses in strange places, first leaked out a small voice. Everyone soon found out.

Beyond the parking lot was another large paddy field, but suddenly a black mist-like thing began to cover it.

Then, one by one, vehicles such as sedans, light cars, caravans, and wagons came out of the black mist one after another.

And finally, an extraordinarily large truck slowly and quietly appeared.

"What?"

Kamo frowned in confusion.

"Here's another angle on that track."

When Fushimi operated the remote in his hand, the screen changed.

"I'll expand on that a bit."

The track was up.

"Oh, God."

Benzai unintentionally smiled wryly.

It was a type of truck called Dekatora. The jet-black body was equipped with countless red, blue, and yellow colored lights, which cast dazzling lights against the backdrop of the countryside night. It had a strange presence, like a UFO landing in the wrong place.

And next to it...

"No need for opinions. The invincible Black Iron King."

...it was written in big letters.

"This is a big truck that Kamimori, the idiot pretending to be the Black Iron King, stole from the trucking company he used to work for. It looks like he restored it to his liking... well, he doesn't have good taste, but his handwriting is pretty good."

Fushimi said that matter-of-factly and emotionlessly. In contrast, Fushimi's anger could be felt from his flat words, and everyone fell silent.

"Ok, next picture."

Fushimi operated the controller in his hand again.

"This time it's a surveillance camera in a commercial facility. Look carefully."

The screen showed an automatic door that was probably the main entrance. Suddenly it flew, breaking the glass around it. And then, through the automatic door with only the frame left, a man calmly walked past.

He was quite tall and had short hair. He was dressed in what looked like a manual laborer's uniform, but he was open from the top and only wore a white tank top.

His strong muscles bulged from his upper arms, neck, and shoulders. The face that he smiled like a child with his mouth open was impressive.

"He is Kamimori. He probably just hit the door with his hardened fist, but as you can see, he has destructive power. You might think he has the energy of a small bomb."

Hidaka, who had an encounter with Kamimori, clenched his fist in frustration, while Enomoto looked down with a solemn expression.

They were both beaten by Kamimori, and as a Strain, his exceptional strength is embedded in his bones.

"The problem is after this."

As they watched, more people entered through the broken automatic door.

"Hey~, he has a lot of companions."

Domyoji whistled rather happily.

"Come on. Some people must know something."

Fuse's eyes turned stern. Fushimi nodded.

"That's right. Currently, there are several Strains on the wanted list. Currently, probably more than 20 antisocial Strains have joined this idiot and are committing criminal acts."

Fushimi poked at the screen with the tip of his finger.

"By the way, even in this commercial facility, after stopping rushing guards, these guys stole around 10 million in money and goods and fled. This is the second such incident this month."

Everyone finally understood the seriousness of the situation.

There have never been many examples of such an organized Strain coalition.

"In summary..."

Akiyama asked Fushimi for confirmation a bit bluntly.

"Some kind of, uh, criminal group, well, they're forming a faction of Strains, right?"

"Oh."

Fushimi spoke frankly in the "terms" that Akiyama originally meant.

"I think it's good to see that the Black Iron King Clan is nearing completion."

They all had a complicated look on their faces.

Awashima, who was sitting a short distance away, put her hand to her forehead and thought.

The meeting ended after Fushimi communicated the future policy.

It was a large-scale instruction that basically all members should be given priority in dealing with Kamimori and his group, while the distribution of work to other projects would be done at their own discretion.

"But you surprised me."

After everyone left, Awashima said something a little funny.

"I can't believe what the Captain predicted is happening like this."

Fushimi, who was reconfirming the information on the tablet, looked a bit displeased.

Awashima continued without a response from Fushimi.

"One. An unprecedented type of Strain could cause an incident. Two. A guiding Strain will occur that unites them. When one or two conditions are met, a group of Strains not seen in the past is formed. That is..."

Awashima was looking at Fushimi.

"It will be something that mimics the "King" and his clan for as long as possible. It's all the Captain told us before he left."

"....."

Fushimi looked up from the tablet and replied curtly.

"If that's the case, I expected it too. Among the people who became Strains after destroying the Slate, there were many that weren't applicable to conventional qualitative. It's obvious if you have an idea."

"Yes. But I didn't understand the flow at all. Fushimi, I think you have something similar to the Captain's "eyes that see the future."

Instead of making fun of him, Awashima praised Fushimi with sincerity and kindness.

Fushimi looked away to the side, he didn't say a word.

(In that case, what the lieutenant has is "general's ship", right?)

Without Munakata, the fact that Scepter 4 is running smoothly is largely due to Awashima's control.

After a short silence, Awashima started asking questions about Kamimori and his group again.

"You said they might be living in a bunch of cars that came out of that black fog."

Awashima raised her well-shaped eyebrows.

"I wonder... what is his purpose?"

Fushimi analyzed the information he obtained and concluded that Kamimori was hiding and moving repeatedly, randomly attacking commercial facilities and warehouses.

Like the highwaymen of the Middle Ages, or the horse tribes of the plains, they have a form of wandering behavior that does not take root.

"I find the action to be quite momentary."

Awashima expressed the impressions of him. Fushimi was forceful.

"Or you could say they're like children. Well, in any case, they might not be thinking of lasting too long themselves."

Awashima nodded. After...

"However, I also agree with your prediction that there is an intelligent brain in this group."

"Yes. Otherwise, there is no way such an orderly organization could have been formed in such a short period of time. A fool who cannot be called by Kamimori would not budge."

"Is that brain and the Strain that generates the black mist the same person?"

Fushimi agreed.

"Almost certainly. The organizational change and the concealment using black fog happened at the same time. I won't know until I catch this guy, but that black fog seems to have the effect of making perception difficult."

"That's why even with such a large group, I can't figure out where they're hiding."

Fushimi nodded again.

"Then, as our policy, we will capture that staff officer with the highest priority first."

"Isn't Kamimori the General?"

At Awashima's question, Fushimi lied with a straight face.

"Because Kamimori makes an excellent personnel officer in any organization."

Awashima let out a small laugh.

Two weeks after Fushimi shared his opinion with Awashima, Kamimori and his companions showed up at a ski resort quite far from the metropolitan area.

It was already dark and completely out of season, so not at all popular.

Supports lined up at regular intervals and a stretched lift. In addition, the grassy slopes along the route barely showed the characteristics of a ski resort.

Just as the hands of the clock struck midnight.

Suddenly, a black mist with a shade darker than the darkness of night slowly spread over the parking lot of the hostel at the foot of the mountain. A black mist unfurled as if filling the uninhabited space. And from there various types of cars emerged as if they were filtering.

Kamimori's proud Dekotora came next.

The cars were parked neatly at a distance from each other.

"Ok! Good atmosphere! As expected of a ski resort!"

Kamimori jumped from the driver's seat to the ground and raised his arms to the night sky as hard as he could and roared.

With blond hair buzzed short, he took off only the top half of his overalls and slipped on a tank top, revealing his strong shoulders and upper arms.

His friends gathered around him.

"Ok! Guys. Let's be flashy again today! For now, we'll smash the hostel and burn it down!"

They all nodded strongly at Kamimori's comment.

At that moment...

"Ah, guys. Stop being idiots. Give up."

They heard a very unmotivated voice through the loudspeaker. Little did they know, it was the voice of Saruhiko Fushimi, an intelligent young man from Scepter 4. At the same time, the surrounding lights turned on.

The light sources needed for nightly business during the season were all turned on at full power at once, filling the area with blinding light.

"No! The Blues!"

One of his friends yelled.

"....."

Kamimori stared at the area around the hut.

Certainly, there was a row of Scepter 4 members in blue uniforms.

"Let's do it."

The aggressive Kamimori clenched his fists and tried to move forward. Another hastily stopped him.

"You can't do that, boss! "That person" told you, right? In the unlikely event that you get ambushed, return to the mist and run away!"

"But..."

"We're not just thieves and thugs. Boss, didn't you say that we would fix the world properly?!"

Kamimori gritted his teeth at that comment. But there he showed his magnanimity as a boss.

He raised his fist and then lowered it.

"Hey, guys!"

He acted quickly.

"Let's run away!"

Then he took the initiative to run back to the driver's seat of the Dekotora. The members' reactions were quick, probably because they had made the arrangements in advance.

They hurriedly jumped into each car, started the engine, reversed the cars, and plunged one after another into the black mist that was still developing.

Kamimori was the bravest.

After making sure everyone could escape, he backed up the huge truck and calmly walked back into the mist. From the driver's seat to the end, he was the force of the rebellion looking down on the members of Scepter 4 and threatening them.

And the members of Scepter 4 strangely didn't even try to move, let alone chase after them.

A few seconds after Kamimori escaped into the black mist, the black mist gradually thinned as if it had been lost in the wind, and in about five minutes it completely dissipated into the night air.

Naturally, Kamimori's carriages were completely annihilated like a magnificent magic trick.

There was a shadow watching him, about halfway down the slope of the base.

The shadow that had crouched among the trees slowly rose and began to move away without a sound.

At that moment...

The searchlight suddenly activated, capturing the figure in a ring of pure white light.

"Tamaki Genjo. You are completely surrounded. Surrender quietly."

Fushimi Saruhiko stepped forward and spoke in a low, high-pitched voice. Behind him, the members of Scepter 4 were on standby.

That person.

The Black Iron King's chief of staff, Tamaki Genjo, raised his hands playfully.

"I know you, Fushimi Saruhiko-kun, the ace of Scepter 4. Excellent work. I will not resist. I will follow you silently. In exchange..."

He finally smiled.

"How did you figure out we would attack here tonight? How did you know I was here? How did you get my background on me in the first place?"

Fushimi snorted softly.

As Tamaki Genjo stated, he did not resist at all.

He was handcuffed, transported in a Scepter 4 vehicle, and until he moved into camp, he didn't say a word, just a faint smile on his lips.

On the other hand, Fushimi, who accompanied him in the back seat of the car, had a dull look, rested his chin on his hands, and stared out the window the entire time without saying a word.

It wasn't until they were alone in the Scepter 4 interrogation room that they opened their mouths.

"Now then, Fushimi-kun, it's finally time for the interrogation. What the hell should we talk about?"

Placing his cuffed hands on the table, Genjo Tamaki smiled.

"....."

Fushimi crossed his legs, crossed his arms and sat on a chair, looking at him with a somewhat arrogant posture.

Tamaki is in his forties. His shoulder-length hair has a bit of white mixed in, but he has a lot of hair for his age. He wore round glasses on his slender face and a crimson scarf around his neck.

His general fashion sense is like that of a hippie that was popular in the 60's.

(He's like a failed John Lennon. If the times were right, he'd smoke pot and play popular songs.)

That was Fushimi's first impression.

Tamaki's most distinctive feature was the large black eyes that shone behind his glasses.

His pupils were more dilated than normal people and glowed brightly like a child.

He seems to have an intelligent face, and also the face of a dreamer.

Or maybe they are both.

"So what do you want to ask me?"

Fushimi fell silent, so Tamaki urged him on again. Fushimi let out a small sigh.

Then, in a cold tone, he said...

"Well, it sounds like you're dying to talk, so I'll just ask you one thing. How sooner than you expected did you get caught this time? For you, getting caught was probably part of your plan."

Behind his lens, Tamaki's eyes turned perfectly round. After...

"Fufufufufu."

He put his hand on his forehead.

"Ahahahahahahaha!"

He laughed out loud. Fushimi frowned in annoyance. Tamaki writhed in a fit of laughter for a while. Finally...

"Hahaha. Ha, no, that's great. By asking that question, does that mean you already have an idea of our purpose?"

Fushimi nodded silently. Tamaki took a deep breath.

"Then let me answer. It was quite early. Like you said, getting caught was part of my plan, but honestly, I didn't think it would be so soon. Actually, I was preparing to announce the statement from this point on and to make a crime notice starting next time. I never expected to be caught while the organization was idle."

Tamaki narrowed his eyes curiously.

"May I ask? Why did you discover the characteristics of my ability? In other words, why were you able to identify where I was hiding so quickly?"

Fushimi shrugged.

"It's a video analysis. As a result of the fluid analysis of your mist like a sprayed drug, and a simulation based on the weather conditions of the day, I was able to roughly identify the place where you were hiding. From the characteristics of your ability, I was able to roughly estimate that you couldn't leave the scene until everyone had escaped."

"Please wait."

Tamaki raised his cuffed hands in disapproval.

"Doesn't make sense. There's not that much data right now. Security camera footage at most, right?"

Fushimi said quietly.

"This isn't the first time we've faced a mist-generating supernatural ability."

"Ah.", Tamaki opened his mouth. Fushimi continued.

"At the Mihashira Tower, I was forced to drink boiling water. Fortunately, there were many surveillance cameras there... well, I was operating them at the time and they were able to record the footage. Regarding the mist's supernatural ability, we had already taken measures to some extent a long time ago."

Tamaki sighed and said...

"Seigo Otori, huh? I see, that's right."

He spoke the old name of the "Grey King" in a nostalgic and somewhat sad tone.

Fushimi did not dare touch that point.

"Well, actually, your abilities are quite troublesome. We might have been in more trouble if you had fully used that supernatural power just for your own good."

Tamaki looked at Fushimi. After...

"Fushimi-kun, let me ask you another question. Since it's you, I think it's only natural that you understood our criminal motives and narrowed down the target of the attack to a certain extent, but even so, I think it was a great gamble to have staff at the ski resort in the off-season."

Fushimi didn't answer anything and started to write something on the tablet. Tamaki asked more questions.

"One more thing. How did you find out my identity? I found out about Strain's ability a year ago when the Slate was destroyed. I've been careful up until now, so I don't have a criminal record. I can't believe my information was in your records."

Fushimi did not stop working on the tablet and asked in a curt tone.

"Why do you think that? What is the most likely reason?"

"Hmm.", Tamaki moaned.

"Actually, I have some answers... You sent a spy in, didn't you?"

Fushimi finally raised his head and smiled.

"Correct answer."

Tamaki smiled wryly.

"I didn't want to imagine it too much, but I don't know much about it either. I've also completed investigative measures some time in advance for the organization you belong to, Scepter 4. I know the faces and careers of the core members. I think it's absolutely impossible for them to join our group?"

"Well, I have no obligation to answer."

Fushimi said that in front of that introduction.

"Currently, Scepter 4 not only has Clan members who have been through the "King" facility, but also Strain members. Luckily, one of them is a guy with great insight who snuck into your house and gave me some information beforehand."

"I see."

Tamaki raised his hands as if he was completely defeated.

"I was surprised though. From your organization's point of view, Strains are subject to crackdowns. How dare you use that?"

Fushimi shrugged.

"It's a top policy."

Tamaki was deeply moved.

"Reisi Munakata, the "Blue King", huh? I'm sure he's an amazing man."

"I guess."

Fushimi placed the tablet on the table and took a formal attitude.

"There's a point where your expression isn't accurate. We know next to nothing about your identity. At best, it's just what you're called within the organization. Who are you?"

His eyes sharpened.

"Why do you use the same mist power as the now-deceased "Grey King"? Do you have some kind of connection or special affection?"

Tamaki stared at Fushimi's gaze, and he nodded loudly.

"I'm not hiding anything. It's not about hiding it. Most of all, I want you to know. It's just some long internal talk. Do you mind?"

After waiting for Fushimi to give his consent, Tamaki began to speak.

"Seigo and I... Seigo Otori was a friend from school. We met in high school. We went to college together. Although our careers were completely different, as were our personalities. Oddly enough, there was a bond."

Tamaki said that with a nostalgic expression.

"I did stupid things. I traveled. Is a relationship like writing each other's initials on an important page in the book called youth?"

"You use many literary expressions."

Tamaki smiled at Fushimi's somewhat mocking way of saying it.

"Despite my appearance, I once self-published a collection of poems when I was a student. However, my major was criminal psychology, with a focus on profiling. After graduating from graduate school, I remained in university as a professor. Still, did I meet with Seigo at least once a month? Yes. Speaking of what Seigo and I had in common, it was the unparalleled love for sake. He was a beer fanatic and I am a sake lover, but our tastes were quite similar."

"....."

Tamaki corrected himself after receiving Fushimi's cold gaze.

"Oops, I got off topic. Well, anyway, I believed that our friendship with each other would remain strong even after we entered society, and that it would surely continue until we

reached an age where we both couldn't stand on our own. I thought so. However, from a certain point, Seigo suddenly started to change."

"About the time Iwafune Tenkei woke up as the "Grey King", right?"

Tamaki's smile was mixed with bittersweet sweetness.

"Honestly, I'm not very familiar with that name, but... in terms of time, it's correct."

He nodded once.

"Imagine it. What if an old friend says that he has awakened to a mysterious ability and starts launching a mysterious religious group?"

This time, Fushimi smiled wryly.

"Good, I understand."

Tamaki was very serious.

"I visited his "Cathedral" many times to admonish him. However, the more I went, the more his ideals fascinated me and convinced me of the legitimacy of the paradise he was creating on earth. Above all, his power was real. I thought his mist power was very "beautiful".

"Beautiful?"

Fushimi asked back. Tamaki affirmed.

"Yes. To be precise, it was "beautiful" due to "unlimited kindness".

Fushimi spoke no more words. Tamaki spoke again.

"One day, I said to Seigo, "I want to be by your side and be your strength". Seigo agreed with a smile. And when I dropped out of college, the day before I was about to move into Seigo's house."

At that moment, fear, confusion, and endless anguish appeared in Tamaki's eyes for the first time.

"That sword fell from the sky."

There are wounds that will never heal for many years to come.

Fushimi sensed that and remained silent. The silence continued for a while. Before long, after clearing his throat once, Tamaki, who began to speak regardless of the situation, returned to his calm on the surface.

"The death of an unbelievably large number of people and of my best friend. From that day on, I lost the meaning of life. I didn't even want to go back to college, so I spent my days hiding from the world. There was a time when I was still wandering the streets like

a bum because day-to-day manual labor was still good, and there were times when it was worse. Ironically, I used to work as a criminal psychologist. They never caught me."

"Hey..."

Fushimi said nonchalantly.

"You, that guy... the "Grey King" was alive."

"Yes, I first found out about it when I woke up to my own supernatural power and researched various things. Seigo didn't die in the middle of the Damocles Down, but in the confusion caused by the "Green King"."

Fushimi stared at Tamaki. Tamaki had an indescribable expression on his face. He seemed angry, sad and laughing.

"Honestly, there were times when I felt resentful, wondering why he didn't at least contact me. But then I changed my mind. He killed himself the day the sword fell from the sky. He had no choice but to kill Otori Seigo and become Iwafune Tenkei. He was the "Grey King", I know."

He murmured in a sorrowful voice.

"He was nicer than anyone and he was clumsy."

Tamaki clenched his fists tightly. Fushimi looked at his trembling hand.

"Oh, so that's what it's all about."

"Eh?"

"So you're trying to finish what the "Grey King" left unfinished?"

"Hehehehe."

Tamaki's shoulders shook so hard that he looked pained and he laughed.

"Really. You are very smart, Fushimi-kun."

Then he emphatically affirmed.

"Yes. I'm on the side of all outcasts. In terms of power, it's by no means comparable, but I believed that the reason someone like me could awaken to similar supernatural power as my inspired friend is because there must be a reason for the world. Fushimi-kun. I want to change this modern society where people with supernatural powers are excluded."

Fushimi remained silent even when he told him the point.

"Is it because he was easy to control that you turned Kamimori into a pseudo-king? It would be better if someone had a decoration to move your group around."

After a while, Fushimi started to speak. For the first time that day, Tamaki had a slightly sullen look on his face.

"That's a big misunderstanding. As you can see, Kamimori has charisma. He's sincere. That's why I asked for his cooperation after explaining all the circumstances. It's not that I'm unilaterally deceiving him."

Fushimi seemed a little surprised by those words.

"But he's just an idiot, right?"

He couldn't help but say that directly. Tamaki snorted.

"Idiots are idiots, but they are good and honest idiots."

Fushimi looked at the tablet again. He had one more thing to check.

"The places you guys attacked were all places where people with supernatural powers were unfairly persecuted for some reason, right?"

Tamaki laughed and nodded.

"For example, at that ski resort, one of our classmates got beat up by a gang. He could read people's minds a bit, and they found it creepy. Most Strains don't have flashy powers like mine or Kamimori. So we speak out of that anger."

"So you were planning to post the motive for the crime later on the Internet and repeat similar things? Until public opinion changes."

Tamaki agreed again. Fushimi cut him off coldly.

"A type of terrorism that draws public attention by committing acts of destruction, criminal acts and making their own demands. I think the sensitivity is just disgusting."

Tamaki was calm. He told his theory as he hammered the handcuffs on the noisy table.

"But if we don't do that, the general public won't care about us, the Strains, right? Will the discrimination be resolved in good faith? Hasn't history more than proven that the absolute majority is not oriented towards the absolute minority? Relief works only when it is incorporated into the social system. That is what we demand."

Fushimi remained silent, looking a bit fed up. Tamaki calmly stated his conclusion.

"In short, I want you to create a place for us, in this society."

Fushimi was still silent. Tamaki insisted.

"I have written 14 articles on the Internet about the appearance of the Strains and their social consequences. After I am caught, I will clarify these things in the course of the trial and at the same time I will go to society."

"Wait, wait."

Fushimi interrupted Tamaki with his hand as he began to speak widely.

"That kind of problem... If you're talking about lofty things, please talk to my boss."

Tamaki's face went blank. Fushimi sighed and said...

"I certainly don't like your way of doing things, but I don't think it's completely unreasonable either. Also, if you put the organization together one by one, there was a sense of giving purpose to the members who were in danger of losing control and controlling them, wasn't there?"

Tamaki's eyes widened.

"Besides, there was also a warning to the administrative part, right? It is said that if the legislation is not implemented as soon as possible, similar, more egregious and lawless Strain groups will emerge."

Tamaki's voice was a little hoarse from surprise.

"So you've read this far... In that case, moreover, I want to talk to you about various things."

"No. Those kinds of problems... no, legal development and lobbying are not part of my duties."

"Why? You have a sharp mind that understands the big picture and eyes that see the future."

Fushimi laughed a little when he was told the same thing as Awashima. He then told Tamaki under the premise that they will never understand.

"I do what I have to do. That's all."

As expected, Tamaki was blank.

Fushimi was laughing out loud, albeit quietly.

In the end, they couldn't come to a complete mutual understanding, but Tamaki believed Fushimi's words, "I'll let you meet Reisi Munakata."

"I entrust everything to you."

That's what he promised.

Fushimi, who left the interrogation room and walked down the corridor, immediately found several other cases and considered the order of priority in his mind.

After all, the chaos of the Black Iron King and his party was just one of the countless tasks that Fushimi Saruhiko had to face. Hidaka called out to Fushimi, who was moving at a very fast pace.

"Fushimi-san, do you have a moment?"

When Fushimi stopped and nodded, Hidaka showed him the tablet.

"This is a video from a surveillance camera in the city. When I was looking at it because I needed to review it for another matter, I saw something like this."

Fushimi narrowed his eyes. The camera captured the crowd of people coming and going in the business district from a low angle. And what happened from right to left in about 10 seconds was...

"Gojo Sukuna, huh?"

"Yes."

Hidaka asked Fushimi with a confused expression.

"What should we do? I don't think he's been there anymore, but just in case, would you like to search the area?"

"Leave me alone."

Fushimi responded with an annoyed look.

"Honestly, I have a mountain of things to do. I don't have the luxury of assigning staff to look for that guy right now."

Hidaka immediately agreed.

"I understand!"

He paid his respects and left. Fushimi let out a sigh. What he told Hidaka was not an exaggeration, Scepter 4 was always understaffed.

"I made a promise to that imitation John Lennon, and I'm sorry, I have to get that person back."

The calculations have already been done to some extent.

However, Fushimi thinks it's a lot of work.

It seems that if you become "King", with the loss of the Slate, there seems to be a part of him that has to search for various things.

At that moment, his PDA received a message and when he looked at it, it was from Misaki Yata.

"Hey. It's also a weird way of saying new retro games, but I bought them and let's play."

He got that message. Before that, there was an incoming call from Seri Awashima.

He had to go report on Tamaki Genjo. There were countless things to do.

It was necessary and he had been responding all along.

So there was no need to meet anywhere else.

(My place is here.)

Then Fushimi started walking forward again.

CHAPTER 9: SEE YOU AGAIN

A year has passed since then.

"I'm here~..."

Sukuna Gojo moaned from the pain in his knee.

After daily sword practice with Mishakuji, that kind of pain would appear at night. While he was crouching on the floor and rubbing his knees, Mishakuji came out of the bathroom and laughed.

"Oh, Sukuna-chan. You look bad."

"You look bad! You look bad!"

From the top of the perch set up in the room, Kotosaka agreed with Mishakuji and sneered at Sukuna.

"Shut up."

He was used to injuries like bruises, but he didn't like the pain in his joints. Mishakuji said as he slid a lotion-soaked cotton pad over his cheek.

"Growing pains, right? It's easy to over exercise when you're growing up. Did you stretch correctly?"

"....."

"Even though you are active in practice, why are you skipping it? Cooling down is important maintenance for your body."

Sukuna reluctantly started to stretch after hearing that with an exasperated face. It was too late for a post-exercise cool-down, but he felt that slowly stretching his body eased the pain a bit.

"Hurry up and take a shower after you're done stretching. The one who should make dinner today is Sukuna-chan."

"I know."

After swinging his sword out with all his might, Sukuna was covered in sweat and dust. Mishakuji wouldn't let him walk into the kitchen looking like that, and even Sukuna felt uncomfortable.

As he was about to go to the bathroom after finishing his stretches, Mishakuji called out, "Sukuna-chan."

"What?"

Looking back, Mishakuji stood next to Sukuna and smiled amusedly.

"As expected, you have grown."

"Eh... Yes?"

Mishakuji looked at Sukuna and he was as tall as ever. But when they told him that, just a little... he felt that Mishakuji's face and his eyes were getting closer than before.

He didn't care if he told him that he was growing. Though Sukuna replied curtly, "Maybe so.", and he triumphantly headed to the bathroom.

In the time of "Jungle", Sukuna had a way of fighting that was based on the great powers that Nagare had given him.

He fought by freely manipulating a scythe that was taller than his body, equipped with a blade made of powerful green lightning, with his supernaturally strengthened physical abilities.

Of course, he could still fight the same way he did then. The power that he received from Nagare has not yet disappeared from inside Sukuna.

However, he had no guarantee that the power would continue since the "Slate" was destroyed.

That's why Sukuna asked Mishakuji to teach him how to use the sword.

Mishakuji's strength does not depend solely on his supernatural powers. He is rooted in a trained body and mind, and polished technique.

Sukuna wanted something that could be called his own power, so that even if the time came for his super power to disappear, he wouldn't go back to being a helpless child.

After taking a shower, Sukuna stood in the kitchen after properly drying his hair with a blow dryer since Mishakuji was noisy.

He boiled water in a pot, added the onions and broth, and while it simmered, he chopped the green onions, ham and carrots. Iwa-san always wanted to add green peppers, but he didn't like them, so he skipped them (well, if Mishakuji had green peppers when it was his turn to cook, he would have eaten them). Carrots, he also cut into large pieces for Kotosaka and set aside.

He placed a beaten egg in the pot of bouillon soup and finished the egg drop soup first.

He made scrambled eggs by dropping two egg mixtures sprinkled with salt and pepper into a hot skillet and putting them on a plate. He put the carrots in the pan, starting with the hard-to-cook carrots to stir-fry, then add the rice to stir-fry. The smell of sesame oil and ingredients filled the room, making Sukuna's stomach growl. He also added green onions and ham, returned the scrambled egg to the pan, and drizzled it with soy sauce. Fried rice can be made quickly, and if he adds vegetables to it, even Mishakuji, who is picky about nutritional balance, won't complain, so it has become a Sukuna staple. No matter what, he couldn't reach the taste that Iwa-san did.

"I did it."

He arranged a bowl of fried rice for two and a bowl of egg drop soup on a small table, and served Kotosaka a bowl of chopped carrots, apples, and walnuts.

"Itadakimasu!"

When he clasped his hands together, Kotosaka also yelled, "Itadakimasu!"

"Sukuna-chan, you're also getting used to cooking. At first it was terrible."

Mishakuji said after taking a bite of the fried rice. It was apparently a passing grade.

"I've never done it before, so it's not good."

Sukuna was the only son of a prestigious family. Since the end of the war, most of the family members have held important government posts, and his father was also a high-ranking government official. In such a house, his mother wanted to control everything over Sukuna, brandishing her distorted love.

Of course, they had never made him cook. Sukuna only ate food made by chefs that his mother approved of, and he was not allowed to eat food made by amateurs.

He wondered what she would think if she knew that Sukuna was eating the fried rice that he made himself.

When he was at his parents' house, he ate food cooked by the chef, after leaving home, he ate what he bought at a convenience store, and after becoming a J-Rank in "Jungle" and entering that secret base, he ate Iwafune's home cooking every day. Now when

Sukuna prepares meals, Iwafune's kitchen is ideal. It's not because it's easier to imitate than chef's cooking.

That was because the food that Iwafune made was the most delicious that Sukuna had ever tasted, and it was what he believed was necessary to live.

"If it's something like this, I should have asked Iwa-san how to make food properly."

The fried rice made by Iwafune didn't seem to have been made with anything special, but it had an uncanny depth and was really delicious. Even if he got used to cooking, the taste of Iwafune would be far away.

"Yes. But doing trial and error on your own without knowing the answer is a good experience."

Mishakuji said that with a cold face and changed the topic to "Now that I think about it...".

"You're thinking of leaving this town soon, aren't you?"

"Ah. Where do we go next?"

"I'm going back to the center."

Mishakuji, Sukuna, and Kotosaka have been moving from one place to another ever since they lost the secret base where they spent time with Nagare and the others. Sometimes they would wander for days, and sometimes they would rent an apartment by the month and settle for a while, like this time.

"Ok, but aren't we just wanted people?"

Both Mishakuji and Sukuna are the core of the criminal group that wreaked havoc on the world a year ago. They had no intention of getting caught, but it was quite a bold move to head back to the center of the city where it would be easy to see "Scepter 4" and "Tokijikuin".

"You know, Sukuna-chan. It seems that the "Blue King" is on a trip now."

"Really? They must be fucking busy, what are they doing?"

Due to the release of the "Slate" made by Nagare, people all over the world became supernatural beings. Most of them lost their strength due to the destruction of the "Slate", but there were surprisingly many who retained their supernatural powers. Even if the "Sword of Damocles" disappeared, the responsibility of the "Blue King" would not decrease and should have increased.

"So, are you going to prepare something in the absence of the "Blue King"?"

Remembering the excitement from when Nagare was near, Sukuna instinctively leaned forward, but Mishakuji smiled wryly.

"Idiot. No, I'm just going to see how things go."

Mishakuji narrowed his eyes and looked out the window.

"A year has passed since that incident, and I feel like the shape of the world has changed a bit."

"Shape of the world?"

"Yes. The consciousness of the people who shape this world must have changed. Nagare-chan's plan was defeated, but at least the people are different from when they knew nothing. I felt the "possibility" within me, though just off for a moment. There are many people who still have the light of "possibility" in them."

Sukuna looked at Mishakuji with wide eyes.

"The area where the influence remains strongest is, of course, the area around the city center where the "Slate" was located."

Sukuna had never thought of it that way. Nagare lost, and thought it was all over.

Memories of the time spent with Nagare and the others surfaced, and Sukuna grabbed a spoon and said, "Ok, let's go back."

Kotosaka also spread her wings in unison and yelled: "Kuwah!".

The new residence was decided near the old Yomido Gate.

The gigantic door that was just above the secret base of "Jungle" had already been buried, but the fact that it was the center of the turmoil left a trace, and despite being in the center of the city, the price of the earth was falling.

Mishakuji and Sukuna rented a small apartment with Kotosaka and started living there.

Life didn't change much. Sukuna had Mishakuji teach him swordsmanship, sometimes complaining of growing pains and taking turns cooking and doing chores.

He has been running away from home since he was in the fifth grade of elementary school. It wasn't good for his knowledge to stop as a child, so he started doing correspondence courses on his tablet.

That day, Sukuna finished his math class, finished preparing the curry for dinner, and came out with a bamboo sword.

Since Mishakuji has been out since morning, he had no choice but to wield the sword by himself that day. Carrying the shinai in a cloth bag over his shoulder, he went to the small and desolate park where he used to practice, and practiced suburi and kata moves for a while.

He also did cool down stretches correctly and wiped off sweat. He rolled up his sleeves because his body was hot after working out. He had many bruises that had been hit by Mishakuji in yesterday's practice, but he felt that his arm, which was only thin and white, had grown a little stronger.

Sukuna started walking again with the bamboo sword bag on his back. He did not walk the way home, but a walk with no destination.

After returning to the city center, aimlessly walking around the city after sword practice had become Sukuna's daily routine.

It was an action of thought to look at the city while being aware of what Mishakuji had said: "The shape of the world has changed."

Although he avoided the patrol route of "Scepter 4", it was possible that he would be caught by the city's surveillance cameras, and there was a chance that someone who knew Sukuna's face would find him. However, he thought that he should get involved in a fight if necessary, and he had no intention of living in secret. Mishakuji probably knows Sukuna's daily routine, but pays no attention to it. His own responsibility is the principle of "Jungle".

That day too, Sukuna watched the city as he thought about the dream Nagare had.

Incidents caused by people with supernatural powers were more likely to occur in Tokyo than in rural areas, but other than that, there didn't seem to be any particular changes.

"The shape of the world has changed, huh..."

Sukuna pondered over Mishakuji's words and looked at the streets where people who seemed to live the same daily life came and went.

A black limo drove past Sukuna. Right after that, a sharp brake sound resounded.

Sukuna casually turned around. The rear door of the suddenly stopped limo was flung open. Sukuna's eyes widened when he saw the person who came out from inside.

"Mother..."

Sweat broke out all over Sukuna's body.

The woman was staring at Sukuna. Sukuna's mother's red lips trembled.

When he was at his parents' house, her mother was a symbol of control for Sukuna. She tried to control everything from Sukuna by suppressing Sukuna with her great love.

"Oh, Madam!"

A man ran out of the driver's seat. For a moment, he thought that he was a servant he didn't know, and realized that it was only natural since it had been over three years since he left home.

"Sukuna..."

His mother called out to him with a trembling voice.

Sukuna couldn't move a single step from where he was, just silently feeling his mother's gaze running through his entire body.

Tears welled up in his mother's eyes.

"Give me back my Sukuna...!"

His mother said that with a broken voice.

Sukuna felt his blood drip down. But at the same time, like a frog looking at a snake, his body, which had been motionless, was released.

At that moment, he realized that he was no longer "Sukuna, his mother's property".

"What a dirty bruise! Even though you were a smart kid, you didn't go to school for years! You're like a bum! Ah, this is not good. It can't be undone...!"

The bruise was proof that Mishakuji had trained him to become stronger. Even if he doesn't go to school, his mind is not inferior to that of a child of the same age. He also acquired programming and hacking skills under Nagare. Being taken care of by Iwafune, he lived a much more humane life than when he was at home. He can now cook his own meals, even if he isn't as good as Iwafune.

However, to his mother, all of that was probably the "dirt" that ruined Sukuna.

Only the Sukuna, who was treasured, cared for, polished and loved by his mother like a jewel, was Sukuna to her.

The driver appeared in front of his mother crying.

"Young gentleman. Anyway, get in the car. You should calmly talk to your parents after you get home."

That's what the man said. He must be an indentured servant after Sukuna left home. Although he called him that way and used honorifics, instead of looking at Sukuna as the employer's son, he was closer to looking at the enemy.

Sukuna shook his head silently.

"I won't go upstairs. I won't go home."

"If that's the case, I'm sorry, but even if I use force..."

Looking at the man who said that and got ready, he realized that he was a supernatural being. Probably his mother's driver and bodyguard.

In this day and age when psychic crimes have increased, there are many things ordinary bodyguards can't deal with. It was no surprise that his mother, who was the wife of a high-ranking government official, was assigned a bodyguard with supernatural power.

"I see." Sukuna was convinced that the world's common sense had changed a bit.

The man took a big step forward. From the outstretched right hand, blue light spread out like a web. It seemed to be a capture-type ability that was similar to the nature of the blue clan.

Sukuna took a big leap.

Dodging the supernatural web, he jumped on the man's head while doing somersaults.

Before the man could react to Sukuna's movements, Sukuna slightly turned his body in the air and struck the man's neck with the bamboo sword that was still in the cloth bag.

The man whose consciousness was severed collapsed on the spot.

Sukuna landed and looked at his mother, who was staring at him.

"I'm sorry, but I can no longer return "your Sukuna" to you."

His mother's shoulders trembled at Sukuna's words.

The woman who once controlled everything in Sukuna now seemed small and weak in Sukuna's eyes.

"But, if one day you feel like meeting me as a human being, I hope we can meet at that time... Mother."

Without waiting for a response from his mother, Sukuna turned on his heel and ran. He moved his legs as hard as he could to cut the wind and get away from the place.

There was sadness. Surprisingly for him, it was painful for his mother to judge him useless and make fun of him.

Sukuna didn't stop walking even though he was far enough away from his mother. He ran with all his might to clear the mist from his heart. He was still small, but he was growing at a rapid rate, and he kept running with all his might.

He ran on impulse, and when he stopped his feet as he held his breath, he felt strangely relieved.

Sukuna let out a long breath and then took another deep breath.

He raised his sweaty face and looked at the sky. The wind blew and cooled his hot body, making him feel comfortable and cool.

The sadness and pain were still inside his chest, but they had found a place inside Sukuna.

What Nagare tried to create was a world in which each person was responsible for his own life, exerting his own forces as he wished. Even if Nagare lost, Sukuna will live the life Nagare intended. He didn't care if anyone denied him.

Because what Sukuna was playing was a game of life only for Sukuna.

Yes, it seemed natural.

Sukuna slowly took a step forward. He ran so frantically that for a moment he didn't know where he was, but after a short walk, he recognized the scenery. Apparently, he had made it all the way to Shizume City.

A school seemed to be nearby, and he saw a group of boys and girls in uniform walking towards Shizume Station.

He became aloof from himself, not even looking at the appearance of the children of the same age who were going to school.

Sukuna's eyes widened as he saw a girl who stood out from the passing boys and girls with carefree faces.

White skin, white hair, doll-like features, and red eyes. The girl who stands out, whether she wears the same clothes as those around her or not, is Anna Kushina, former third king.

-- That person attends high school.

With a strange feeling, Sukuna looked at Anna wearing her high school uniform and walking among ordinary children.

He thought that she would be floating in the school, but next to Anna, there was a normal girl in the same uniform who seemed to be her friend and was talking to Anna.

Sukuna had a general understanding of royal authority. Since Anna woke up as Strain from a young age, there were various circumstances that she had and it seems that she didn't attend elementary school.

For some reason, he thought that she would continue to walk a different path than normal children. Like Nagare, who became the "Green King", and Sukuna, who became a member of Nagare's clan.

However, when he learned that this was the path Anna chose, he felt a sense of understanding.

Anna's eyes, which were nodding towards the girl next to her, suddenly turned to Sukuna.

Sukuna lightly shook his shoulders and said, "Oh, no, it's too late to go."

Anna looked at Sukuna with too direct eyes, and the girl next to her also followed her gaze and looked at Sukuna.

"Who is he? A friend?"

The girl next door asked Anna. Anna thought for a moment.

"Yes."

And she agreed.

"Who is your friend? Don't talk nonsense!"

Sukuna raised his fists and turned his back on Anna, running at full speed for the second time that day.

CHAPTER 10: MYSTERY CLASSMATE

A year has passed since then.

Anna Kushina attended a public high school in the city of Shizume.

Anna was hospitalized in an extraordinary research center when she was a child, and even after leaving there, she lived alone in "Homra" and did not go to primary school.

There was also the reason that Anna's sensitive ability, that she tends to see other people's minds, was not suitable for the closed group life of the school.

However, in her high school year when the "Slate" disappeared, Anna decided to go to school, partly due to Kusanagi's recommendation. Until then, Anna had been content to interact with everyone in "Homura", but she decided to expand her world.

"Anna has grown into a wonderful young lady... I wish Mikoto and Totsuka could see her."

Kusanagi, who saw Anna in her uniform for the first time, said so in disgust, and Yata pushed him away and said: "Kusanagi-san, I'm sorry."

At first, everyone in "Homura" was worried about whether Anna was doing well in school, but as time passed, they got used to the situation that "Anna goes to school" and it became normal and acceptable.

For Anna, who has spent her time in a group of older men, school, where boys and girls of the same age meet, was a new and often confusing place, but she did her best to get along with her classmates.

She thought it was rewarding. However, Anna's secret problem was that she couldn't create a relationship at school that she could proudly call "friends".

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A beautiful and mysterious girl was sitting behind her.

Due to that fact, Kakine Tsubaki's body was stiff and tense.

Due to the recent class change, Tsubaki became a classmate of a beautiful and mysterious girl, Anna Kushina, and her attendance numbers were also mixed up, so Anna Kushina was sitting in the seat right behind Tsubaki.

Anna Kushina was a girl who attracted attention since she entered the school.

She was born with long white hair and red eyes. A face that looked like a doll. She was of few words and had a mysterious aura that set her apart from ordinary beautiful girls. Even the so-called "normally" cute girls who were the center of the class, were treated with special respect by Anna Kushina.

Tsubaki was in a different class during her first year, but she often heard rumors about Anna Kushina.

She did not appear to have attended any elementary school. (As to the reason, the most popular theory is that she was sick, but she wasn't sure.)

She looked like a noble lady from Fukamado, but in reality she was the boss of some scandalous delinquents from Shizume City. (It's a silly story, but there are surprisingly many eyewitness stories that lend credence to the rumors, like walking around with scary men, or going in and out of bars even though she was a high school student.)

Also, there were various rumors, such as that she was the daughter of a yakuza boss, or that she was a fortune teller that politicians could trust.

Regardless, she was a mysterious girl with many mysteries and difficult to approach. She couldn't really talk to her, and when she got a chance to talk to her, she got excited and told her friends, "I just talked to Anna Kushina!"

(If she was in the front seat, she would have watched her back carefully, but since she was in the back seat, she was nervous.)

Tsubaki groaned inwardly.

She felt restless and nervous just thinking that she was right behind her, but since it was a big deal, she would like to see her face up close.

Tsubaki slowly turned around and looked back.

(Wow, seriously she is mysterious.)

Up close, Anna was truly beautiful. She was not a vulgar beauty, she was a beauty with pure power, like a grateful work of art.

Her long lashes cast shadows on her cheeks. Her eyes lifted, and her eyes met.

"Ah."

A small voice involuntarily leaked out. It would not look good to look away or look ahead. Tsubaki frantically searched for a topic.

"Um, er... Kushina-san, what kind of power did you get in January?"

When she said "January," she meant January of a year ago. It was during the incident that everyone suddenly had a mysterious power and caused chaos.

It turned out to be an abrupt question, but since the memory of the incident was fresh when she first entered last year, it was a topic that was often used to create conversational opportunities, much like "What elementary school are you from?"

Anna didn't answer and just looked at Tsubaki.

It was bad? As she broke out in a cold sweat, Anna slowly opened her mouth.

"Tsubaki, you had the power of the color red, right?"

She was shocked by the fact that the mysterious beautiful girl suddenly called her name and that she guessed something that the mysterious beautiful girl had no way of knowing.

"Uh... W-why...?"

It's true that Tsubaki emitted a red light during that commotion. Later she heard that people whose power color was red had a high chance of emitting flames, but Tsubaki's flames didn't burn anything at the temperature of a heater, they just fluttered.

Tsubaki, who had such carefree strength, did not encounter any danger, so she remembered that confusion as a bit funny and extraordinary.

Because she talked about it relatively casually, she had quite a few friends at school who knew about Tsubaki's power. Did Anna hear from anyone? But who would put a particularly uninteresting story about an ordinary girl like Tsubaki in Anna's ears?

"It's the same as Tsubaki's name."

"Eh?"

"A beautiful red like a camellia flower."

She said it as if she had seen it.

Anna's eyes seemed to be looking at what happened in January on the other side of Tsubaki.

Now that she mentioned it, she thought that Tsubaki's power that came out at that moment was like a camellia flower dancing in the air.

Tsubaki looked at Anna's beautiful face and once again thought, "She's really mysterious."

The mysterious girl Anna Kushina had the image of a solitary and lofty flower, but when she started talking to her, she responded unexpectedly. She seemed to be of few words, but it was just a personality trait, and she didn't seem to dislike her idle talk.

"Tsubaki, did you have that kind of courage?" That's what her friends who were in the same class as her in first year told her, but it was only at the beginning that she needed the courage to talk to Anna.

Although she was expressionless, she was not angry and was very cute when she smiled sometimes. Maybe because she didn't go to elementary school, her answers were a bit off, and being ignorant of trends is more of a "gap" than a "mystery", she was happy that when she told her what was hot in at that time, she heard intently with a straight face.

"I'm happy to be Tsubaki's friend."

She was eating crepe on the way home from school when Anna suddenly said that.

Tsubaki was nervous because she never expected that mysterious girl to say such a thing. The hand that held her crepe strengthened.

Anna elegantly bit into the edge of the crepe with many red berries wrapped around it and relaxed her eyes.

"It's the first time I buy and I eat with my friends."

"Ah, Kushina-san, you look like a girl."

"I'm not a girl."

"How is your family, Kushina-san?"

Tsubaki suddenly remembered one of the rumors about Anna, the theory that Anna Kushina was the daughter of a yakuza boss. That was ridiculous, she laughed to her heart and waited for Anna's response.

"Um... There are a lot of people who are like family."

"Eh?!"

"Sometimes people get scared, but they're all good people."

"They're like a family, so they're not related by blood?"

Tsubaki secretly broke out in a cold sweat when the weather turned suspicious.

Anne agreed.

"But we are connected by a bond stronger than blood."

(Let's not delve further into this story.), Tsubaki thought.

Although she still didn't have the courage to find out the truth from Anna, she didn't dare run away from being her friend. The agitation caused her to bite too much and the cream overflowed.

Anna's slender white finger reached out and touched Tsubaki's cheek.

"Your cheek has cream on it."

Anna smiled as she wiped the cream from Tsubaki's cheeks with her clean fingertips.

Tsubaki's heart was beating a different type of beat when she sensed the presence of a yakuza in Anna's house.

When she was about to fall into a perverted mood, she heard a loud laugh that snapped her out of her joyful feelings.

Looking around her, she saw a group of guys coming out of the arcade across the street.

"Oh."

Tsubaki involuntarily shrugged. Anna looked at Tsubaki curiously.

"Right now, among the people who came out of the arcade, Tsushima-senpai is a third-year student at our school."

Tsubaki answered Anna's question as she looked away so as not to make eye contact with them. Anna tilted her head.

"Bad rumors?"

"He still has the power of "January", and that's why he's doing bad things. It's a power that makes his hands hot like a hot iron, if he threatens, everyone will listen to what he says, so he's talking about doing what he wants behind the scenes."

Tsubaki only had the carefree power to make her look a bit beautiful, but it seemed like quite a few people had the power to use violence. Most people's powers wore off quickly, but it was a bit scary to think about what would have happened if everyone's powers had continued.

In fact, even Tsushima, a senior who seemed to have some strength, was feared by everyone because he always carried a weapon.

However, instead of freaking out when she heard Tsubaki's story, Anna looked directly at Tsushima.

"Hey... Kushina-san!"

She was about to say that it would be better not to make eye contact, but before that, Tsushima caught Anna's gaze. Even so, Anna didn't take her gaze from him. Tsushima turned his foot towards her as if he was attracted to her.

Tsubaki turned pale and grabbed the hem of Anna's uniform.

"You're Kohai from our school, right? I've seen that face before."

Tsushima, standing in front of Anna, said that. The bad boy who seemed to have his entourage also surrounded the bench where Anna and Tsubaki were sitting.

Tsubaki was completely scared and crouched down, but Anna looked at Tsushima with a doll-like expressionless face. Tsushima's eyes were so direct that he frowned.

"Hey, say something."

"It's better not to do bad things using your power."

Somehow, even though she may not have responded to the request, Anna suddenly said something like that.

Tsubaki's face, which she had thought was completely drained of blood, began to bleed even more. She pulled at the hem of Anna's uniform so she won't say something weird. Desperately she sent a silent signal, but Anna paid no attention.

"Hey, what kind of advice do you give Tsushima-kun?!"

"Just because you're kind of cute doesn't mean you're disrespectful!"

The entourage roared. Tsubaki looked at Anna next to her with the feeling that she was about to die. Anna was still looking at Tsushima with a beautiful expressionless expression that showed not the slightest bit of agitation.

Perhaps because the surroundings were excited, Tsushima's face relaxed, and he slightly raised his hand to control the surroundings.

"Hmph, to give me an opinion. You are an interesting woman."

Tsubaki, on the other hand, freaked out and withdrew a bit.

"What is your name?"

"Anna Kushina."

"I will remember."

Tsushima left with his entourage. As his back disappeared, Tsubaki let out a long, deep breath.

"Kushina-san! Don't say those things to scary people! Don't stare at them in the first place!"

Tsubaki complained with half teary eyes, but Anna tilted her head blankly.

Seeing those innocent eyes, Tsubaki withdrew any further complaints and let out a sigh.

"I shouldn't have said something rude..."

She knew that Anna had a mysterious side... or rather, she didn't know what she was going to do, but she let it slip and reflected on herself. Tsubaki straightened her back and turned to face Anna.

"Anyway, Kushina-san. Be careful from now on. That person seems to have set his sights on Kushina-san. Even if he invites you, turn him down while trying not to make him angry. Try not to be alone as much as possible."

She said that feeling that she should protect that mysterious girl. Anna kept looking at Tsubaki with innocent and beautiful eyes.

Soon everyone at school knew that Tsushima had his eyes on Anna Kushina.

That was because Tsushima, a third-year student, had often been seen going up to Anna's class, which was in a different grade, to pick on her and get involved with Anna when she was trying to go home from school.

Anna didn't seem particularly worried or angry, but of course she didn't seem happy either, and she treated him nonchalantly with her usual doll face. If someone spoke to her or invited her, she didn't ignore it, she would simply say: "I don't want to go, so I won't go."

Tsubaki was scared next to her and couldn't do anything, but at least she was more aware of being with her so she wouldn't be left alone.

"I hope she gives up on Kushina-san soon..."

On the way home from cram school, Tsubaki muttered under her breath to herself.

Anna didn't seem to mind, but the commoner Tsubaki, just being next to him made her stomach ache. Furthermore, due to Anna's bluntness, Tsushima, who was smiling at first, gradually felt his mood worsen.

Tsubaki let out a deep breath.

Due to the exhaustion of studying in cram school and Anna's case, her body felt like she was craving sugar and she was thirsty. Tsubaki found the light of a vending machine floating on the street at night and bought an orange carbonated drink. That went before dinner, but she thought a sweet drink would be fine, so when she drank half at once, she heard footsteps and voices.

"That Anna, it's bothering me that she's being too arrogant."

That was the voice that had been bothering Tsubaki lately. Tsushima was approaching while he was chatting with his entourage.

Tsubaki quickly hid behind the vending machine.

"It's because Tsushima-kun is nice to her, aren't you getting carried away?"

"She feels like a princess who takes pampering for granted, so maybe you should teach her about fear of men around here, okay?"

Hearing the words of his entourage, Tsushima burst out laughing.

"That's right. She doesn't know I'm a scary man."

(What are these guys planning?)

Tsubaki trembled with equal amounts of anger and fear welling up. Her hand slipped with the rhythm and the soda can, which was half full, fell out.

Tsushima and the others turned to the sound of the can hitting the asphalt with a thud.

"Eh? You're Anna's waistband."

Tsushima, who came over to the side of the vending machine where Tsubaki was hiding, said that in a mocking tone.

(What kind of waistband? I'm Kushina-san's friend. You're the only one next to her who just tries to please her. By the way, why do you call her Anna? Even though I still call her by her last name.)

Various thoughts popped into her mind, but she looked at Tsushima without saying anything. At that moment, anger prevailed over fear, making her eyes sparkle.

Looking bluntly at Tsubaki's face, Tsushima thought of something, snorted, and laughed.

"Ok. Hey, lend me your PDA."

"Eh?"

"Hurry up."

Tsushima snatched the bag from Tsubaki and grabbed the PDA that was in the pocket. "Give it back to me!" Tsushima's entourage held back Tsubaki, who extended her hand.

Tsushima fiddled with Tsubaki's PDA for a while, then smiled and looked at Tsubaki.

"I'll call Anna with your PDA."

There are several abandoned buildings in Shizume City.

It seems that they have played a role in the deterioration of public order, such as being used by homeless people as a place to live and criminals to hang out.

Tsubaki was taken to a nearby abandoned building by Tsushima and his entourage.

Sitting on a dusty tube chair set along the wall, she crouched down tightly holding the bag that was handed back to her. Only her PDA continued to be taken over by Tsushima, and she couldn't call for help or send a warning to Anna that she shouldn't come. There were four in Tsushima's entourage, two of whom were on Tsubaki's left and right, and she seemed unable to escape.

"Don't be so scared. As long as Anna is calm, neither you nor Anna will get hurt."

Tsubaki gritted her teeth at Tsushima's laughter. Her heart had been beating so hard inside her chest for a while that she was aching, and due to her fear, her breathing had become shallow and it was a bit difficult to breathe.

However, anger welled up to the point of swallowing even that fear, and Tsubaki's mouth moved.

"Kuh... Kushina-san won't do what you want...!"

"Ah?"

Tsushima raised his eyebrows and moved closer to Tsubaki. His right palm glowed red hot. In the dark and abandoned building, Tsushima's hand turned red and light, like cast iron. Tsubaki took a deep breath. The entourage to Tsubaki's left and right jumped back as if they were scared.

Cursing, Tsushima's palm hit the wall behind Tsubaki. The sound of the concrete wall burning next to her face made Tsubaki fall off her chair without screaming. The wall that Tsushima touched had a clear mark from his palm, like a hot iron.

"Haha, are you scared? My right hand is getting ridiculously hot."

Tsubaki, trembling, rubbed her buttocks on the ground and stepped back to get away from Tsushima. Seeing Tsubaki like this, Tsushima took a deep breath.

"Because of what happened in January, I became a monster, no one can beat me. Don't think you're going to go against me too."

"What are you doing to Tsubaki?"

As if interrupting Tsushima's words, a calm and beautiful voice resounded.

At some point, there was a small shadow at the entrance of the room. Anna had arrived. Because Tsubaki was caught by those guys, Anna was drawn to a place like that.

Tsushima smiled and turned to look at Anna.

"I was just teaching her about my powers. Because this girl seemed to underestimate me. Anna, you too. I've been acting wrong, so you've been arrogant up until now, but..."

Tsushima couldn't say for sure.

The room was suddenly filled with red flames. The interior of the dark and abandoned building was brightly lit, and Tsubaki narrowed her eyes for a moment, then widened them.

There was a spinning sound as the flames burned. She knew that the sea of fire referred to such a scene. The whole room was on fire.

However, the flame did not scare Tsubaki. Tsubaki's body was surrounded by a dome of red light and the heat from the flames was transmitted just like the heat of a hot sun.

That was clear from the fact that the metal desks and chairs had melted and lost their shape that the flames that filled the room weren't fake. That flame contained a higher temperature, much higher than ordinary fire.

Tsushima and his entourage were shouting. They weren't burned, but they weren't enveloped in a dome of light like Tsubaki either. They were surrounded and stunned by the billowing flames that seemed to attack them at any moment.

Anna walked slowly through the flames. As she watched Anna walk through the fire in the cool air of walking across a meadow, she realized that the fire was a part of her.

Anna stopped in front of Tsushima, who was crouched on the ground and desperately trying to get away from the flames.

"I won't forgive anyone who hurts my friends."

Tsushima was speechless for a while, opening and closing his mouth, but finally managed to get a few words out.

"I'm sorry..."

The flames that filled the room suddenly disappeared.

Anna turned her feet towards Tsubaki, paying no further attention to Tsushima and the others who were sitting still.

Facing the stunned Tsubaki, Anna lowered her head in apology. She knew that she was depressed because he had scared her, but Anna's bright red flame had completely consumed all the fear in Tsubaki.

"It was a beautiful red flame..."

Such a stupid impression came out of Tsubaki's mouth.

Although Tsubaki had witnessed a terrifyingly hot sea of fire, for some reason Tsubaki remembered the dim warm red light that she emitted in January.

"Anna! Don't go alone!"

There was a voice calling for Anna and multiple footsteps, and grown men ran into the abandoned building. A small man in a knitted hat and a large plump man in front, followed by six other men.

"I'm sorry, Misaki. My friend might be in danger."

"You are ok?"

"Yes."

The person in the knitted hat nodded and snapped his fingers as he turned to look at Tsushima and the others.

Tsushima and the others were still hunched over, their faces trembling as they looked at the terrifying men who suddenly appeared.

Not knowing what to do, Anna took Tsubaki's hand, stood up, and led her to the exit of the abandoned building.

"Don't do anything terrible."

Before leaving, Anna turned around and said that to the men.

"Haha, don't worry! I won't do anything immature. However, it is the duty of an adult to properly scold a bad boy."

Said the man in the knitted hat. Anna tugged at Tsubaki's hand and left the abandoned building.

"Hey! What are you doing bringing a girl to a place like this?!"

"Don't be shameless, damn kid!"

"Don't look at Anna with strange eyes!"

Tsubaki cringed when she heard an angry roar.

Those men were probably Anna's "family people who were connected by ties stronger than blood".

"Well, Kushina-san is... the daughter of a yakuza boss... is that so...?"

When she couldn't help but ask, Anna gave her a dumbfounded look, then smiled a little and shook her head.

"No."

"But..."

"I was once a 'King'."

This time it was Tsubaki's turn to flinch.

Anna didn't say anything else and walked down the street at night, hand in hand with Tsubaki. When they got to the point where they could no longer see the abandoned building, the hands holding her slipped. As soon as she released her warm soft hands, she felt a sudden chill.

"I'm sorry I made you scared because of me today."

Anna lowered her head towards Tsubaki. Tsubaki panicked.

"Oh, that's...!"

"But... Tsubaki, if you want, I would like to continue being your friend."

Tsubaki became uneasy. She opened her mouth thinking that it was time to say it.

"Mmm, of course! Um, if you don't mind, Kushina-san... can I call you Anna-chan...?"

At Tsubaki's suggestion, the mysterious Anna Kushina laughed like a normal girl, as if she had lifted a mysterious veil.

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Anna Kushina attends a public high school in the city of Shizume.

Even after a year, she secretly worried that she wouldn't be able to create a relationship at school that she could proudly call "friends", but recently she finally made a friend in her class.

Due to the troubles from the other day, all of "Homura's" worries had returned, and it was a bit annoying to worry about strange men approaching Anna again, although it was a fun day.

"Anna-chan, thank you for today. It was the first time I had entered a bar, so my heart was pounding."

Anna had invited Tsubaki to the HOMRA bar where she lives. (The suspicion that Anna was the daughter of a yakuza boss had not been cleared up, so it also had to be explained.)

Kusanagi was delighted that Anna had introduced him to her school friend for the first time and served them pancakes with elaborate decorations.

"Come visit us whenever you want."

As she left the bar and was about to walk Tsubaki down the main street and say goodbye to her, Anna's sensory ability sensed him.

"He returned."

"Eh?"

Tsubaki tilted her head at Anna's mutter.

A moment later, there was a commotion across the street.

"What is that procession?" "A sightseeing tour?" "There are too many people, right?" She heard many voices murmuring.

She heard the sound of a large number of overlapping footsteps and saw a strange group marching towards them.

Walking in the lead was a tall man with glasses. The appearance of civilian clothes without wearing a blue uniform was unusual for Anna.

The "Blue King" Reisi Munakata.

And behind him, a mysterious group was following him.

From their facial features, skin color, and the clothes they wore, it was clear that they were people from various countries and cultural spheres, with various occupations. There were people who looked like high-class people, other people who looked like bad guys, and also people who looked like magicians who came from a land beyond the reach of civilization.

They were all of different races, ages, and genders, and they all looked at Munakata, who was in the lead, waiting for something.

"Oya, what a coincidence."

Munakata stopped in front of Anna and said that happily. Tsubaki looked at Anna with a surprised face.

"Ah, Anna-chan, do you know him?"

Tsubaki secretly asked in Anna's ear. Anna nodded curtly.

It is true that she knew Munakata, but she did not know the group behind him. Apparently, a lot of things happened while she didn't see him for a while.

"I heard you were on a trip."

"Yes. I'd like to talk about one of the memories, but excuse me for rushing."

Munakata said that and again led the group and walked briskly.

Dismissing Munakata and the mysterious group, Tsubaki let out a sigh.

"So you know someone like that. Anna-chan, you are really mysterious..."

Anna tilted her head vaguely after receiving an incomprehensible impression.

CHAPTER 11: REISI MUNAKATA'S RETURN

A year has passed since then.

"Granny, I brought him!"

When David, the third youngest of her seventeen grandchildren, roared through the front door, Mariana Campos Moreno was dozing in an Equipalace chair woven from orchid fiber and upholstered in tanned pigskin.

She fell asleep in the soft breeze that came through the arched windows.

Beyond that, she could see a courtyard filled with blooming marigolds. It was a flower that her deceased husband loved so much, and even now that her limbs have become useless, Mariana takes care of it herself, not her daughters.

For a moment, Mariana thought with a confused head after waking up.

(Oh, yes. Didn't David say he would bring a lifeguard?)

David Moreno was a headache not only for Mariana, but for his entire family. Even after graduating from school, he was dizzy, and on top of that, he started associating with the young gangsters who ruled that city.

Mariana warned them that he wouldn't get better, but as expected, a larger drug cartel took notice of him, kidnapped her and her friends and nearly executed them.

He looks like he was saved by a single man in the middle of it.

To be honest, it was a shameful story, but David was actually alive, and that was the reason why he cut ties with the gangs. It is said that the benefactor had business with Mariana.

In that case, she should at least make use of her modest special ability.

"Here. I'm here!"

In response to David's youthful voice, the rasp in her voice made her smile wryly. It may not be long before "Day of the Dead" turns from mourning to bereavement.

Hearing that voice, David entered the small room where Mariana was.

"Granny! Look, he's the "customer" you were talking about."

Mariana narrowed her eyes.

In contrast to the exterior, which shone pure white in the reflected sun, the interior was gloomy, and everything was covered in gray shadows.

"Sorry. My eyesight is bad these days."

All she knew was that a tall man was standing behind David.

"Hello. It's an honor to meet you, Madam."

The man said in fluent Spanish. Mariana was silent for a while.

"What's up, Granny?"

David said anxiously. Mariana stared at the man, then...

"First of all, let me thank you for helping my grandson. Thank you very much."

At her thanks, the man shook his head at her.

"It was a total turnaround. Not something to be thankful for."

It was an elegant and calm voice.

"I heard from David that you are the best tarot reader in Chiapas."

"Yes, I think I'm in the top three even in Mexico. I've told the fortune of a member of parliament, a soccer superstar, and an international actress. It seems you're looking for something."

"Yes.", said the man.

"I'm looking for 'myself' for a while."

Mariana closed her eyes and smiled.

"Oh."

She just rejected him.

"Such "extraordinarily big thing" is not for me, I can't predict it."

David rolled his eyes.

"Wait! Granny."

"I see. It's a shame."

She could tell by his distant way of speaking. Perhaps David, who wanted to have a relationship with the man, even a little, kind of forced him to come here. The man himself perhaps had not the slightest obsession with divination.

Mariana said.

"Also, I'm really sorry, but when I'm around a ridiculously big man like you, my remaining senses go haywire. I'm sorry, but could you go?"

She said it bluntly. The man showed a funny smile without getting angry at all.

"Haha, sorry about this. Have a nice evening, Madam."

He bowed politely and left the room. At the same time, David angrily approached his grandmother.

"That's terrible, Granny! Even though that person saved my life! Even though it's the first time I've met someone I can respect!"

Then Mariana yelled at her poor grandson.

"You, idiot! You will follow that person until you finish paying them for helping you. You'll never let him out of your sight. Here you go! Let's go!"

David's eyes sparkled. It was the first time that his life had meaning.

He turned and chased after the man, yelling loudly.

"Wait!"

She heard footsteps going away.

"Wait, Sir! Mr. Reisi Munakata!"

Mariana leaned back in the chair. The moment she saw his face, she knew.

"That man was a person with a "fate"."

In response to Slate's call, he became the "King".

He clearly realized who he was.

But now...

The Slate was also lost.

What is his current self?

Who is he?

Where should he go if he is not a "King"?

"I..."

Reisi Munakata wondered, and kept wondering.

At first, he toured the country. He gazed at the twinkling stars on the farthest island, he sat meditating in an ancient temple built in a surprisingly difficult place, he strolled through the dazzling neon streets and slept soundly in the total darkness of the virgin forest.

He met, he broke up, fought and saved many people. Reisi Munakata was just Reisi Munakata and he remained Reisi Munakata, but as a result, many people appeared who were impressed with him, who felt indebted to him, who took aim at his life, and who had love and hate for him.

A promising manager who had a heated argument with him about the future of the world temporarily entrusted the company to his subordinates and followed Munakata.

When a wandering genius violinist looked at Munakata, he came up with a tune, so he accompanied him.

Trying to kill Munakata, an assassin walked behind him trying to find an opening.

Munakata did not reject any of them.

Eventually, the Munakata pilgrimage left that country and spread out to sea.

China, Vietnam, Iran, France, England, the United States and Mexico.

Reisi Munakata continued his journey as the wind blew and his feet followed.

And he continued to be Reisi Munakata in all parts of the world. As a result, nearly 100 men and women of all ages followed Munakata.

A martial artist whose dreams had been shattered. An old man wobbling on his legs. A college student who wanted to become a photographer. There was even a former gangster. A chef who made exceptionally delicious Chinese food. Also rich people and poor people.

Their race, age, and gender were all different, but they all had one thing in common: they possessed some kind of supernatural power.

Munakata and his group finally reached the tip of Cape Horn, the southern tip of South America.

Munakata kept looking at the sea at the other end of a remote area where the wind was blowing. How long had it been?

Suddenly, an old man appeared from a gap in the trees and slowly approached.

"Are you Mr. Munakata?"

When Munakata smiled and nodded as he asked hoarsely,

"I have a letter for you. Look, I give it to you."

He gave him the letter. Then slowly he made his way back into the forest. Curious, Munakata broke the seal and looked inside the paper.

After,

"Listen everyone..."

Munakata looked back at his fellow travelers who had been watching the exchange.

"I have received a letter of complaint. It seems that it is high tide. Let's go back to Japan at once."

It was a somewhat radiant smile.

Fushimi Saruhiko was definitely cornering Kamimori Katsuya, the self-proclaimed Black Iron King, and his group.

Upon capturing Tamaki Genjo, the person who literally covered the organization with a veil of black mist, they lost their Strain ability and intriguing protection.

It was not a difficult task for Fushimi and the members of "Scepter 4" to individually contain the exposed members.

Fushimi and Awashima thought the incident would end soon, though the top favorite Kamimori was still on the run.

Nevertheless...

That expectation was immediately nullified by Kamimori's outrageous actions.

Surprisingly, he attacked the "Scepter 4" garrison with only a few of his subordinates.

An unprecedented outrage in which a Strain attacked a public facility staffed by elite members of the Blue Clan, the headquarters of Strain's anti-crime measures, the source of order.

The reason was simply to help his fellow prisoners.

"Fushimi, how are you now?"

Awashima's annoying voice could be heard from the other side of the PDA.

"I haven't been able to return to the camp yet either. At the moment, I was only able to contact Hidaka once, so I gave him instructions, but I don't know the actual details."

Fushimi's response was filled with a disgust that he couldn't hide.

"Yes. I'll be home in about ten minutes. Fushimi. Let's make those who did something so stupid pay a reasonable price."

"Of course, Lieutenant."

And they both hung up almost at the same time. They both felt their pride as members of the blue clan hurt.

According to Fushimi's style, "Scepter 4" was also underrated.

That was the expression.

The unfortunate thing for them was that Awashima and Fushimi were on duty, and Zenjo, Akiyama, and Benzai, Captain Class, who were excellent at swordsmanship, were also absent.

Currently, Hidaka is the only member of the special forces on the scene and seems to be fighting hard with a small number of members.

When the taxi he was riding in got stuck in a traffic jam, Fushimi finally jumped out and ran the rest of the distance on his own. Then, in front of the garrison, he suddenly had a bad feeling and braked.

That insight struck a chord.

A shelf used to store materials suddenly flew out of a window on the second floor of the building, scattering glass and crashing to the ground right in front of Fushimi, causing him to collapse with a harsh sound.

"Let's do it!"

Fushimi looked up with a dangerous glint behind his glasses. Without hesitation, Awashima rushed over.

"Fushimi!"

She already had her hand on the hilt of the saber.

The two nodded to each other, breathing in unison, and tried to jump out of the main entrance.

And so...

"Oya."

They heard a nostalgic voice behind them and stopped involuntarily.

"It's going to be quite lively, isn't it? I've been sitting in the middle for a while, but do I have the qualifications to participate in this festival from now on?"

Katsuya Kamimori was just a simple man.

Tamaki, the superior officer, had told him to abandon him and escape the metropolitan area in the unlikely event of being captured, but he ignored him and retrieved Tamaki and his friends, boarding the "Scepter 4" base.

It was similar to raiding a warehouse where another group of criminals have a stronghold to help their fellow criminals who have been caught.

However, stupidity had to pay a painful price for the strategy devised by Fushimi and the young members of the special forces who carried it out.

The policy that Fushimi conveyed to Hidaka was simple.

In the first place, they were never to let Kamimori near the underground detention center (where Tamaki and the others were being held).

And until all the allies had the strength to do so, they would avoid starting battles as much as possible and build barricades and besiege the castle.

Fuse and Enomoto first.

Later, when Goto and Domyoji returned to his base, Hidaka finally decided to go on the offensive, neutralizing Kamimori's subordinates one by one and restraining them in turn.

Last time, he used the bitter experience of being pushed head-on by a god who boasted ridiculous physical strength. As a result, Kamimori had lost all of his companions and was trapped in a barricade in the middle of the second floor corridor and was left stranded.

Domyoji, Enomoto, Fuse, Goto, and Hidaka pushed him through the barricade, unable to move forward or back.

The shelf that fell in front of Fushimi had been thrown out of the window by the frustrated Kamimori, who was like a wounded bear.

"Dammit!"

Kamimori barked.

"You are dirty! Fight properly, blue clothes!"

His youthful face was dyed red with anger. Many had already decided. After that, it was a calculation how to reduce the damage and capture the god.

"I'm getting a little sad. I'll be your partner for a while.", Domyoji said.

"No, Domyoji-san!"

Hidaka hastily stopped him.

Although Kamimori has a finely chiseled face, he has a boyish face that could be mistaken for a teenager, with a golden shaved head and a white suit that he stripped off to reveal a bold patterned shirt.

Looking at his mischievous appearance...

"Well, even if he's the Black Iron King, he's actually an older brother who graduated from Yankee."

Fuse whispered.

"Perhaps they were abetted by the scheming Tamaki."

Enomoto nodded slightly. Nevertheless...

"But your reasoning is not completely unfounded. As long as the current measures against Strains don't change, I'm sure there will be more such people."

He muttered that under his breath, and the people around him heard that, his face was startled and he nodded his head.

People in the field felt it firsthand.

Some of the current Strains crimes are not due to malice on the part of the person involved, but rather a lack of social systems.

They were all silent for some reason.

"If you're a man, come right now!"

They were keeping watch as Kamimori yelled.

At that moment...

"Do you want a timer? So..."

They heard a very calm voice. They were all puzzled. A shadow was slowly approaching the scene of chaos, climbing the stairs.

"Let me be your partner."

Reisi Munakata, the "Blue King".

The boss of "Scepter 4", who had been absent for a long time, suddenly appeared with a smile on his face. Furthermore, he wore the uniform without any discomfort, and the sword belt was complete. Everyone was speechless at the sudden development.

With his hands folded behind his back, Munakata calmly passed through the barricade and stood in front of the divine guardian. Nobody had time to stop him.

Kamimori looked taken aback for a moment, but immediately...

"Oh! You are the boss of this place. What is it? Will you be the one with me?"

He said happily. Munakata agreed.

"Just like that."

Munakata immediately stopped Kamimori who was about to attack him.

"Let me ask you one thing. Why are you here?"

"Ah?"

"You should have known the risks. If you escaped like this, at least you alone would have been safe enough."

"....."

Kamimori lowered both fists.

He was silent for a while, then...

"No, seriously, I never thought of that. How can you abandon your friends and run off alone?"

"....."

Kamimori looked directly at Munakata. With a desperate expression that he wanted him to understand something.

"Well, just because I woke up with such a strange power, I got fired from the place where I worked so hard. I was so angry, but I didn't know what to do, so I was alone all the time. But Tamaki taught me what I should do. After that, the number of friends gradually increased and they started to follow me."

He cried.

"I'm a hopeless bastard, but if they call me king once, I definitely can't abandon my comrades, right?!"

"....."

Munakata had a smile on his lips and closed his eyes. And when he opened his eyes again...

"Your words touched my heart very much. It's alright. As the King himself, I will face you with all sincerity."

He put his hand on the hilt of the saber.

"Thanks!"

Kamimori joyfully clenched his fists. Munakata still had a soft expression.

"Munakata."

He drew his sword.

"Batto!"

Kamimori rushed forward without pause. Munakata swung his sword across it.

A moment later, the results came out.

A strange noise resounded and the entire building shook violently. Domyoji was the only one there that he could understand exactly what had happened.

"Oh..."

An admiration escaped from his mouth.

Munakata danced in the world of the speed of the gods, dodging the opponent's attack with a fine line, turning his body around and lowering the tip of his sword to directly hit the god's head.

Thus, Kamimori crashed into the ground, and the ground collapsed due to the impact. Kamimori was completely passed out as he was trapped in the construction material on the floor.

Munakata knelt down next to the unconscious Kamimori with a somewhat happy face.

"I'll tell you more when you wake up."

He patted him on the shoulder.

It was a spectacular sight.

After half a delay, the members of the special forces finally cheered and tried to approach Munakata.

But before that...

"Well done!"

"As expected of Mr. Munakata!"

"Good! Good! Munakata!"

People of different nationalities and ages climbed upstairs, jumped over the barricades and surrounded Munakata.

"Do not enter the garrison without permission!"

Fushimi raised his voice in anger and Awashima with a wry smile did the same.

The others were blank.

After that, Akiyama, Benzai, and Kamo, who had rushed back to their bases with Fushimi and Awashima, joined Munakata and gave a briefing in his own office.

By the way, Domyoji and the other members were busy cleaning up after capturing the divine guardians.

Meeting their "King" for the first time in a long time, everyone who stayed there was deeply moved.

Akiyama had a nostalgic face, Benzai had a smile on his lips, and Kamo had slightly teary eyes.

Awashima seemed relieved that Munakata appeared to be in good health. And Fushimi with a cold expression as if he dared to make up for it.

Munakata began to speak.

"Thanks to everyone, I was able to spend a very significant moment."

Then he added.

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I know it's been a burden."

He bowed his head courteously and deeply. On the contrary, everyone panicked.

"No, it's not like that."

"Please raise your head!"

Akiyama and Benzai appealed.

"Oh."

Fushimi took a deep breath and said wryly.

"However, it certainly was a burden."

"Fushimi!"

When Awashima rebuked Fushimi...

"You shouldn't say that to your boss who suddenly comes back to this place after wandering around. Being underboss was the hardest to handle."

"Is that so."

Munakata smiled.

"I made Awashima-kun do a lot of things. Thanks again."

He leaned in again. Awashima also blushed.

"It's my job."

She tilted her head back. Kamo asked when the atmosphere calmed down.

"So, Captain, what did you see and hear during this time?"

Munakata slowly said...

"The state of the world after the collapse of the Slate. The current situation of the growing and diversifying Strains. The changing species of humanity... that's the way it is."

The executives of "Scepter 4" kept their thoughts to themselves and remained silent.

Munakata suddenly remembered.

"Speaking of which, Fushimi-kun. You sent a messenger from Cape Horn to give me a letter. How the hell did you know I was going there?"

Fushimi smiled. It seems that Munakata's somewhat mysterious appearance was interesting.

"Don't you know who the head of the department is? It's easy. The head of the department causes various incidents and troubles wherever he goes, so if you look at the news from the overseas network, you can naturally read the route and date expected arrival."

"That's all."

Munakata nodded.

"Well, I thought the head of the department would definitely like that place."

Fushimi slightly averted his gaze and added that in a low voice.

"You read it, right?"

Munakata said with a smile. Fushimi asked back.

"By the way, you've been away for a while. Did you find what you were looking for?"

Munakata neither affirmed nor denied it.

Fushimi's face was dumbstruck. But before he could say anything, Awashima intervened.

"Captain. To me, the Captain will always be the Captain. That doesn't change, right?"

She looked at Munakata. Munakata accepted that sincere look with a soft smile. Then he turned his gaze to Akiyama, Benzai and Kamo in turn.

In response to that unspoken question...

"Eh..."

Akiyama expressed his personal opinion.

"To me, the Captain is someone to look up to and he leads the cause of this country. It's the same now as it was in the past."

"I respect you. I will continue to follow you."

Firmly, Kamo said that wistfully.

"From the moment you recruited me, my time has taken on new meaning. I pledge my unwavering devotion and loyalty."

Finally, everyone's eyes were on Fushimi. Fushimi looked a bit shocked, but he immediately flashed a fearless smile that was typical of him.

"Well, it's you, right? I laughed so hard. I don't understand why you picked them up. Aren't there about 100 people? Since you're the captain, you'll make a place for them, right?"

Munakata closed his eyes.

He was called by various names along the way.

Boss. General. Don. Okayashi. Adult. And most of all... King.

In the past, he advertised himself to the Slate.

But now...

"The boss is... our King."

Everyone including Fushimi nodded at Awashima's muffled voice.

Munakata's eyes widened.

"That's right. Now, I finally understand the "me"."

It was the time when Munakata's journey ended.

He traveled, walked, met, talked, fought and traveled the world.

He looked at what the world was like now.

He thought about what the world would be like in the future.

When he got some answers and returned to Japan, he was able to understand Reisi Munakata better than before.

He was naturally satisfied with what he had to do.

Reisi Munakata was just Reisi Munakata.

It was easy.

Munakata, who had reached that state of mind, left his companions behind and headed for the person he should talk to the most.

A building that almost reached the heavens where the "Golden King" who once ruled that country lived.

Munakata smiled and looked up. Currently, a silver-white airship is moored there.

That blimp will never take off again.

CHAPTER 12: THE WORLD OF THE FUTURE

A year has passed since then.

Shiro, the man who is Isana Yashiro, and Adolf K. Weismann remembered the landscape of that day's sunrise many times.

The dawn of that day, when the old friend of his who had been carrying out the dream he had started passed away.

(Weismann... what a beautiful new world!)

On the bridge of the "Schattenreich", Daikaku Kokujoji said that with a trembling throat. Outside the window, the sun appeared from beyond the sea of clouds, trying to illuminate the world.

(Someday I dreamed of a view like this.)

Having lived as the greatest "King", he was looking at the dawn light at the moment when his life ran out.

(It's a shame to close my eyes...)

Those were his last words.

The airship "Schattenreich", the place where Kokujoji passed away, is now moored on the rooftop of Mihashira Tower.

On the bridge of the "Schattenreich", Shiro was reflecting on the sunrise sight that he had witnessed with Kokujoji.

"Silver King."

An old "rabbit" quietly appeared and said to Shiro.

"Munakata Reisi came to see you."

"Yes."

As Shiro nodded, the "Rabbit" quietly withdrew, and Munakata in a blue uniform appeared with the sound of his shoes echoing.

Shiro smiled brightly.

"Hello, Munakata-san, it's been a while. How was your trip?"

Shiro was informed in advance that Munakata would be traveling for a while, and he consulted and took countermeasures for any inconvenience that might arise in his absence.

A short time ago, he received the news of his return and a request to meet him. He felt somewhat ominous from the fact that it was the day he had just finished maintenance on the "Schattenreich".

"It was very significant. What are you doing with this airship? Do you want to go on a journey with me?"

"No way."

Shiro laughed and said that.

"I will no longer leave the ground."

Shiro narrowed his eyes as he looked inside the airship, which had the same structure as the "Himmelreich" where he had spent almost 70 years.

"This airship was unreasonably torn to shreds during the decisive battle with "Jungle" a year ago, and I left it as it was, but I was finally able to repair it. I have no intention of flying anywhere anymore, but the Lieutenant took care of it for a long time, so I want to restore it to its beautiful appearance before I put it to sleep."

"I see."

Munakata agreed with a slight smile on his lips.

"Munakata-san, have you finished your journey?"

"Yes. I have found the answer and the many encounters I have had along the way have given me a new idea of what to do."

"I see. I want to hear about the world you've seen, Munakata-san."

"I decided that I should talk to you, so I came here."

Just when he thought this was going to be a long story, several young "rabbits" arrived with chairs, a small table, and tea utensils. He couldn't help but smile bitterly at those who were too smart.

Grateful, he sat on the chair that had been prepared for him and listened to the story of Munakata's journey while he drank tea.

Munakata's story was like an adventure tale that children would enjoy, like a presentation of research results at an academic conference, or like a philosophical murmuring.

Shiro listened carefully to Munakata's story, interspersing questions from time to time.

How people around the world live, think and act. It was a time to experience the situation of people living, through Munakata, which cannot be covered by the news.

"Even if it's not as strong as in Japan where the "Slate" was, the effects of the release of the "Slate" are still being felt all over the world."

"Because there aren't as many people with persistent supernatural powers as in Japan, the situation is even more difficult for people with supernatural powers around the world than in Japan."

Shiro put his hand on his chin and thought. Munakata looked directly at Shiro through the back of his glasses.

"You could say that humanity has taken a new step forward. Aren't you responsible for that, Weismann?"

Instead of an accusing tone, Munakata spoke in a calm and determined voice.

In the depths of Shiro's eyes, the dawn of that day shone again.

The night is over. A new world has begun. The scene that dreamed with Claudia and Kokujoji in the past may be a little different now, but when morning comes, they have to get up and start walking.

"Of course."

Shiro nodded.

"I am responsible. I had a dream about the "Slate" and I was responsible for moving it. I was responsible for giving Nagare Hisui's dream that effect. So I will do my best. I can no longer be a person who only dreams and prays. I listen to people's prayers and I will do my best to bring them closer to a world where those prayers come true. I think that's my job."

"Very good."

Munakata nodded in satisfaction and stood up.

"I will do my best as well. As a leader who walks in front of the people, even though I am no longer the "King" determined by the "Slate". As the head of "Scepter 4". As a person named Reisi Munakata. There is no cloud in our cause."

Munakata turned around and left the "Schattenreich".

Shiro stared at the space where Munakata had left for a while, pondered what he should do, and slowly sat up.

The "rabbits" appeared and waited by Shiro's side as if they were waiting for their lives.

"Please take care about this airship."

"Ok."

"And... thanks for coming back once again."

A year ago, Shiro relieved the "rabbits" of their responsibilities. According to Kokujoji's will, they were to help Shiro until he returned to the surface. After that, they disappeared into the shadows, just trying to maintain the system established by Kokujoji.

However, they went back to work for Shiro. There were many things that he could not have done without the "rabbits".

The old "rabbit" bowed deeply.

"You are his successor in will. It is our deepest desire to serve you."

"Thank you.", Shiro said again.

Under the transparent floor there was nothing anymore, where the "Slate" was before, Shiro said goodbye to the "Schattenreich".

+++++++

He woke up to the smell of grilling fish.

He widened his eyes a little. A warm steam billowed from the kitchen. He could hear the sound of rice being cooked and the sound of something being chopped on the cutting board. Kuro was making breakfast.

Shiro let out a yawn and straightened up. Then he noticed that there was a weight on his feet. Neko, in her uniform, slept curled up on Shiro's futon. She doesn't look like a kitten anymore, but she still looks like an animal cat in places like that.

"Good morning, Neko."

After lightly shaking her, Neko rubbed her eyes sleepily and got up. It was good that she was dressed, but he guessed that she fell asleep again because she saw Shiro still sleeping.

Looking at Shiro, a smile spread across Neko's face who had woken up.

"Shiro, good morning!"

"Breakfast is ready. Wash your face."

A voice came from the kitchen, and Shiro answered "Yes." and he went to the bathroom.

He washed his face with cold water, changed his clothes and straighten his bed hair.

When he returned feeling refreshed, breakfast was already prepared on the dining table.

Salt-roasted horse mackerel, dashimaki egg, miso soup with tofu and komatsu-na (Japanese mustard spinach), and freshly cooked white rice. It was a standard menu that everyone loved.

"Itadakimasu!"

He clasped his hands and took his chopsticks. He drank miso soup with a strong dashi broth, grabbed the horse mackerel meat and put it in his mouth, bit into the fluffy egg and filled his mouth with rice. He dove into a delicious breakfast that would energize him for the day.

"Today will be the meeting for the opening ceremony after going through "Scepter 4"."

As he nodded to Kuro, who was confirming his schedule, Neko let out a dissatisfied voice, "Eh!"

"Shiro, aren't you going to school today?"

"Sorry. I'm in a bit of a rush today."

"Neko. Shiro is doing important work right now."

"Boo... I know..."

"Now that I think about it, I got a call from Kukuri."

Hearing Kuro's words, Neko was in a good mood and she let out a happy voice, "Kukuri!" A smile naturally appeared on Shiro.

"Kukuri, how is she doing? Is her university life going well?"

"Ah. It seems they are busy preparing for the school festival. She told me to go visit her that day."

"Come on! Come on!"

"The high school festival turned out to be ridiculous, so I really want it to be a success this time."

As soon as he finished eating and stood up, Kuro handed him a bag neatly filled with the necessary documents.

Kuro looked at Shiro's figure from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet, and slightly adjusted Tai's position to make minor adjustments. He nodded once and pressed the voice recorder button with a straight face.

"Correct your outfit and jump into the world."

It was the deep voice of Miwa reciting a poem. Kuro smirked.

"That's how it is."

He was still the same Kuro as always. Laughing, Shiro said, "I'm leaving.", and left the room with Neko.

As he was walking down the hall while greeting the dormitory students who were about to go to school, he ran into Toru Hieda. Shiro still felt strange when he met him. Shiro's soul had been in his body for over a year until the "Slate" was destroyed.

Shiro felt an indescribable shame towards him, as if he was closer to him than Kuro, Neko or his biological sister Claudia, who shared her blood with him.

"Oh! It's Toru!"

Neko said that happily and hugged Hieda like a jumping kitten.

Hieda smiled wryly and said, "Good morning, Neko-san.", as he gently held Neko's body so as not to touch her carelessly.

A year ago, every time Neko hugged him, his eyes turned black and white, but he seems to have gotten used to it. Hieda was a very reserved guy who wasn't very good at interpersonal relationships, but surprisingly he adapted.

"Good morning. Shiro... Um, Weismann sensei."

Hieda greeted Shiro with a smile. At Shiro's request, Hieda usually calls him "Shiro-san", but at school he calls him "Weismann sensei" as a teacher-student relationship. After considering which is the most appropriate for now, it seems that he settled on the latter.

"Today is "Shiro-san". Weismann sensei is free today."

"Then it's work for those who aren't in school. You seem busy."

"Yes. Shiro is busy."

Neko, who started to walk next to Hieda, thinned her lips, but it soon turned into a smile.

"Wagahai and others are also doing their best. So keep up the good work, Shiro."

Hieda nodded in agreement with Neko's words.

Buoyed by their genuine support, Shiro said goodbye to the two outside the dormitory and started walking towards the station.

The monorail station connecting the mainland and the school island was packed with commuter students. Among the students full of laughter and youthful chatter, he met a friend of Neko's.

"Ah, German sensei."

Harumi Nakayama, Neko's classmate, relaxed her expression when she saw Shiro.

Due to her dyed blonde hair and her sharp eyes, the other teachers often see her as a delinquent, but she is a kind and good girl. Neko, who used to be reluctant to wear clothes, now tries to dress like a high school girl thanks to this friend. Like Shiro, he was happy

to have a friend who could influence Neko from the same perspective, and he was very worried about Nakayama herself as a teacher.

In particular, she has had a lingering supernatural power for a year, and there was a time when she was deeply depressed by it.

Shiro tried his best to make her live with a smile. Kuro also followed her, and Neko also snuggled up to her like a friend.

Thanks to that, Nakayama can now go to school in good physical and mental health, but there are still people in the same situation all over the country, no, all over the world.

"Are you going to work outside of school?"

Contrary to her delinquent appearance, Nakayama asked in a polite manner.

"Yes. I'm sure I'll make the world easier for you."

His words weren't enough to explain it, but Nakayama looked at Shiro's face and bowed, "Thank you.", without asking anything.

"So, today's physics class will be self-study, I'm sorry. But the self-study printout is a masterpiece, so I'd love it if you could do it."

Shiro parted ways with Nakayama and entered the station.

The students were friendly and asked, "Huh? Are you going out, German sensei?" Shiro answered each question with a smile as he rode the monorail from Gakuenjima to the mainland.

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"I read the article you posted on the internet about the emergence of the Strains and their social impact. It was a very interesting consideration."

Shiro met a Strain named Tamaki Genjo at the detention center for supernatural criminals in the basement of "Scepter 4". He was a man who served as a staff member for a group of supernatural criminals led by a Strain, who called himself the "Black Iron King".

Tamaki aimed his large black eyes directly at Shiro from behind his round glasses.

"I've also read the draft of the new supernatural-related bill you sent me. It's certainly reasonable to think of it as a realistic starting point, but just with this, some people will fall from the hands of salvation."

"Yes. I would like to hear your honest opinion."

At Shiro's words, Tamaki began to speak as if a dam had broken. For many years, there must be something that has been treasured inside, something that has matured. Fushimi Saruhiko, standing at the entrance of the room as a witness, let out a sigh.

After two hours of discussion, Shiro got up and stood up.

"Dr. Weismann. Will you save all the outcasts?"

As Shiro was leaving, Tamaki threw that question at him.

Shiro recalled the information that Tamaki was an old friend of Iwafune Tenkei, no, Seigo Otori.

The "Grey King" Seigo Otori, who tried to create a paradise to save and protect all the weak.

The "Green King" Nagare Hisui, who tried to transform the world into a world where everyone had power.

Iwafune Tenkei, who cared for and saved Nagare.

Thinking of them, Shiro lowered his eyes for a moment, then raised his head with a smile and said.

"I want to protect the place where everyone can eat with their loved ones in peace. I will continue to do what I can to get closer to a world where that can be done."

Shiro bowed to Tamaki and left the room.

"The long discussion with the criminals in prison is the same with our boss, but you are also crazy."

Fushimi, walking a little behind Shiro, said that in an exasperated voice.

"Moreover, he even showed us the bill before the deliberation..."

Shiro laughed out loud.

"It's a bill to save people like him and his colleagues. The opinions of the parties are important, and Mr. Tamaki is an expert who used to do research at the university. In fact, his story was very useful."

"You've even met Kamimori, but his story won't help you in any way. He's just an idiot."

Kamimori is a man who used to be the leader of a supernatural criminal group calling itself the "Dark Iron King". The other day, he was arrested by Munakata for his violent act of attacking the "Scepter 4" garrison. Before Tamaki, Shiro met and talked with Kamimori.

"He's not stupid either. He doesn't have a rich vocabulary and isn't good at logical thinking, but he has the power to understand people's feelings and has what can be called an "instant anger power" that directs the right anger when it's about things you should be angry about. Without it, you'd either build up your anger and make it worse, or raise your

fist in the wrong direction. It was helpful to hear why he was angry at the world at the time."

"Haa..."

Fushimi let out a breath of wonder or admiration.

"More importantly, is Munakata-san here now?"

After going up from the basement to the entrance hall, Shiro looked up to the upper floor where Munakata's office was. Fushimi shook his head.

"He's out now."

"Oh, sorry. There is a document that I wanted him to seal."

"Ah, then you should go to the deputy chief's office. Her acting boss role is over, but deputy chief Awashima still has decision-making authority."

Fushimi said and turned his feet towards the grand staircase. Shiro followed behind.

"Well, I'm saved. But why?"

"I don't know why the Chief brought them in from all over the world. He gave them roles, created a place where they belong, and started doing all sorts of odd jobs. That's partly why I'm busy, and unexpectedly, deputy chief Awashima is better at making realistic decisions like "Scepter 4"."

"I see."

When Fushimi called Awashima's office, there was an immediate response.

"Hello."

When Shiro showed his face, Awashima greeted him with a reluctant "Ah.". During Munakata's absence, Shiro frequently interacted with Awashima as a representative of "Scepter 4", so they had become somewhat familiar with each other.

"Shiro-san. How was your day?"

"I want to obtain the consent of "Scepter 4" for this document."

As Shiro handed over the document, Awashima quickly read it over and sealed it.

"Thank you. Even though Munakata-san is back, Awashima-san, you seem to be busy as usual."

"Yes. However, just by having the Chief, who is the pillar of "Scepter 4", even if we have the same duties, our sense of security is quite different."

Indeed, Awashima's mood was more stable and relaxed than before Munakata's return.

"Shiro-san, you seem to be busy. The opening ceremony is today, right?"

"Yes. From now on, we will have a meeting for that purpose, uh."

Shiro's PDA rang. Awashima urged him to leave without worrying about it, and Shiro lowered his head slightly and took out his PDA.

"Ah, it's Kusanagi-san."

Seeing the name displayed on the PDA screen, Shiro tilted his head. Awashima and Fushimi also looked at Shiro with a captivated expression on their faces.

"Hello. Yes. Yes. Huh? Ah, hahaha... I see. I'll go there from now on."

As Shiro ended the call with a wry smile, Awashima and Fushimi's questioning eyes turned.

"The meeting partner after this seems to be in the HOMRA bar for a while... I'll go find him."

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A "CLOSED" sign hung on the door of the HOMRA bar. Today, that sign meant "rented."

A black sedan was parked in front of the bar, and two strong men like SP were standing next to it.

Shiro gave them a slight bow and opened the door to the bar.

"Ok. Kanichi, you can do it. There's no need to worry so much."

A man in his fifties in a suit, former Prime Minister Kanichi Samukawa, was sitting at a bar table, receiving encouragement from Anna Kushina, a high school student sitting across from him.

Misaki Yata and Rikio Kamamoto, sitting on a chair at the counter a little further away, watched the show with their arms crossed, frustration on their faces. Behind the counter, Izumo Kusanagi was polishing his glass with a wry smile.

Shiro deviated and moved closer to the counter so as not to disturb Samukawa and Anna.

"Samukawa-san, he asked Anna to tell him the fortune again."

When Shiro whispered, Kusanagi lowered his eyebrows and shrugged in embarrassment.

"He wants her to predict the future of Japan. Actually, it's almost like advice, huh."

"At this stage, I'm still boiling, that old man."

"It's pathetic that you have to get a girl to push you around. Even if you're a former prime minister."

Yata and Kamamoto said that sharply. Shiro sat on the chair at the counter next to Yata as he calmed him down, "Ok."

"Originally, Samukawa-san seems to have relied heavily on fortune telling. Anna, who has great sensitivity, is much more accurate than other fortune tellers, so I understand the feeling of wanting to see her... But this time it's more like a ritual to make a decision than as a divination."

Kusanagi served Shiro an iced tea. As he luckily wet his throat, he looked at Samukawa's profile.

"Tomorrow, the 'Supernatural Powers Agency' will be officially launched. As its director, former Prime Minister Samukawa must become a banner-man to create a world where psychics and non-psychics can live together in peace."

A year ago, as a result of what Nagare did, the existence of supernatural powers became known to people all over the world. It was no longer possible to deal with the problems behind the scenes with "Tokijikuin" and "Scepter 4". Specialized departments will be established within the administrative bodies to solve various problems in front of the public.

Samukawa is a former prime minister and possessor of permanent supernatural power. While he acts as a spokesman for the minority of people with supernatural powers, he is well-suited as a leader to create a society where the majority of people who do not have supernatural powers do not feel uncomfortable.

"Even if it's the day before the opening ceremony, it won't work. Taking over as director is a matter of decision."

Kusanagi also showed a slightly exasperated smile.

Yata said that.

"I don't trust that old man!"

"You! Hide your backbiting properly!"

Yata's voice was strong, though he should have been speaking softly so as not to get in the way. Samukawa, who was talking to Anna, turned his body and pointed at Yata.

"I'm not talking behind your back! I think you're unreliable, so I just said that!"

Alongside Yata, who is defiant, Kamamoto, who usually tends to hold back, but jumped on the bandwagon and said, "That's right!"

"For the most part, are you really able to properly control your clairvoyant ability?! You're not looking under Anna's clothes, right?"

"Stop."

Samukawa said with a punch.

"Aggressive behavior wielding such blind suspicion turns into prejudice and discrimination against psykers. If you're one of the geniuses, you'll understand."

"Oh, sorry. That's right."

Kamamoto sincerely apologized. Yata also looked at Samukawa with a slightly reconsidered face.

However, Samukawa himself immediately lost his dignity and fell on the table.

"But... That's right. Mind you, I have my doubts about it, and I'm sure it will continue to be said. Depending on the type of supernatural ability, just having it makes me a half-criminal. If I bear the worst part, the stone thrown by the psychic will hit me first..."

"Kanichi."

Anna read the former prime minister in a transparent voice.

"The more stones you receive, the more people behind them will be protected. One day you will be a hero."

Samukawa's eyes widened slightly.

Shiro got down from the chair at the counter and walked over to Samukawa's table.

"Also, I will protect you as much as possible. With the weapon of knowledge and the shield of technology."

Samukawa now wears glasses that he didn't wear before. It is an item that suppresses his clairvoyance ability and was developed with technology from Shiro and "Tokijikuin". Until that unfolded, Samukawa was under house arrest, unable to appear in public places with women.

In the future, he plans to develop tools together with "Tokijikuin" so that all psychics can live their daily lives without problems.

"Yes."

Yata seemed to have received a message and looked at the wristwatch-shaped PDA.

"Shiro, before you came here, did you see the blue clothes?"

Yata said that as he looked at his PDA. Shiro nodded.

"Yes. I met Fushimi-kun and Awashima-san, and told them that I would come to pick up Samukawa-san."

"Then, Saruhiko said, 'How's it going over there?' Samukawa-san, even the blue ones are worried about you."

Samukawa took a deep breath and stood up. The frustrated look from just now was gone and had turned into a calm adult face.

"It's certainly time for the meeting. Shall we go?"

Samukawa looked at Anna and smiled.

"You have taken care of me, Kushina-kun."

"Your eyes are different from mine, but they are eyes that can see through. I'm sure you can see the future we should move into."

"You are strong even though you have great abilities."

Anna softened her expression and placed both hands on her chest.

"Because I have them all."

Surely, it included not only Kusanagi, Yata, and Kamamoto, but also important people who have disappeared.

Mikoto Suoh. Totsuka Tatara. Shiro, who was deeply involved in their death, gently lowered his eyes and thought of them living inside of Anna.

After leaving the bar with Samukawa and riding with him in the car, Shiro came up with an idea.

"I don't know if I can reach the level of "everyone" supporting Anna, but Samukawa-san, you have me."

Shiro smiled at him, and Samukawa grimaced as if the poison had been removed.

"You have changed."

"Is that so?"

Samukawa looked out the window and muttered.

"The "King", I thought was something that went way over my head."

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While making natto for breakfast, the TV started showing the news from the "Agency of Supernatural Powers".

Samukawa, who was shown on TV, made a directorial comment with dignified behavior that made the previous day's laziness a lie. Originally, he was a frank person who was good at giving speeches. He calmly answered even unpleasant questions from journalists.

"Shiro's work finally came true in this way."

Kuro took a deep look at the TV screen showing yesterday's opening ceremony, put down the bowl and chopsticks he was holding in his hand, and straightened his posture.

"Shiro. Thank you for your hard work."

Shiro's eyes flickered to Kuro, who bowed his head slightly and thanked him politely. Following Kuro's lead, Neko joyfully raised both hands and said, "Shiro, Otsukare-sama!"

Shiro laughed and scratched his cheek.

"Oh, no. I'm just standing at the starting line. Everything is from now on."

"That's true, but, checking the signs and taking a break with the joy of accomplishment when you've reached that point are important during a long journey."

Shiro was embarrassed and said "Thank you." for Kuro's sincere effort and encouragement.

"So, it's been a long time since I've had a day off and I'd like to go somewhere for a while, so I wonder, Kuro and Neko, will you come with me?"

Kuro and Neko nodded without hesitation, though they seemed puzzled.

He stopped by a flower shop on the way out and they made him a bouquet of calm colors.

The place they headed to with him was the place of the decisive battle a year ago.

The "Slate" was released by the "Green King" Hisui Nagare, the place where the pillar of light was located, and the place where Shiro and his friends plunged into the base of "Jungle" with the "Schattenreich".

Here, Shiro dropped his Sword of Damocles of his own free will and destroyed the "Slate".

The big hole that Anna and "Homura" had entered underground was blocked, the door was completely blocked, and now it's just a big crossroads.

He offered flowers at the edge of the intersection.

Kuro said nothing and lowered his eyes as if he was silently praying.

Maybe Neko felt helpless and sad, and she clung tightly to Shiro.

Shiro was looking at the place that had become a normal road surface.

Shiro.

Kuro suddenly yelled in a suppressed voice.

Kuro was not looking at Shiro, but was looking across the intersection diagonally with serious eyes. Shiro turned his eyes to follow Kuro's line of sight.

He found a familiar silhouette on the other side of the traffic.

A tall and slender person with a large parrot on his shoulder and a small boy who is still growing, were standing side by side looking at them. They were Mishakuji Yukari and Gojo Sukuna, who were the executives of the Green Clan.

It is an intersection where thick roads intersect. At this distance, his expression was vague, but Mishakuji seemed to have the same faint smile as always, and Sukuna seemed to be watching them with a rigid face.

For them, that place was a deeply connected place filled with various feelings.

As he watched them, Shiro remembered the day when Mishakuji suddenly visited Shiro's room.

(I feel like this question isn't very "beautiful" anymore. Asking a question when you already have an answer would be very unrefined.)

Although he went as far as to proudly enter the former enemy's residence, Mishakuji didn't say what he would have liked to ask and left.

To Neko who asked what happened, Shiro said.

(Well, I'm sure she meant something along the lines of: "Could you really beat the guy named Hisui Nagare?")

It was not a matter of winning or losing, but he believed that Hisui Nagare's ambitions could have been half achieved.

The world has changed. What had been kept secret until now was revealed by Hisui Nagare, and everyone had the power.

Most people have lost their power, but there are still people who have power. They are not members of any clan of any kind, but lone "Kings" who were suddenly released into the wild.

Even most people who have lost their power can't go back to when they knew nothing.

"However, I will continue to fight. In a world where psykers and non-psykers coexist, I want everyone to be able to protect their own chabudai."

He didn't even know if he was trying to answer Mishakuji, or if he was addressing the late Nagare. However, Shiro muttered a small vow for his thoughts to come out of his mouth.

A truck turned the corner and slowly crossed in front of Shiro and the others. The view of was blocked by the large body of the vehicle, and Mishakuji and Sukuna were no longer visible.

After the truck drove off, the two were gone.

He assumed the signs had disappeared. Kuro took a deep breath to ease his tension.

In this world changed by Hisui Nagare, Mishakuji Yukari will live freely in search of beautiful things and Gojo Sukuna will grow as he searches for his own way of life.

Shiro looked towards the center of the intersection once more.

The "Slate" was no longer underground. Not even in the tower near heaven.

Shiro believes that the "Slate" itself is not the source of power, but rather the key to accessing great power, though the "Slate" itself has yet to be fully elucidated.

If so, even if the "Slate" is gone, there is still a great power somewhere. In the future, there's no guarantee that a new path leading to that power won't appear as an access key replacing the "Slate".

At that moment, the ridiculous world that Nagare dreamed of could come true.

"Shiro, what's wrong? You look strange."

Neko looked at Shiro's face and said that.

"Yes. It's a strange sensation that is terrifying and a bit exciting."

"What's that?" Neko turned her head and Kuro raised his eyebrows suspiciously.

If he had met him differently and they had pursued a dream together, he would have been in a position as the Lieutenant and scolded him. And so, imagining something that didn't even exist, he smiled bitterly.

Shiro reached out his right hand and left hand to the side and grabbed Kuro and Neko's hands.

"Let's go home. To our house."

Shiro took the two of them by the hand and began to walk.

"Hey. I'm not a boy, so don't hold my hand."

"Wagahai will hold hands and go home~!"

Kuro reluctantly distanced himself from Shiro, while Neko happily waved the hand connected to Shiro.

In between the two, Shiro laughed out loud.