

There was a time when the denomination of 'only one' was popular among a group of fanatics rather than 'number one', but this phrase which is also very encouraging when extremely famous, or when weak willed, when thinking about it reasonably, it wasn't as if there was nothing to reproach to it.

The main problem was that becoming an only one might actually be harder than becoming a number one, and in most cases, there were usually a lot of people.

There was no difference whatsoever in the significance of being unique from being like everyone else, most people can only bring out their individuality by competing.

Wait, that way, the support on 'only one' rather than 'number one' would be too legitimate, but perhaps I should say that was exactly why it was beyond saving.

And following that, the second problem was that, shouldn't people come to know about the loneliness of being the only one, its one and only kind of desolation, the harshness of being encouraged by strangers, the horror of compelling yourself?

Be "peerless" as in only one, is a disgusting command just thinking about it —— I mean, well, your strength as a human might decrease for every time you make a friend.

However, I wonder, aren't friends something that should be made even by sacrificing human strength —— I recently started thinking that way.

I became able to think that way.

The one who taught me that was of course Hanekawa Tsubasa, but —— there was one more, definitely.

I believe there was Hachikuji Mayoi.

I believe that was something she taught me —— she who continuously lost her way all alone, she who stayed as an only one, for over 10 years.

Therefore.

"Let's save Hachikuji."

That thought naturally came to.

Unexpectedly, that is.

Immediately after I heard that a time paradox would never occur, that it would not occur at all.

There was nothing to it, there was no stimulus.

It simply happened in the middle of the sidewalk.

If I had to say, it came into mind —— from seeing the sign 'ROAD EXCLUSIVE TO PEDESTRIANS'.

"Huh? What, did you say something?"

"I said —— let's go save Hachikuji."

Though Shinobu said it skeptically, I repeated the same line once more, almost as if to deepen my resolve, as if I was telling it to myself.

"I mean, I was thinking —— why back to 11 years ago. And why on the 13th of May, that is, on the second Saturday of May. Even if the coordinates to the time we were supposed to jump to shifted, I think it was kind of a weird way of shifting —— I could understand if we had went back an hour when trying to go back a day, or back a year or even, I'll give you the benefit of doubt, back 10 years, but there must have been some sort of reason why we jumped back with pinpoint accuracy to 11 years ago, more accurately, to 11 years and 3 months ago. Of course, it was your first time travel, so not having it well executed was one factor, but, still, I felt that there was also another, different reason."

"A reason —— why did you feel like that?"

"Just my intuition, why?"

"Intuition."

"Maybe I should say premonition —— I had a premonition that it was not a shift, but rather an adjustment. That it didn't turn out like this because it didn't go well —— that it actually turned out like this *because it went well*. No, it's a feeling directed towards the past, so maybe instead of premonition, I should say regret for further accuracy."

"....."

Shinobu was about to say something —— and fell silent.

Since it's her, I think she definitely thought about saying something to interrupt me and make fun of me, but —— there's no mistake that she decided to stop upon seeing my expression. To that extent, I think,

I must have been looking stressed.

One that wouldn't let you think I just got a nice idea at all, that kind of face.

"It's only highly probable, but. Tomorrow should be Hachikuji's date of death."

"......The date of death, of that lost little girl?"

"I'll say this first, I have no confidence in it. Hachikuji only said, 10 years and a little more ago —— she didn't strictly say 11 years ago. She might have thought that there was no use in being specific, or maybe she herself simply just didn't remember anymore. While talking about memories from you who has lived 600 years is indeed extreme, it's natural not to remember memories from 11 years ago. But —— one thing that's for sure, is that tomorrow is Mother's Day."

Mother's Day.

Hachikuji Mayoi —— died on Mother's Day.

After getting into a traffic accident.

"In other words, if my reasoning is correct, tomorrow, Hachikuji will be run over by a car and lose her life —— on her way to drop by her mother's house, whom she had been living apart from."

"It was something like that —— I recall."

"Therefore."

Therefore, I said.

Of course, while staring at the road sign.

"Therefore —— let's save her."

"....."

"I've thought about a lot of things —— like if there wasn't anything we could do, since we came all the way to this world of the past. Such as getting hold of books that are out of print, or buying stocks, those are fine too but..... how to say, something more meaningful, something more useful——"

I can't express it well, but if I had to say.

Something, fated.

"——I wonder if I couldn't do that."

".....Did we not arrive to the conclusion that you could not? Just a while ago."

That a time paradox won't occur, in the end, simply means that it won't —— it means that we cannot do "anything drastic", said Shinobu, slightly in disbelief.

It was a distant way of talking, as if to express that she couldn't keep up with my seriousness.

"Yeah."

I nodded.

It wasn't that I had forgotten.

"Anyway, listen to me from the beginning. Who I first thought about was Senjougahara. If there wasn't something I could do for my girlfriend, Senjougahara Hitagi."

"You showing off?"

"No, no. Rather than showing off, it's more like..... well, if you can interpret this as showing off, then I can't help it, but anyway. In this time frame, Senjougahara shouldn't be living in the current Tamikurasou, but in that "mansion" that I've only heard of——"

"Hmm. If I recall, I should have heard that that "mansion" has now been reduced to a road."

"Yeah. So I thought I'd take a picture of that "mansion's" aspect from the old days and give it to her as a souvenir."

"Should you not be able to do that much? The data inside your cellphone might be gone due to mysterious powers when you return to the present, but it should be worth challenging. It does not seem to carry any risk either."

"Yeah."

Let's avoid a discussion on mysterious powers, a term which is already beyond dubious.

"Even if the cellphone's function as a phone can't be used, the camera feature could probably be used —— well, there's the possibility that the instant I try to take a picture, some kind of historical obstruction gets in the way, and causes me to not be able to take one anymore, but despite that, as you said, I believe it's worth challenging. ....It's just that, it too doesn't seem to have much meaning, or so I think."

"? Why? Will she not be pleased? That simple woman."

"Simple woman you say....."

Is it my imagination?

Or do I feel hostility?

"No, I mean, if you think about it, wouldn't she normally have a picture of her old house at least? It's not like she got burned out of her home, of all things."

"Hah hah ha. Indeed, such a hilarious thing like a house fire should not have occurred. That would have been too unlucky no matter how you think about it."

"If I'm not mistaken, the bookshelf in Senjougahara's home had books that looked like albums..... in that case, it won't make a souvenir or anything."

"Well, that seems to be exactly why you could give it as a souvenir, but fundamentally, what you said seems correct."

"And this is where I thought. If by any chance, I couldn't solve the troubles Senjougahara had, from this point in time of 11 years ago."

"Hm? The trouble that girl had was that heavy crab's..... no, that was not it. It was not the crab, but at the root, family——"

"Yes, family problems."

I said.

In advance.

"Such as her mother following a treacherous cult, or her parents consenting to a divorce —— well, they include all of that stuff. I was thinking if I couldn't strike at the root of all those problems before they happened."

"You will likely not be able to. Since it would end up changing the fate of one person..... no, the fate of many people."

"Yeah, probably."

I didn't argue against the opposing Shinobu. I couldn't. I didn't need to be told to know that there wasn't any way for a mere, single human like me to accomplish such feats.

There was no way.

"It might be worth challenging, but there's also the possibility that it would turn into a much worse situation —— the risk in poking your nose into someone else's family affairs, I know it well."

Besides, if I was to add that.

"I can't even begin to imagine what to do to put the Senjouhara family's situation on a better path. Especially at this point in time, 11 years ago."

As far as I've heard, terrible problems of that extent didn't happen in the Senjouhara family in this period — on the contrary, they could even be said to be in an intimate relationship.

Father, mother, and daughter.

This was the period where — the three of them would go see the stars together at an astronomical observatory.

"If this was 2 years ago or so, I could have sent that Kaiki bastard who came to this town flying with all my strength, but if it's 11 years ago, that swindler should still be a university student or something. Even if I sent this guy flying, I think the shift would get a trajectory correction in 9 years' time."

"More like, I think you would be no match even against Kaiki in his university student days though. You would have the tables turned back on you, and end up having your money extorted."

Your counterfeit bills, said an acrimonious Shinobu.

Yeah, well, can't gainsay that.

Honestly, I didn't feel like I had a chance against that man even in his elementary student days.

"If I could, I want to do something for her, is what I think — Senjouhara, because of the way she is, because she experienced an unfortunate period, now has a blessed present where she can go out with Araragi-kun. Though I'm saying positive things like that, even so, the 2 years she spent with the heavy crab were, contrary to the phenomenon, too heavy I think. But this is probably "something I can't do"."

"I suppose."

"Similarly, I don't believe that I could do anything about Hanekawa's family's situation either. No, if we're only talking about possibilities, it might not be that I can't get involved in the problems in the Hanekawa family——"

This period's Hanekawa is only about 6 years old — then, in her case, the problem has long been "happening". Like with the Senjouhara family, the difficulty for resolving problems that had yet to happen was absurdly high, but as for the problems that have already happened, it shouldn't be like I couldn't figure out a solution.

However.

"——however, I think that's absolutely impossible. The disease surrounding the Hanekawa family is far beyond the ability of one high school student and of one vampire."

"Indeed."

Shinobu agreed on this.

Without hesitation.

"I would still be alright against the hindering cat or Black Hanekawa, but I have been severely betrayed by that former class rep as well, you see —— I do not wish to get involved with her if I could avoid it."

"Yeah..... I think it would only get worse if we carelessly get involved..... it has nothing to do with Kaiki from before, but I don't feel like I have a chance against a 6 years old Hanekawa either. Even if I tried something, I feel like I'd be coaxed into her pace."

"Indeed."

"I do want to meet loli Hanekawa, but I'm not sure what to think of me turning into a criminal from that."

"So we have to bear in mind that possibility too.....?"

Well, the last one was a joke though.

The Senjouhara family was still better off, when it came to the Hanekawa family, I couldn't form a concrete image of "the situation having improved". Naturally, it was likely that that family also had a time when things were better than now, but..... I couldn't think of it as being here, 11 years ago.

Unlike Senjouhara, Hanekawa surely wouldn't think she now had a blessed present because she experienced an unfortunate past —— she didn't hold such values.

She didn't hold them at all.

Those values, she hated them instead.

To the point where it even reached the domain of self-denial —— ultimately, the one Hanekawa hated more than anyone else was her exceptional self, her blessed self.

That abhorrence, and that hatred.

Gave birth to a white cat. Gave birth to a black cat.

"If there was something I could do for her, I would want to do it, but —— this must also be "something I can't do"."

"Indeed. Yes, I think your reasoning is correct. Similarly, it is probably impossible for you to do anything for monkey woman or for forelock missy. It is as that loathsome aloha brat says here."

People only save themselves on their own.

It's impossible for someone to save someone else——

"Yeah. But"

Shinobu said something that would wrap up this discussion —— however, our talk up until here was nothing but an introduction. My self, which was unable to do anything for Senjouhara and Hanekawa, was incredibly disappointing, however.

However, I say.

"I think I can save Hachikuji."

"Why do you think so?"

You look strangely confident, said Shinobu.

"Despite having nothing to base it on."

"No —— because, the traffic accident she got hurt in, it was something accidental right? Unlike things such as family circumstances, it's not something of the type that slowly piles up and becomes unrecoverable by the time you realize it. If we can just avert a momentary coincidence, we can avoid it, see?"

"No..... considering your feelings, and taking into account your relationship with that lass, I am sorry for doing something like putting a damper on you but..... I do not really wish to say it but, I think that will be futile. As a case, it is not as greatly different as you say from that tsundere girl's and from that former class rep's."

Said Shinobu, with really awful articulation.

My feelings, and even my mood are communicated to her, and not only through words but also through my shadow, so it must be especially hard to say.

"For example tomorrow? Pretend that tomorrow, using whatever method, anyway, you protect that lost little girl from the harm she would suffer. Pretend tomorrow does not become that lass' date of death. It is true that it may be possible to do that much —— however. In that situation, I think the time of the accident would simply be postponed to the next day, or to 2 days later."

"....."

"Or perhaps it may not be a traffic accident. Anyway, no matter what form it takes, that lost little girl will end up losing her life within a few days' time. That predetermined event is probably not changeable. What you are trying to do is nothing but a delay —— nothing but a deferment."

Those words from Shinobu were, heavy —— still, however, it was something I had anticipated too. Even I wouldn't have expected something that selfish.

Hachikuji will die.

Be it tomorrow, or the day after, I don't know, but —— that was inevitable, fate.

But.

But, I say.

"That's fine."

"?"

"In other words, but, *as long as the day she dies isn't tomorrow —— as long as it isn't on Mother's Day, Hachikuji will probably not become an abnormality.*"

That young girl.

On Mother's Day, Hachikuji Mayoi —— got lost *because she died without meeting her mother.*

That is to say, if tomorrow, nothing happens, she doesn't get into a traffic accident, and meets with her mother as she intended —— that child will.

No matter what, be content.

Though she may have to die, she shouldn't deserve to get lost.

After dying——

She doesn't deserve to stay dead.

"....."

Shinobu.

Listened —— and fell silent.

I thought that perhaps she would laugh it off and go all-out criticizing me for my shallowness but —— at least, it didn't seem to be the case.

I wasn't off the mark.

By much.

"Interesting."

The comment that came out of Shinobu after a while, was that.

"Interesting. Honestly, I think it is worth trying."

"You do?"

"Yup. No, I am not guaranteeing success, rather, I think it would fail ordinarily. The premise is that it is basically hopeless. But having the premise of it being hopeless makes it worth trying..... maybe, possibly."

The end of her line was somewhat unreliable, but Shinobu implied acknowledgement of my idea. Kindly.

"As I am one, I can tell that abnormalities are existences outside the boundaries of fate —— therefore, making barbaric acts like time travelling possible as well. That is why, *if we do avert the one event that is the trigger* —— we may be able to avoid it, if it is only the abnormality-transformation and nothing else."

If we do.

Yes.

Hachikuji Mayoi, who went through over 10 years, all alone, without relying on anyone, while rejecting each and every human who came to talk to her instead —— won't have to get lost, to keep wandering while being more lonely than anyone in this town.

Although she can't be saved.



She can be helped.

I can, help that girl.

"In terms of risk management, if even the event of that girl becoming an abnormality was predefined in fate, our efforts would turn out to be in vain and pointless as expected though. If the date was set to be on Mother's Day, it would not shift to the next day or two, but perhaps be delayed to next year. And then"

"And then encounter the lost cow —— huh. Well, that might be highly likely. But if fate was that stubborn, it wouldn't make sense for you and I to time warp here like this, with pinpoint accuracy to 11 years ago on the day before Mother's Day."

I said, with a strong resolve.

"The reason we are here. The reason we came here. It wasn't to do summer homework, or to obtain books that are out of print, or to buy stocks either —— it was to save Hachikuji."

Yes.

That was our fate.

Strongly, strongly —— I stated so.

Without learning anything from history about the tragic end walked down afterwards by those who used fate as a reason.

## 010

I traced back my memory.

Pulling out information one by one.

I remember Hachikuji's mother's family name should be Tsunade —— that was what I heard.

Also, I remember that the house of that Tsunade-san shouldn't be too far from Hanekawa's or Senjouhara's —— it should be near that park which I still, to this day, don't know the reading of, that park where I met Hachikuji, 浪白 park.

That's our destination and —— that should also be around where she got into a traffic accident.

Did she say she got into the accident while crossing the street?

Right when the lights turned green, she said —— well, I didn't need to remember the parts above, as I knew them from the start, it was just kind of an explanation of the situation.

But while our destination, in other words the terminus, the goal was clear, I didn't know where Hachikuji used to live when she was still alive.

If it was in the next town, or somewhere else.

It's within a distance that can be travelled on a child's feet while carrying that enormous backpack, so it shouldn't be that far..... or so I inferred, but then again, now that I think of it, I didn't expressly hear Hachikuji say that she didn't use a train or a bus on the way.

I was under the impression that she had only been walking from the way she spoke, but I can't say for sure, besides, the possibility that that fifth grader was putting on airs isn't nonexistent.

And my memory could also be wrong.

The way I said it made it seem fairly simple, as if we only had to prevent a traffic accident, but —— in fact, while I thought just preventing a traffic accident that I knew would happen tomorrow would be easy, when corresponding it to reality like this, it actually looks hard.

Hmm.

As I thought, it doesn't quite go as expected. What to do.

"I have a good idea."

"Eh? Really, really? You have to tell me if you have a good idea, Shinobu-chan."

"Break down all the traffic lights in the streets of this town!"

"The probability of an accident would increase! Some terrorist you are!"

"Now, now, you are a terrorist though."

"Don't say it like you said something witty!"

And thus, we reached an impasse in our search by trial and error.

Rather than getting lost, it was a dead end.

It was a cul-de-sac.

Well, we still had a night's time, so there was no use in rushing..... so, for the time being, I decided to pin down where Tsunade-san's house was first.

Since we can think about things even while walking, or even while getting lost.

I did learn of Tsunade-san's address from Hachikuji on a Mother's Day in the future, and I did reach that place once, but naturally, there was no way I could still remember that, so I'm starting again from scratch.

"You."

"What."

"One"

And.

Shinobu, saying that she was tired of walking, in a position where she was hugging (not as much as being carried like a princess, but a normal hug), clinging onto me, suggested an idea on our way.

"Just as one method of preventing the traffic accident. How about directly warning that lass' mother, who lives in the so-called *Tsunade* house." [\[1\]](#)

"Hm?"

"Since you are going to confirm the address of that *Tsunade's* house sometime anyway. Then, on that occasion, you could just press the intercom and tell her."

"Such as «Your daughter who was taken into custody by her father's side after your divorce will get into a traffic accident tomorrow. She will come visit you in secret because it's Mother's Day. Please call her and advise her caution. Oh, right, while I'm here, could you tell me where the Hachikuji family resides?» ?"

"Yup. Is there a problem with that?"

"Let's see. Let's think it over a bit. Since reaching a conclusion carelessly might cloud my judgement. Uhhhm, I'm not suuure. Maybe there iiis a problem, maybe there iisn't. Mmm, there is!"

More like, it's full of problems.

It'd be over if I get notified.

Though it's still better and more realistic in comparison to the idea of breaking traffic lights——

"Meeting Tsunade-san would be bad, I think."

"Why so?"

"There isn't a why..... but well, when you think about it, Hachikuji should have been living in this town until her parents divorced, right? So while directly asking Tsunade-san is a no go, consulting the people in the neighborhood could be a possibility....."

For example someone walking on the streets, right when I was thinking about that, with a good timing, Shinobu and I notice someone's figure in front of us —— no, it'd be hard to call that a good timing.

Instead, it could be said to have been the worst timing.

I mean, I was hugging a blonde little girl.

And because the figure in front of us, also turned out to be that of a little girl.

A little girl of about 6 years old —— who was walking while reading a book.

Bspectacled.

With a single braid dangling from the back of her head.

Looking obviously diligent.

"Geez, what a damn cute little girl she was, no wait it's Hanekawa Tsubasa!"

"Kyaah!"

Loli Hanekawa gave out a scream and distanced herself from me.

As she increased her distance, she threw the book she was reading at me.

It landed a clean hit on Shinobu.

"Gyaa!"

Shinobu fell on the ground, like an insect sprayed with insecticide.

All this within a second.

"W, what are you! Why do you know my name! No, I can tell just by looking even if you don't answer, you must be a freak!"

"....."

I was instantly hated by loli Hanekawa.

It was such a shock that it made me want to fall on my knees.

Still, it's amazing, that even as a 6 years old, I could recognize Hanekawa as Hanekawa.

I thought it was because it was me, because it was Araragi Koyomi that I could recognize him even as a 7 years old, but that wasn't necessarily so, they were surprisingly recognizable —— no, perhaps it was only because it was Hanekawa, because it was the Hanekawa who I had a strong attachment to, that I knew it was her.

There was no one with this diligent appearance even 11 years ago.

Rather than that, Araragi Koyomi.

It's your first sight of Hanekawa Tsubasa's casual clothes.

Because she's in elementary, she doesn't have a uniform yet!

"Kyahoo! Hanekawa's casual clothes are the best!"

"Kyaah!"

"And flat Hanekawa's the best! Amazing, Hanekawa's flat-chested!"

"Kyaah! Kyaah! Kyaah!"

Loli Hanekawa is running around trying to escape.

That Hanekawa is afraid!

Of me!

"You..... calm down. Your feelings are conveyed so strongly that it hurts, but do not lose sight of your primary objective. If you get arrested here, getting acquitted by tomorrow would be impossible....."

"Ugh."

Heeding the warning that Shinobu gave as she knelt on the ground, I halted my legs which were on the verge of jumping onto loli Hanekawa at the last moment.

I used all I had to hold the image of someone having their shoes sewed to the ground.

The one I really want to take hold of is loli Hanekawa though.

Endure endure endure endure endure endure endure!

"What is with this person, so scary..... he's standing straight shedding tears of blood..... to think there would be high school students like this..... I knew it, the world's totally black....."

Loli Hanekawa's fear knew no bounds.

Intensely constructing trauma now.

"M, miss."

To the best of my ability, I mustered my most gentle gentlemanly-sounding voice [\[2\]](#) to talk to loli Hanekawa, though I had probably failed.

Well, I'd like to have at least my efforts recognized.

"No, see, I knew your name because you were wearing a name plate. Oh yes, I would like you to tell me the way if possible."

"....."

A gaze of skepticism.

It couldn't be helped, because loli Hanekawa wasn't really wearing a name plate.

I lied for no reason at all.

Ugh, although she's a little girl, being looked at with "eyes looking at a stranger" by Hanekawa was pretty harsh. As for the "eyes looking at someone pathetic", they were, well, pleasant though.

"Do you know where the residence of a Tsunade-san happens to be around here?"

"....."

Staying silent, loli Hanekawa pointed a finger to the right.

Ooh.

So she knew, as expected of Hanekawa, she wasn't to be underestimated even back when she was a little girl.

"Thank you. You sure know everything."

"I don't know everything. Only what I know."

Saying that, loli Hanekawa ran off at a quick pace. As if to run away from me. No, she probably was actually running away.

"——Do you think history changed from that just now?"

"Most likely not."

The only thing that changed was probably her affection levels for you, said Shinobu.

Shinobu got herself back up as she spoke. Thinking about it, considering the turmoil earlier alone, it was pretty terrible for Shinobu, she got struck by a book, and fell off me despite having done nothing wrong.

And to not get angry at that, I guess I should say her magnanimity was as expected of one who is 600 years old.

"Not from that little entanglement."

"But meeting someone you know in the past does make you worry about the consequences involved after all. I'm not sure if it was for the better or the worse that the meeting was with Hanekawa..... I wonder if there's a chance future Hanekawa would have become my girlfriend by meeting her now?"

"No."

She denied.

It was a denial with more strength than necessary, for some reason.

"Besides, even if there was a one in a million chance of that eventuality existing, that girl's troublesome memories would be——"

"Huh?"

"No, forget it. Anyway, no need to worry. Anyway, we now know where the *Tsunade* family lives, why not hurry and go?"

"Yeah."

We then headed towards Tsunade-san's house using the path loli Hanekawa told us —— on the way, I remembered.

That I had also asked Hanekawa the same question 11 years later, and that at that time, she had flatly answered with "I don't know".

Was it possible for something not known 11 years later to be known 11 years before —— no, thinking that perhaps the Hanekawa of 11 years later simply pretended not to know in consideration of the situation, I marched on, believing in the words of loli Hanekawa, however.

Even as I walked further and further, Tsunade-san's house was not to be found.

Ultimately where we arrived at was a police station.

"I got fooled....."

Thus was the story of Hanekawa who was steady since her days as a little girl.

Still, even though they say that fate is unpredictable, while frankly I've never been too fond of that adage, nonetheless, I was able to find out the address of Tsunade-san's house, and while I was at it, that of Hachikuji's house as well, at that police station.

If someone asked me how, there was really nothing to it, I asked the police officer on duty at the police station,

"Excuse me, I'd like to ask the way."

I thus solicited for help.

It was a legitimate option, that required no scheming.

Instead of calling it going for broke, it was more like I had nothing left to lose anymore, in other words I approached the officer with the feeling of enacting some sort of gag, however,

"Ah, Tsunade-san's house? Uhh, let's see."

Just like that, the policewoman readily informed me.

Are you serious?

Was what I thought, but I see, this meant that this was a period where they were incredibly more lax on personal information than now (in the present).

"It must be hard on Tsunade-san, really. After her divorce, she started looking old in no time. She's conducting herself like she's healthy, but it's obvious since her fatigue is showing on her face. It's understandable though, she profoundly adored her only daughter after all. Errr, what was her name? Hold on a second, I'll remember it now. My memory is good, when on duty. Right, right, Mayoi-chan. She was such a cute girl, but it seems that she can't easily come see her. No well, my standpoint is neutral, and it's not like I'm blaming her husband but——"

She went on and on with this story.

For about an hour.

I accidentally became more knowledgeable about the internal situation of the Hachikuji family (actually, the Tsunade family in this case).

No matter how lax this period was on the protection of personal information, I thought that policewoman was still way too talkative.

I wouldn't be surprised if she was taken to court in the present.

"By the way, how are you related to Tsunade-san?"

Then, at long last, the policewoman asked such a question, as if she remembered her sense of duty.

I

"I'm a friend."

answered so.

"A friend of Mayoi-chan."

.....I thought I got through it in a cool way, but I felt the policewoman's eyes narrow somewhat at the dubious entry in my profile that said 'friend of a young girl of tender years', so I made a run for it at full speed afterwards.

A young half vampire boy scrambling at full speed.

It wasn't something you saw every day.

"Alright, I got the residential map the policewoman drew for me! With this, I'm invincible! If I had to give an analogy, I feel like Mario who took a star in Super Mario Bros.!"

"Was it that satisfying a comparison that you had to say it with such intensity?"

At the end of my full speed scrambling —— me and Shinobu.

Were at that aforementioned park.

We sat down on a bench in 浪白 park, opened that (pretty darn good) hand drawn residential map, and talked as we examined it.

"By the way, which came first, the Super Nintendo or Super Mario?"

"Hm?"

Err, no.

I was at a loss for an instant, but clearly it was Super Mario.

It may even have been thanks to the existence of Super Mario that the Super Nintendo came to be.

"Well, there is something in the taste of the one who abbreviated Super Nintendo as SNES that ought to be respected..... I would have wanted my old name to be abbreviated nicely like that too....."

"You mean that thing?"

I have sworn to never call Shinobu by that name again, so I had to refer to it by an ambiguous designation.

"Heh. A vampire who forgot her real name, huh....."

"No, don't try to make it sound cool."

That's just a memory issue.

As we exchanged such trifles, I checked over the residential map again.

Tsunade-san's house.

And Hachikuji's house.

"They're not as far apart as I thought..... it might be a little strenuous on elementary student legs, but she should be fine even without a bicycle at this distance."



At least I don't have to worry about what to do if she used public transport like trains or buses for now.

If I was to unreasonably expand the possibilities, I'd worry about what to do if that elementary student used a taxi like a celebrity, but if she did something like that, I wouldn't help her anymore.

Don't be ridiculous.

Would be what I'd think.

"So — all we need is to use the shortest route to connect Hachikuji's house to Tsunade-san's house, and keep watch on the crosswalk along it, right?"

"No well, I am not so sure."

Shinobu said, in the manner of offering advice, after hearing the words I let out as if I had reached an intermission, words I let out with the feeling of having overcome a hurdle if I had to say.

Incidentally, Shinobu wasn't sitting next to me on the bench, but on my lap.

She was resting her shoulder blades on my chest.

While thinking about pointless things like 'I wonder if she'd be surprised if I licked the nape of her neck from behind', I

"What?"

said.

"Is there some problem with my plan? I was thinking that all that was left was to find a bed to rest up for tomorrow. That the ruins of that private school would be fine."

"Look."

Shinobu swiftly lifted her head back, and looking up at me, said

"No matter how short a route you connect, there is no way the number of crosswalks between *Tsunade's* house—*Hachikuji's* house would amount to a single one."

that.

While seriously thinking that, when looking at them this close, this little girl's lips were still as seductive, while wondering if fantasizing about dirty things involving these lips would be a crime, on the other hand,

"Aah that's right."

I realized that.

"You're right. Not to mention that if we take into consideration the number of roads intersecting across, it adds up to a sizable amount."

"There are no road sections such as roads intersecting across."

"But at scramble intersections for example, one of the roads has to be intersecting across. And those who traverse at an angle are on roads intersecting diagonally."

"A road intersecting diagonally..... how cool."

"A road intersecting bullet is also considerably cool though. [\[1\]](#)"

"It reminds me of The Matrix."

"So you watched that too....."

"While we are at it. Footbridges which are more accurately called pedestrian bridges, are a type of crosswalk too, and in addition, underground crosswalks also exist. If you take them all into consideration, the number of prospects to keep watch of would add up to a tremendous amount."

"No..... it's awfully hard to get into traffic accidents on footbridges and underground roads, besides if an accident of that scale happened in the town I was living in, I think even I would remember it....."

Not to brag but I used to be a prodigy in this period after all.

I was a god's child after all. [\[2\]](#)

"But Shinobu. Why are you endowed with this kind of superior expertise on road traffic?"

"I asked that aloha brat."

"Aah, I see."

In that case, I'd have to change my question to why Oshino was knowledgeable about road traffic, but..... well, I suppose there isn't anything that would be unnatural for Oshino to know.

I don't know everything, only unnecessary things, he's something like that.

"Incidentally, according to the 2004 census, the number of crosswalks in Japan added up to 1,725,015. If limited to those with traffic lights, there were 987,326. They should have exceeded a million now."

"Huh! Really!"

"Well, I just randomly came up with those numbers though."

"Why are you telling a lie at this stage!"

Can't you be admired normally!

She even lost her credibility for other things at once —— well, abnormalities, and vampires, don't have credibility or anything to begin with though.

"Credibility and Tempur pillows are kind of similar."

Shinobu rested the back of her head, covered in blonde hair, on me as she said that.

As I thought about worthless things like 'do girls smell this good even without applying perfume or anything', I

"Yeah."

said, and crossed my arms in front of my chest.

To be specific, in front of my chest was a blonde little girl, so it took the form of me crossing my arms in front of Shinobu's chest. From the outside, it could only look like I was hugging a little girl.

"Still, we have no choice but to mark one of the undoubtedly numerous crosswalks. I only have one body after all."

"If you insist, I do not mind splitting your body into pieces."

"As if I'd insist on that!"

"I wonder if it would regenerate the way a planarian does. You might grow about 100 more of you if I turn it into smithereens."

"I feel like Hachikuji's said something similar to me before..... actually, if you think about it more attentively,"

It wasn't because I put away the map, or that there was some special trigger, but I hit upon another possibility that we needed to consider.

"if you think about it, there's no guarantee that Hachikuji went from the house of the Hachikuji's to Tsunade-san's using the shortest route. Besides, considering how things turned out after that, don't you think she lost her way quite a bit?"

"Aah. Indeed."

'Instead, when thinking about her abnormality-transformation afterwards, it might be more reasonable to assume that she did not go along the shortest route', concurred Shinobu with what I noted.

"But if she came after going around in circles all over place, there's no way to keep watch anymore——"

At the extreme, every crosswalk across Japan could be valid.

I set my eyes on the residential map on a billboard in a corner of the park.

On that day —— on the Mother's Day of 11 years in the future, Hachikuji was looking at that billboard.

Alone.

All —— alone.

"——what to do now? When I've finally been able to pin down the location of Tsunade-san's house and Hachikuji's house thanks to Hanekawa too."

"Rather than thanks to the loli version of the former class rep, I believe you can boast with dignity that it was thanks to yourself."

"Really?"

"Yup. At least, that girl would never have pointed over to the police station with that intention....."

Hum, Shinobu showed a smile full of satisfaction that wasn't that gruesome, and said "Behold. I have a hidden scheme."

"A hidden scheme."

"Yup. Schemer Shinobu. The dream collaboration."

"In your case, the eras are truly overlapping, so rather than a collaboration, it's more like you just recycled the same material again." [\[3\]](#)

Besides, first, do something about this undeniable fact that it was your hidden scheme's fault that we came to this world of 11 years ago.

I implore you, please don't hide anything.

Open source please.

Well, I gained the possibility of having a chance to save Hachikuji thanks to that, so I had no intention of blaming her any further for that.

"Come on, I mean. There is no need to specifically stake out at a crosswalk. You now know where *Hachikuji's* house is, so you can just stake out in front of it and stalk that fellow when she tries to head over to *Tsunade's* house."

"Why aren't you playing dumb!"

I inadvertently blurted out an unreasonable retort at the unexpectedly proper hidden scheme. I had both arms crossed, so it was an original retort where I used my chin to rub around Shinobu's hair whorl.

"If we s-stalk her and tighten ourselves every time she c-crosses a street, we should be able to keep that fellow away from danger....."

It seemed like being rubbed felt pleasant to her, and with no sign of refusal, while flaccidly grinning broadly, Shinobu continued explaining.

"Naturally, from the public eye, the act of stalking a young girl of tender years would be totally suspicious but..... as for that, considering this is 11 years in the past, it should be a period where they are still open-minded about that kind of queerness."

"Hmm....."

Queerness, huh.

Well, it is queer — however, it's an excellent idea.

"If we want to ensure that lost little girl's safety with more certainty, there is the option where we could desperately ambush her as soon as she comes out of her home, do something of some sort, make her cower and confine herself at home, and not let her out for the whole day tomorrow."

"What is this something of some sort?"

And ambush?

I'd get caught even if it's 11 years ago for acting queer enough to make an elementary student confine herself at home.

I'd get caught by that policewoman from earlier.

"When I need to, I guess that option isn't out of the question either, Shinobu."

"Is it not out of the question?"

"Well, when I need to. I am ready to take on the shame of a criminal when the moment comes. But essentially, rather than excessive, it's meaningless. Preventing the traffic accident alone isn't enough — I want to let Hachikuji, while she's still alive, meet her mother who is living in Tsunade-san's house."

I want to see my mother.

That is Hachikuji's wish, as well as.

The reason she kept losing her way for over 10 years.

"It also depends on how many years that policewoman's been in service, but as far as I've heard, it didn't seem like Tsunade-san's only daughter got in a traffic accident last year or the year before — as I thought, the Mother's Day of 11 years ago has to be Hachikuji's date of death. That's why I came to this era — it was for that reason, as expected. If Hachikuji can just meet her mother tomorrow, she should, with no regret — even if she does get into a traffic accident afterwards, she should be able to welcome the date of her death with no regret, without losing her way."

Conversely, supposing we manage to prevent the traffic accident itself here, if as a result, Hachikuji still couldn't meet her mother — wouldn't she still end up losing her way after dying on a later day?

It's impossible to avoid the death itself.

If you say that is her unyielding fate, history — I have no choice but to accept it.

However.

This is why what I want to avoid is the 10 years after that.

"Well, it is true that if we accomplish that, she will likely not become an abnormality, at least. In that case, we have no choice but to execute Operation Stalker after all."

"Change the operation name right this instant."

"Operation Sneaker then."

"Sneaker? Why?"

"Because the etymology of sneaker is the same as that of sneaking. One made no sound even when walking, so they named him Sneaker, apparently."

"So it was from such an outrageous naming....."

I looked down at my own feet.

They were evidently wearing sneakers.

It's over, I can't look at sneakers properly anymore, they're starting to look like shoes that support criminals.

How unfitting these shoes were of me.

"Alright, so let's sleep early tonight, and start staking out in front of Hachikuji's house in the morning tomorrow. I wonder if there's a utility pole or something where we can hide ourselves."

"Well, there should be a utility pole at the very least. Even though there are no base stations."

'Still, you'.

Shinobu said —— she didn't especially change her tone, but she shrouded herself with such an aura that, without even the need to insert a contradictory conjunction, I knew that she was probably going to tell me something negative.

"You, do you understand properly?"

"Hm? Understand what? If it's about the stability I feel from hugging you, of course I understand it well. In that sense, I'm grateful to you."

"You do not particularly need to be grateful in that sense."

After saying 'for all these little things every time', Shinobu said.

"The meaning behind saving that lost little girl here."

"Hm? The meaning? Didn't we already discuss lengthily about that? Don't beat a dead horse. We've established that a time paradox won't occur——"

"No, not about paradoxes and whatnot——"

That Hachikuji Mayoi will not undergo abnormality-transformation meant that.

That she will not encounter the lost cow meant that.

That she will not lose her way meant that.

"It means that, 11 years later, you will not be able to see that girl again, you know?"

"....."

"You will not meet that girl on that Mother's Day, or chat merrily afterwards, or exchange trifles either, it means that everything will become naught. Do you —— understand that properly?"

Of course.

I understood —— that much.

I was planning to sleep out Oshino-style at those private school ruins for tonight, but there was a huge oversight to that plan.

Actually, it was evident if I had given it some thought.

In this period of 11 years in the past — the private school ruins weren't in ruins yet, rather, that private school — if I recall, its official name was Eikou Cram School — didn't exist yet.

What we found when we reached the site was a thicket.

A thicket!

"Oh man..... who knows how many bug bites I'd get if I slept in these woods..... no, with some bad luck, I even run the risk of being attacked by wild dogs and the like."

"Come on, if there is no building, abandon the whole idea of staying here already."

Why are you stubborn only when it comes to these things, retorted Shinobu.

It was a good retort.

"But still, it feels odd somehow..... it's a weird way of saying it but, while I would accept it if those ruins, that I grew familiar with and whose presence was natural to me, regressed back to being newly built, for them to not even be in construction yet....."

In other words, I don't know exactly when, but a while after this point in time, that 4-story building will be constructed, it will then become the schoolhouse of a number of kids, and eventually face financial trouble and close down — such a fate was in store for it.

It was impossible to foretell that kind of future just by looking at this thicket though.

"Even up until it closes down is part of that so-called being predefined in fate, right? It's sort of....."

"Anything and anyone has a past, and times of old. That is why they now have a present, which will continue on to the future. Is that not how it is? Even you, and I, are not any different."

"Now, since it's like this, what should we do? Because see, I'm delicate, so I can't sleep in places I don't know or places I'm not familiar with. I'm the type that can't sleep on a different pillow, so to speak."

"But there is no pillow to begin with."

"No, I was trying to get you to offer your lap as a pillow."

"Well, if you wish so, I would not refuse but....."

So she wouldn't refuse.

I couldn't carelessly joke around with this little girl.

"More like, why would someone delicate consider sleeping in a thicket."

"You're right."

"It is almost as if you were a delete key instead of delicate. [\[1\]](#)"

"That wasn't witty."

That aside.

This place had already become a place I did not know of — no.

It had not yet become the place I knew of.

Is more correct.

"Oh well. At worst, I could just pull an all-nighter. Since if I had to choose between whether I was sleepy or not, I'd say I wasn't notably feeling sleepiness."

It was a characteristic of my vampire body.

I was currently in normal mode, or instead, I could even say that my biorhythm was now in easy mode, so my vampiric nature had become especially weak.

Therefore I could even say that I was physically the same as a regular human, but having said that, my recovery and healing parameters naturally remained at decent levels.

Therefore, sleeping to "rest" is actually not that necessary — for making progress when studying for exams, the contribution from being disciplined by Hanekawa and Senjouhara was undoubtedly the greatest, but I believe there was also some from simply being able to make use of sleep time as study time to a certain extent.

Thinking of it that way kind of made it seem similar to doping, so I felt some guilt towards other students taking exams, but — that was at a fitting risk, so leaving that aside.

"I was thinking of going early in the morning tomorrow, but let's just confirm the address by tonight."

"Of *Hachikuji's* house?"

"Who else's is there?"

"No well, I was thinking that perhaps you might have thought of confirming the location of Mister Donut."

"Why are you having such self-interested fancies at this point....."

Or rather, I'm not sure.

Would that MisDo be adequately managed in this period where even that cram school is nowhere to be found.....

"By the way, you're not sleepy?"

"Nighttime is my time."

"True. But then, I guess you'd start feeling sleepy during daytime tomorrow."

"I suppose. No I mean, viewing it as a hobby and something I indulge in are influential aspects of my sleep. I can stay up if I try."



"I see....."

If she tries, is the questionable part.

Shinobu is more whimsical than anyone, so she might not be willing to try.

It would certainly be more helpful if she stayed up though——

"Well in my case, I can sleep inside your shadow. I can stock up on sleep during the night, and actively cooperate tomorrow if you want."

"....."

She seemed to be motivated for some reason.

I couldn't discern what her feelings were though.

"Now really. I have no feelings."

Shinobu then displayed a smile.

As usual, it was a smile of unquestionably bad character.

"It is just that this situation where I am alone with you somehow reminded me of spring break and somewhat made me high."

"I see....."

Well, that made sense.

Because of Shinobu's inevitability to lie inside my shadow, I felt like I've spent a significantly long time with her but, still, situations where we were alone together —— the *feeling* when we were alone together felt nostalgic to me as well.

Interactions with Senjouhara and Hanekawa were a matter of course, there were also all kinds of students at school, and back at home, my sisters and parents were around.

No matter how bad at socializing a guy I'd call myself —— I couldn't easily find myself alone in the physical sense.

That's why we couldn't be alone together.

I see now.

So it was spring break.

I've extensively been analogizing those two weeks to a spring break of hell, but —— however, there weren't always just harsh things in that hell.

That's right.

As for the main factor for why that holiday was something I could only remember bitterly, full of regrets —— even though it was that hellish.

Yet —— memories of having fun too.

Were also firmly included in there, that was why.

Misfortune will never reverse into fortune.

However, aside along misfortune —— fortune was there as well.

Not as two sides of the same coin, but as different things.

"Shinobu."

"What?"

"Let's kiss?"

"What makes you think I would!? Why are you enticing me like a middle school girl in her 3rd year!?"

Shinobu widened her eyes.

Her golden eyes.

"What. You were the one who was enticing me before."

"That was the exemplar of a joke! If we did that kind of thing, that miss tsundere or one of them would take my life when they find out, you know!? You might have forgotten, but right now, I am basically just a little girl you know!?"

"No but, you can win against Black Hanekawa, right?"

"That is because the opponent is an abnormality."

"Hmmm."

It was hard to grasp the power balance in those matters.

So she was weaker than a human but stronger than an abnormality?

That's like rock-paper-scissors.

But I guess the same happens among fellow humans too.

"I see. So we won't kiss."

"No."

If we do, it will be in 100 years in the future, said Shinobu.

How patience requiring.

That's an amazing seduction from a girl.

"I don't really get what your principle is either..... do you refuse because feelings are involved? In that case, that now wasn't in the erotic meaning, but in the Americanized meaning."

"Not like I would know."

Besides, there is no erotic meaning in kisses, Shinobu said, which was something unexpectedly pure hearted.

Hmm.

It must be a feint.

"Well then, shall we go for now? Since it would be better than nothing if we can find a bed near Hachikuji's house."

"Indeed."

"In the worst case scenario, we can simply negotiate with the Hachikuji family to let us stay overnight."

"Even I can tell that that is absurd."

Thus we headed towards Hachikuji's house.

Relying on the map that policewoman drew for us —— without losing our way.

Like on the Mother's Day of 11 years in the future, without losing our way.

Mother's Day —— that day, on which I first met Hachikuji.

If my attempt is successful, "that day" will never come.

I don't know how that will be fixed, or how the integrity will be kept in the end, but..... my meeting with Hachikuji, my friendship with Hachikuji, everything will become naught.

That will be right.

That is right.

Abnormalities, from the beginning, are "naught" after all —— it's more odd for them to be there than not.

"Say, Shinobu. Can I make sure of one thing? It's about what we talked about earlier. If I succeed in saving Hachikuji, will I make a turnaround and completely forget about her after that?"

"Uhh. I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know..... how irresponsible."

"I have no responsibilities."

Flatly said Shinobu.

How dare she say that, this little scamp.

"Do not ask me each and every thing you think of. Even for me, this is the first time I engaged in a time slip after all."

"A time slip....."

It was a new yet dubious expression.

Or rather, it was outdated.

"Well, if we think about it rationally, it would be more unnatural to still remember about a young girl you did not even meet, I believe."

"No but, although you asserted that a time paradox won't occur, how is it in reality? If I am going to forget about Hachikuji, consequently I won't be thinking of saving her —— in short, won't I be unable to save her anymore?"

My theory was looping in circles and getting confusing, but I also felt like that was how it was going to turn out —— if that was right, won't what I was going to try next simply end up in vain?

"If a time paradox will not occur no matter what, no matter how much effort you put in henceforth —— even if you put in effort so as to not end up in vain, we might have to recognize that saving that lost little girl is impossible."

Shinobu said.

While clinging onto the nape of my neck (I didn't say it, but she was hugging me in the shape of a koala as usual. She seemed to have grown fond of this posture, apparently.).

"I thought I should not weaken your ardor, so I stayed silent, but if the compelling force of fate is at work, that should be how things will turn out —— since the lost little girl in this period is not an abnormality, but a human. No matter how much you want to save her, even if you want to take her to her mother's house, some kind of obstruction will get in the way, and prevent you from accomplishing it. Such a possibility can be envisaged."

"I got it."

"Hm? What is wrong?"

"Nothing, I just made my resolve —— well, when it comes down to it, if there's no other way,"

I said.

"we just have to make a time paradox occur, right?"

Since there's nothing that never changes, including everyone and everything.

Let's make fate change as well.

## 013

Hachikuji's house was an individual house with no characteristic particularly worth mentioning —— well, the family name of 'Hachikuji' wasn't a very common one, so this shouldn't belong to a different family by the same surname.

The time had already reached the dead of the night when we arrived (I was talking haughtily before, but in the end, I got lost on the way), so that residential area had completely quieted down already.

There was hardly any light in any of the houses.

Only street lights were shining bright.

"I wanted to see and make sure Hachikuji was here within tonight too if it was possible, but I guess we didn't make it in time."

"Mhm. Since that lost little girl and her father must already be asleep, seeing as the lights are not on. —Before that, we can assume only the two of them live together, right?"

"Yeah. She shouldn't have any brothers or sisters, and I haven't heard anything about her father having married again either..... it may be that I only haven't heard about it, but if something like that happened, it would definitely be weird if I didn't hear about it."

Things wouldn't make sense anymore.

Just in case, as another possibility, it was conceivable that it could be a bi-generational house where she lived together with her grandparents — well, even if that was the case, it wouldn't be too much of a blunder.

"I do think that they are living together alone though. Well, even if, in a one in a million chance, her father had married again, and his marriage partner had a child with her, and that child was a girl and furthermore, was the same age as Hachikuji — there's no way I would mistake someone else for Hachikuji."

"Even if they looked like twins?"

"That's....."

"You may be thinking that I am over-thinking this, but still, there is no harm in being wary for what may happen in a one in a million million chance, even one in a million million million chance."

Since there is no telling what kind of hindrance could come up — Shinobu said.

Shinobu herself probably didn't believe in this development that was like trying to pass through the eye of a needle, but still, from her point of view, this must have been something she had to advise me of.

She who had, as if passing through the eye of a needle.

Clearly miraculously.

Been reduced to her current state.

"Okay. Well then, let's spend the night thinking about those things — let's devote ourselves to invalidating every possible eventuality. Shinobu, what time is it now?"

"Errr"

Shinobu looked at the watch she put around her right wrist. That watch which was made for men did not fit the slenderness of Shinobu's wrist at all, so it looked more like a bracelet than a watch though.

"It is 11. PM."

"Hmm."

"It is about closing time for the 7-Elevens in this period."

"We're not that far in the past."

"Incidentally. There is a theory believed by the general public that they were named "7-Eleven" because, as I just said, they initially opened at 7 in the morning and closed at 11 at night, but did you know the name actually came afterwards?"

"Eh?"

"The truth is, the founders took it from the team name of the soccer team they were putting together at the time. That is why the written form of 7 was different for the first 5 years."

"Huh, really!"

I didn't know!

I see, so it was from the soccer team!

Then then then then, what did the other written form of 7 mean!?

"Well, that was a lie though."

"Why did you tell such a lie!"

"I was wondering if I could fool you."

"Don't fool me for a reason like trial!"

Anyway, it was 11 o'clock, apparently.

Why did I have to spend a whole page just to tell the time? It's because of things like these that my position as a narrator was threatened by Hanekawa.

Let's strive for a safe development.

"By the way, the nuance is not conveyed at all when you write 'safe' in kanji. It looks like it has the implication of 'heartless'. [\[1\]](#)"

"Like I said, stop reacting at every single term. Our talk will never end no matter how many pages we use. Errr, now, since we can't keep standing here forever,"

There really was an utility pole.

And a convenient one at that.

One so imposing that would leave you wondering if it wasn't a god (it was a joke on units based on the unit to count gods being one pole, two poles. Though I said that, on top of being hard to understand, it wasn't very funny, and was even indiscreet as well).

But really, I had no intention of setting up camp here throughout the night either.

I thought that for a night or so, there would be no problem depending on the surrounding environment, but this pitch dark and quiet residential area was evidently not suited for stakeouts —— let's say it was a matter of physical sensation.

If only there was a bit more of a chaotic ambiance.

Yes.

If only there was a feeling of chaos —— where it would seem as if youkai would appear.

"Now, I guess we should look for a bed as planned."

Just to make sure, I checked out Hachikuji's house once more —— I closed in near the doorplate to confirm it, then proceeded to leave the place.

While carrying Shinobu.

I mean, if I had been carrying her all the way until now, even I wouldn't not feel heavy, you know?

"However, the sensation of ribs rubbing over my chest makes me insensible to the feeling of weight....."

"Your real thoughts that are unimaginable for mankind are spilling out profusely."

"When it comes to little girls, it's got to be about the collarbone and the ribs. Oops, easy there. That's definitely a line that can't be said in the present."

"It is a line that cannot be said in the Edo period either."

"Wasn't that period open-minded to loli? The age of marriage was awfully low, not to mention it was even open-minded to shota if I recall. Calling them pages or something."

"Yeah."

Shinobu nodded.

Meekly.

"This shows that each era has their own mentality."

"It would be nice if there was a decently large park like 浪白 park though —— there would be nothing better if we could spend a night without bothering anyone, or rather, without bringing discomfort to anyone."

"Mhm. Well, sleeping in the middle of a gutter by the road is similar to being inside a coffin for vampires, so I recommend it, but in that case, it implies that you would have to feel sorry for the newspaper delivery boy who would chance upon that sight in the morning and experience discomfort, correct?"

".....True, but,"

I am extremely happy that you can display an understanding of the subtleties in the feelings in human society, but still, the idea of sleeping in a gutter by the road too, is an idea absolutely unimaginable for mankind.....

It was literally an idea that appealed to niches.

Unfortunately, there was no such park near Hachikuji's house, though there might have been one, we who weren't familiar with the area were unable to find it (I should have expected things to turn out this way and asked that policewoman in advance), and when we finally found a park satisfying our requirements, it was already past 12 at night.

In other words, it was the day in question.

It had become Mother's Day.

"Now for Shinobu-chan's random knowledge corner. Did you know Father's Day was in fact established before Mother's Day?"

"Doubt." [\[2\]](#)

"Tsk, so you saw through it."

Well, we kept having conversations like these («Shinobu-chan's random false knowledge corner»), so it's possible that we simply spent more time than necessary. In fact, perhaps it was not that far away from Hachikuji's house.

If I could use the GPS function of my cellphone, I could find out my current location too, but..... although we easily claim that the past was better, when you actually go back 11 years like this, things here and there turn out to be inconvenient, as expected.

The past wasn't that much better. It was obvious though.

Despite that, it is true that not everything was bad.

That park (unlike 浪白 park, that park had an easy name to read) had plenty of playground equipment — multitudes of nostalgic playground equipment that have already been removed throughout Japan nowadays.

Woah, that's the one that goes in circles.

Indeed, now that I see it, its shape was dangerous.

"Oh man. I'm getting excited. Shinobu, let's compete to see who can send their shoes flying the furthest on the swings."

"Were they not removed throughout Japan because of people who did that?"

A 3rd year high school student prancing around on a park's playground equipment got reprimanded by a little girl who had the appearance of an 8 years old.

Well, I'd seriously get notified if I was playing in a park at night, so even if Shinobu got into the mood, it would probably be better to give up on it.



"Ah, but, I want to do a back hip circle or something. I haven't done it since elementary school after all. I wonder if licking the horizontal bars of iron now would still bring about the taste of blood."

"The taste of blood?"

Shinobu's eyes sparkled.

It looks like I've touched something akin to heartstrings for a vampire.

I can't tell what sparks her interest.

"I see, blood provides iron after all..... therefore, this means that I had the option of surviving by munching on iron if I ever ran hungry."

"What a rough way to make do....."

The act of drinking water would be closer to blood, I think.

I'm not sure though.

Well, naturally, we weren't so foolish as to lose ourselves in playing in a park either —— however, the fact that there were plenty of playground equipment in this park has to be a relief in this case.

Since we were now able to spend the night lying inside a playground equipment modeled after pipelines, that is, in conditions where we had a roof and walls.

"Still, this is really cramped. We are really close to each other. I cannot tell at all whether I am your futon or whether you are my futon at this rate."

"They're both wrong. You can just go back inside my shadow if you think it's cramped."

"Do not say such cold things. Allow me to feel your ribs as well."

"....."

How to say this.

Although, well, from the 600 years old Shinobu's point of view, I who was 18 years old might have belonged to the shota category.

My collarbone and ribs are in grave danger.

I am being targeted!

While saying that.

I set the alarm on my cellphone (the time in my cellphone's clock was still adjusted to the present, so I factored it in when setting the alarm), and we fell asleep in order to rest up for tomorrow.

I felt bad for making Shinobu, a vampire, reverse day and night, but in the end, I still wanted her to be there so I could talk to her tomorrow as well.

## Translator's Notes

1. Safe (恙無い) with only the bottom radical makes the word heartless (心無い).
2. As in the card game.

### 014

"As if I could sleep!"

I woke up with such an outcry.

A whole 30 minutes ahead of the time I set my cell's alarm at.

Shinobu woke up in conjunction with me, or because she was startled rather.

"W, what is it, you..... what happened?"

"Nothing, sorry really....."

My back hurt so much that I reflexively, as if to retort at it, got up.

How sentimental I must have been to think that it was wonderful that the playground equipment hadn't been removed yet in this period, even during that time when I, Sengoku and Kanbaru slept close together in those private school ruins, my joints didn't feel this painful.

I was a true vampire during spring break, so it was almost like it didn't bother me, but..... yeah, Oshino's amazing. Or perhaps anyone can get used to a bed of that stiffness if they kept up the lifestyle of a wanderer for a long time.

Besides, choosing the pipelines as our bed was a huge mistake in the first place. There was of course the stiffness, but more importantly, more than anything, the bottom surface was curved!

Though I believe my appreciation for the interior of pipelines fundamentally came from Doraemon, in this case then, I can say that it was indirectly Doraemon's fault.

Curse you Doraemon.

"Nobu-chan, are you alright?"

"Your Nobu-chan is probably a variation of Nobuemon, but it sounds like a normal name for Japanese children. And if you asked me, it sounds like Nobi-chan."

"So, are you alright?"

To my query, Shinobu answered yes, I am fine.

Hmm, even if she has lost her vampiric nature, she was originally a vampire, so she might be able to cope with conditions this rough with ease.

"No, no, you have the wrong idea. To begin with, I did not get any sleep."

"Eh? Why? You weren't able to reverse day and night?"

"No, that is not it. You were hugging on to me looking like you had trouble sleeping, so I could not sleep."

"....."

So she was in a real body pillow state. So she was my futon.

"You were playing with my ribs like a güiro and going «Hanekawa—, Hanekawa—, loli Hanekawa—» while being perturbed."

"That's a lie—!"

A güiro she says!

"Well, you were probably feeling a little disheartened after coming to a past like this, so I thought that it could not be helped, and allowed you to be spoiled."

"That's definitely a lie—!"

If that was true, it's like, I'd feel way too sorry for you, Hanekawa, and Senjouhara!

I'm the worst character, I should die tomorrow!

".....phew. But I mean, I have to live for today. Since I have to save Hachikuji today, on this Mother's Day."

"Do not try to pass this off as a gag by saying something seemingly cool. Get serious, the shapes of your hands are still clearly imprinted on my rib cage. Here, take a look."

"What a shame, I can't confirm it because it's a novel!"

"We can just insert an illustration."

"What? An illustration where a little girl is emphatically flipping her dress up and showing what's under?"

"With a drawing style like the iPad version of Alice in Wonderland."

"You mean an image that moves and that you can touch?"

"My dress would get flipped by the motion of a finger."

"How obscene..... anyway, moving on, let's go to Hachikuji's house. I should be fine even without eating breakfast. I'll treat you some Mister Donut when we get back to the present, so can you put up with it too?"

"No, like I was saying, do not move on to your own convenience. Do not think that flaunting MisDo's name can get you out of everything. Treating me to MisDo should already have been settled as my reward for time warping."

"Ngh."

"If you ever want to turn a blind eye to these hand-prints, you will have to treat me to Andonand."

"Why do you know about that high class Mister Donut shop....."

Who told her?

That kind of thing never has been and still isn't in my town, and it never will be.

"Those mere hand-prints which will disappear in no time won't serve as evidence."

"Then I will just have to use your cellphone to snapshot it and make it evidence."

"Before we even talk about evidence and whatnot, if that kind of picture was in my cellphone, Hanekawa would cut ties with me, and Senjouhara would propose to break up."

"And then you would get arrested by that policewoman."

"I wonder if that person's still serving as a police officer in the present....."

If she is, that means we might meet again in the other world too.

The bond tying humans together really is unfathomable after all.

"Still, you're probably the only vampire who would use the word snapshot casually."

"And that vampire's ribcage was"

"I'm sorry, I seriously apologize, so please stop mentioning that subject already!"

I didn't have the slightest memory of it, but considering how hard it was to sleep in this pipeline, and unable to have faith in myself, thinking that this manner of perturbation could also be possible, I ended up giving an apology up front.

"Well, I have no intention of resenting you who made the promise of treating me to a ton of donuts, and every day from now on to boot."

A chuckling Shinobu.

Looking at that made me feel like I had been cleverly tricked.

If it's just hand-prints, surely she could've imprinted them by herself.

"Oh well..... I shall leave the possibility of having fully taken pleasure in Shinobu's ribs and in exchange, attain a happy mood."

"What a positive guy....."

Out of the pipelines we crept.

Like yesterday, the skies were clear.

Yesterday in this case referred to the yesterday of 11 years ago.

The difficulty in stalking would decrease if it was raining (the rain would conceal us and our noises. And the umbrella would make her neglect checking her back.), so I was sort of hoping for it, but I guess things don't work out so conveniently.

Well, Hachikuji didn't say that it was raining that day either.

Shinobu and I did some light stretching to loosen our bodies which stiffened at that park's open space (I don't know if Shinobu needed to stretch or not, but she stretched along with me), and then we headed towards Hachikuji's house.

The local time was 8 in the morning.

That should be a good time.

Now, it's not like I was thinking about this during my sleep, but a problem that comes to mind when executing the mission of keeping watch on Hachikuji's house, while posted near a utility pole, has to be the high degree of suspiciousness.

Though this may be a lenient era, if we still staked out over too long a period of time, the possibility of having the good people in the neighborhood start talking to us wasn't zero.

Considering that it was inevitably a Sunday, she was likely to leave home during morning, but it was Hachikuji after all, she was impossible to predict.

Unexpectedly, the likelihood that she might leave at 5 in the afternoon was also possible.

She did say that her backpack's contents were a set for sleeping over or something, in that case, it wouldn't be strange if her lodging plan was to go there late and leave early.

That young girl was liable of being senselessly considerate, thinking about how staying there for too long could be a bother or things like that.

"Geez, what a troublesome girl. She should just die."

"But like we said, she is going to die at this rate."

While having our conventional conversation, we still made sure to prepare a counter-measure on that aspect.

A counter-measure so the people in the neighborhood wouldn't talk to us even if our stakeout lengthened to 10 hours ——— that was to give blood to Shinobu.

That was to have her suck my blood.

As for why I would do this, which was a custom ritual in a sense, even though there wasn't particularly a development into a battle lying ahead, it was because by having her suck blood, I could of course intensify Shinobu's vampiric nature, and as a result, she could change her outward appearance.

Whether she would change it or not actually depended on her intentions, her inner feelings, but ——— that was exactly why I wanted her to change from her little girl appearance.

Supposing she now looked like an 8 year old elementary student.

I wanted her to have the appearance of at least a 13 year old middle school girl.

In truth, having her grow all the way into an adult was better suited to our objective in this case, but if she approached her "original appearance" that much, neither Shinobu nor I would be able to tolerate the sunlight anymore.

Our bodies would burst into flames.

Even if they didn't, we would suffer severe burns.

Some humanity had to be kept.

The humanness of those who can survive thanks to the sun.

"? So, what purpose is there in becoming a middle school girl? You may not know, but from the public eye, dealing with middle school girls is plenty, more than plenty within the scope of lolicon acts."

"No, that wasn't what I meant."

Well, when thinking how a 3rd year high schooler dating a 1st year middle schooler would likely suffer the misery of being abhorred, what Shinobu said was correct, but no, you're wrong, that wasn't my intention at all to begin with.

It's not that I want to have fun making you change into all kinds of ages.

"Do you remember, about those middle school girls from yesterday?"

"I forgot."

"Recall it!"

"Ah, those girls. I see, I got it, what you were plotting."

"Ooh. You're pretty sharp, Shinobu."

While thinking that she definitely didn't get it, I tried to press her for an explanation.

Both I and Shinobu had too much enthusiasm.

"In short, after you talked with those middle school girls, you have awakened to the attractiveness of middle school girls."

"I've been telling you you're wrong!"

"So when we return to the present, you are going to visit forelock missy's house first..... no, you do not have to do that, as I recall you have 2 kits of middle school sister characters at home."

"Don't count my sisters as kits."

More like, Sengoku aside, it would be bad to start seeing sister characters as objects of attractiveness.

"*Sengoku* aside, is it?"

"Hm? Ah, well, I mean, she's in her 2nd year of middle school. Besides, she also looks unusually adult-like recently."

".....So that one's actions were surprisingly in the process of bearing fruit....."

"Who's 'that one'? From this last boss-ish tone..... is it Kaiki?"

"No, nevermind. I do not want to mention it. So, if that is the case, what purpose was there in making me become a middle schooler? The purpose in having me recall that group of middle school girls is?"

"Like I said, if I was dragging you, a little girl, around, people would use that as a reason to talk to us more easily. But I still want you to stake out with me by all means. And so the smart Koyomi-kun came up with this. If I made you grow up to about a middle schooler's age, your figure would become more pretty instead of cute, you'd give off an air of magnanimity that is somehow hard to approach, and you'd have the feeling of a bewitching beauty that anyone would be enchanted by, possessing an air that makes you too awe-inspiring to speak to."

"....."

Huh?

I only said what was obvious, yet middle schooler Shinobu's face reddened?

What's wrong, does she feel sick?

Is it that restoring her vampiric nature naturally makes the sun her enemy?

I thought that there wouldn't be a problem with a growth of 5 years or so, but.....

"Are you alright?"

"Hm? Hmm? Ah, aah, I am fine. N-now, you may continue. Keep on praising me more and more and mooore."

"? No, I wasn't particularly praising you though..... err, that's why staying together with you as a little girl would make it easier for people to talk to us, while staying together with you as a middle schooler should make them keep their distance instead, and although the fact that we remained suspicious might be the same, I thought that it should at least make it harder to talk to us."

"It would be harder to talk to us? Why, why?"

"Well, because you're too pretty....."

"S-specifically, which parts are pretty?"

"? Well rather than specific parts, it's everything. Well, be it your fluffy blonde hair, be it your smooth skin, the shape of your eyes or your lips, and of course your figure which has been fully developed yet keeps some immaturity somewhere, even the balance in the length of your arms and legs could be said to be perfect. If Leonardo da Vinci was alive, there's no mistake that he would have painted you instead of Mona Lisa."

"Aww!"

I got kicked.

I got kicked with the power of a vampire.

I had also become a vampire, so it balanced out and didn't hurt that much —— or that should have happened, but I took enough damage to drop face up.

Just how seriously did she kick me?

What is it, did she get mad?

"Huh? Did I say something wrong?"

"You did not, you did not. You did not say aaanything. Well well well well, if you are going to say that, I am not unwilling to cooperate either. I shall forcefully reinforce you." [\[1\]](#)

As I was getting up, middle schooler Shinobu's outfit changed from its standard model —— when Shinobu gets this much power back, she can *fiddle* with the *reality* of mere clothes at will.

So, the dress change this time was.

Precisely into the uniform of those middle school girls we met yesterday.

A dress type, same as Sengoku's, in other words, the uniform of the middle school I used to attend.

Woah, what is this super rare card.

Shinobu in uniform.....

"It is harder to talk to us this way, right? Moreover, in this country, the uniform outfit also serves to certify your social status after all."

".....Y,yeah. It does."

It's not like I hadn't thought of this idea.

However, I didn't think that Shinobu, who was picky at the level of an ultra popular council president [\[2\]](#) about fashion, would wear clothes that a lot of other people were wearing, so I discarded that idea before proposing it.

But for Shinobu to voluntarily show such a cooperative stance..... I didn't even specifically bait her with Mister Donut, I wonder just what improved her mood.

I had no idea.

It's a mystery, it's incomprehensible.

If I could tell, I would have an immense advantage in my relationship with Shinobu from here on though.....

"Should I prepare a uniform for you too if you want?"

"Ahh, then I guess I'll ask you to."

I decided to rely on her good will.

Though I felt some uneasiness towards this country's system which hadn't changed whatsoever since 11 years ago, where simply wearing a uniform lowered your degree of suspiciousness.

I had Shinobu make me the uniform (the boys) of Naoetsu High School, and crawled back inside the pipelines to change —— now we had achieved a pair of a high school guy attending prep school and a middle school girl studying abroad who, no matter how they were looked at, were not dubious.



Incidentally, while I was changing, Shinobu transformed further into a style where she wore glasses and had her hair in 2 braids separated to her left and right, she was imitating Hanekawa's former appearance for some reason. She might have been imagining a diligent student.

Well, as for a reason for why a high schooler and a middle schooler would be together, I couldn't find one at all after thinking hard about it, but while making the arrangement that we would insist on the far-fetched excuse that she was homestayng at my house in the unlikely event that we were still talked to, we arrived in front of Hachikuji's house once again.

It wasn't as if we had a designated spot on stage, but we kind of took position next to a utility pole, and put a start to our stakeout.

I had picked up the book loli Hanekawa threw at us and left behind yesterday, so while letting Shinobu read it (she was like an odd literature girl now). [\[3\]](#)

And while I pretended to fiddle with my cellphone (cellphones of this form weren't available in this period, but well, for that same reason, I should seem like a high schooler playing games).

We waited for Hachikuji to leave her home.

We waited, for Hachikuji Mayoi who would surely be full of anxiety and hope, striving to visit her mother's house —— carrying an enormous backpack.

It was nothing, by my conjecture, she should set out during the morning as we expected —— we probably don't have to stake out for too long.

I believe, without even waiting for 30 minutes——

I will get to meet her.

Hachikuji Mayoi, alive.

## 015

"She's not coming out at all!"

I screamed, after it was past 11 in the morning.

I almost threw my cellphone to the ground in retaliation —— despite having gotten a new model recently.

"Just how long is she going to make me expect her for!"

"You sure are not suited for staking out —— it has only been a few hours and a little."

"Yeah but..... it's true that I had the confidence to stake out for about 10 hours if I had to, but even so, for some reason, I believed that Hachikuji would come out in the morning..... considering the way she talked about it."

As we planned, no one dared to talk to the pair comprised of me in uniform and Shinobu as a middle schooler —— it was unavoidable for pretty blonde girl Shinobu to stand out, so while passersby did keep glancing in our direction, none however went as far as stopping in their tracks to gaze at us.

Her braided look might have been unexpectedly effective too.

Just the sight of blonde hair in braids was something considerably uncommon after all.

I personally think they're surprisingly common though.

Still, to disguise (transform?) Shinobu, both she and I raised our vampiric nature, so the sun really was tough, even though it shouldn't be since it was actually May, we pretty much felt like we were confined inside a sauna.

Shinobu appeared to be undisturbed, but I'm sure it was quite tough on her.

She kind of looked pitiful, or rather, it wasn't that I didn't regret that perhaps my judgement was a bit too shallow, perhaps I shouldn't have made Shinobu disguise herself, but the time for such regrets had long passed as well.

Besides, the people before us also said that it was better to regret after doing something than regret not doing anything. After reflecting on it, I think they're terribly irresponsible words though. My point is, don't do something you could regret in the first place.

Well, now that it's come down to this, we'll have a battle of endurance.

A battle of endurance with Hachikuji Mayoi.

I'll show you I can take root here and keep waiting [\[1\]](#), even until tomorrow——

"Excuse me, you two."

and.

Right after I renewed my determination, we were spoken to. It befell us.

By complete surprise, just as I was about to claim that there was probably no one left who would talk to us today, there was nothing more astonishing.

"Eh, ah, yes."

I responded while barely maintaining my composure.

Feigning ignorance to the utmost of my ability.

As we had arranged beforehand, Shinobu pretended to be a foreign student who didn't understand Japanese well and continued reading her book.

When I actually thought about it afterwards, the book she continued reading was a book in Japanese (it was a foreign book by the title of <<On the Banks of Plum Creek>>, but it was translated into Japanese), so that kind of pretense was contradictory.

"Well well, what could it be? What business do you have with us who are not dubious in the least?"

I replied nonchalantly.

My pronunciation turned out to be clearer than necessary.

Am I supposed to be a stage actor or something?

"So you want to listen to a lecture about our undubiousness? Very well, allow me to explain. Of course, we aren't vampires or anything. We are just prone to sweating."

"No..... I don't care about any of that."

The grown man before us visibly seemed to be in a hurry —— he seemed to be flustered.

Giving an impression as if he didn't notice our dubiousness at all, he

"Have you seen my daughter?"

asked us.

"She's a young girl in 5th grade of elementary..... she ties her hair in two tails, and I believe she was carrying a big backpack, so....."

".....!"

I returned my line of sight, which I averted for an instant, towards Hachikuji's house —— doing so, I saw that the entrance and the front gate were left open.

As if someone had ran out.

No, this wasn't the time to put on airs of a sage who takes every possibility into consideration with an ambiguous expression like that, the one who ran out was clearly this man, also.

This man was —— someone from the Hachikuji family.

And.

The young girl in 5th grade of elementary he was looking for was, in all likelihood, Hachikuji Mayoi.

"Err..... no, we haven't seen her."

In terms of agitation, I wasn't that different from the man in front of me, but while still maintaining my composure to at least not let it show, I responded as coolly as I could.

Besides, although I said I was maintaining my composure.

That I hadn't seen her —— wasn't a lie.

Despite having kept watch here the whole time.

"Did something happen to that girl?"

"S, she's my daughter, but....."

The man turned around to face his home as he spoke.

"It looks like she ran away from home..... I was thinking that she sure took her time waking up, so I went to take a look in her room and there was a note she left behind, from the contents, I presume she somehow left at around 5 in the morning."

"Hachikujiii!"

I unintentionally screamed out her name.

Perhaps thinking that his own name was called, the man —— Mister Hachikuji, reacted with a jerk. However, I had no time to care about his reactions.

"Just how far does she think she's going!"

Setting out at 5 in the morning.

Is she going fishing or something!

She isn't even thinking about the trouble she's causing to the other side!

She's fully intent on staying for long!

Hachikuji Mayoi.

She was a unpredictable girl since the time she was alive.