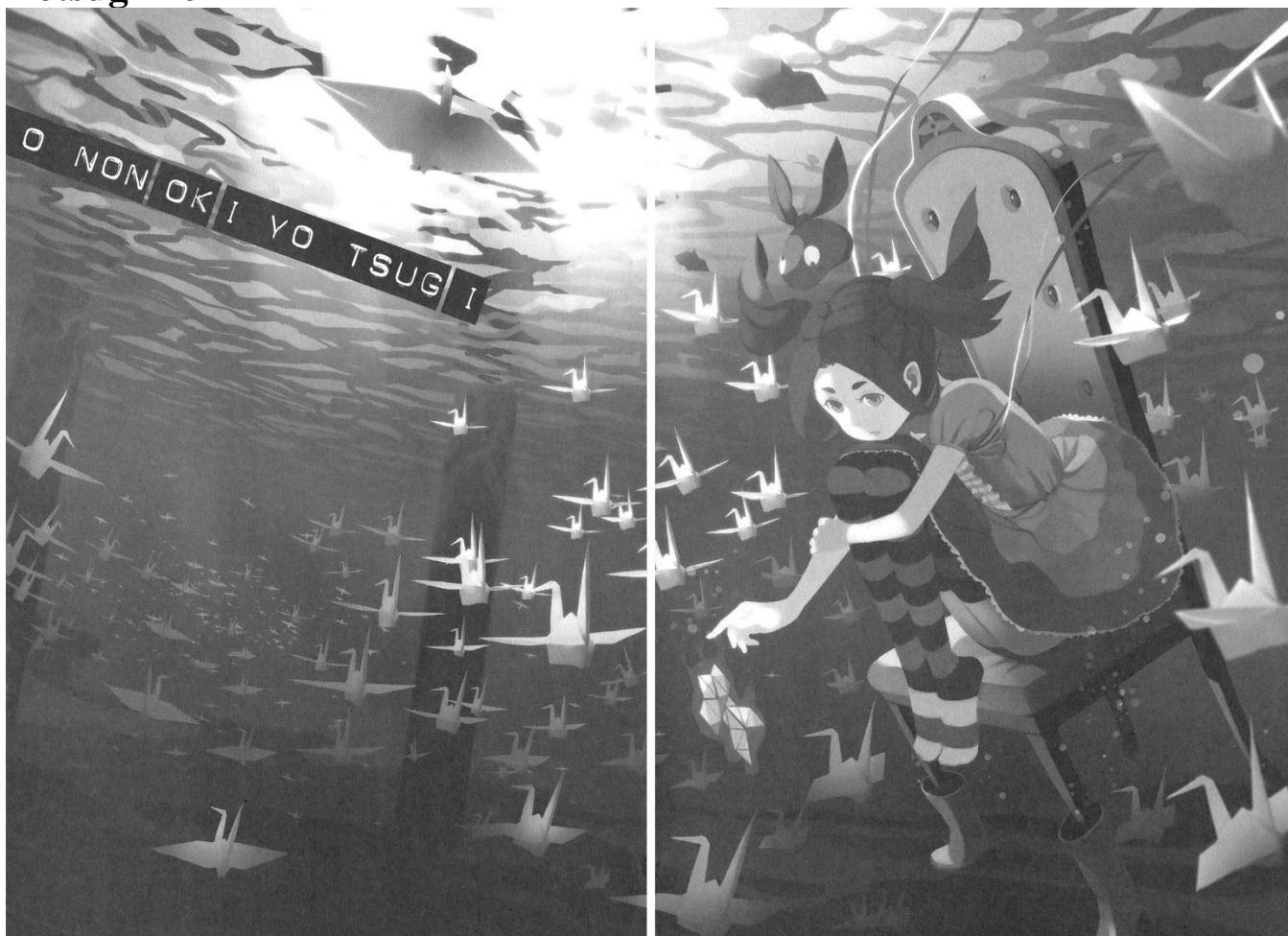




Tsukimonogatari

## Yotsugi Doll



Ononoki Yotsugi is a doll. To put it another way, she is not a human. She is neither a human, nor an organism and not ordinary. That is what Ononoki Yotsugi is, a tsukumogami who acts as a shikigami. She appears to be a cute girl though. By doing eccentric acts with an emotionless face, she lifts up the mood of the people around her but she is either a kائي, yokai or a monster. And. She cannot be involved with the human society in anyway.

“No, to tell the truth that is not correct – in her case that is,” said Shinobu, while I was having that thought. She said it from my shadows. “Because, she was originally a human and a doll – hence, she is imitating a human. She is only mimicking one.”

Does that mean that she is trying to become a human? I thought this and asked, but that was apparently not what Shinobu was trying to say.

Her imitating is the proof that she is not trying to become one. In any case, it is only a way to mix in amongst a human society – a way to compete. Hence, it wasn't a way to assimilate.

“No matter how much you memorize, learn and speak fluently, a foreign language is a way to communicate with foreigners. Just by learning the language, you don't change nationalities – it's the same as that. For her to imitate a human is not because she wants to be called or become a human, but only to be near them.”

Not because she wants to be called or become a human, but to be near them. I see, it was easy to understand because of the foreign language analogy. Although it is too global to speak of her situation by comparing it to foreign languages, if we sum it up as a cross cultural thing, it becomes an ordinary situation for me and other people to understand. To build a friendly relationship with someone with a different background, one must understand and respect the other person's culture – like they say, do what the Romans do in Rome.

“Anyways, has thou ever thought why kائيis – when becoming one, it takes form of a human or an animal – hence, even though they are unearthly creatures they take forms of an earthly being?”

I haven't thought about it.

Well, if you think about it, it would be because there is a limit to the human imagination.

Since it is impossible to visualise something that 'doesn't' exist, by taking something that 'does' exist and adding extra features could be the only possible way to visualize a kائي.

For example, although Oshino Shinobu's original form, Kissshote-Acerolaorion-Heartunderblade, is a vampire and a beautiful ghost, she takes form based on a human.

If she spread her wings, it would be similar to a bat.

If she shows her fangs, it would be like a wolf.

A vampire who is unearthly, no matter how surreal it is, it will always take form of something that is imaginable, otherwise it won't be idealized.

Something that is too beautiful to be painted cannot be drawn and something that is too beautiful to be seen cannot be seen.

I gave an example of languages before, but humans can only speak in the languages that they know. Even if it is a reality that can't be expressed in words or a dream that can't be expressed in words, we have no choice but to somehow express ourselves in sentences. However, as soon as it is said, there can be nothing else to say about it. Kaiis would be visualized at the heights of human imagination, and they would be relentless while being visualized. Even though kaiis will take different forms to those who see them, they would want to have the perfect image. That's why I couldn't say anything.

I didn't have anything to say to the former vampire Shinobu, a kaii that cannot possibly exist in reality who was taking a form of an eight years old blond girl.

Reading my mind, Shinobu said this to me. "Because humans exist, because they are present, kaiis can exist."

And

"However it doesn't mean that kaiis are dependent on the humans – it merely means that if the observing side doesn't exist, then the ones being observed won't exist as well."

I wonder which one is true.

I thought that she was talking about the effects of observers, but somehow seems to be wrong. It felt like it was something more illogical and emotional; a sentimental story.

"For any being, or for any action, if there is no one watching, it would be meaningless. If there is no one who talks about legends of heroes or kaiis, it would be like that they don't exist," said Shinobu.

It felt like she was reminiscing about her past.

"Even me, who was called the legendary vampire – if there were no legends, then it would be the same as me not being a vampire. A kaii that is not talked about is not a kaii."

A tale of kaiis must be mysterious – is what Shinobu said.

"Well, I can't say that these are my thoughts, but they are of that unpleasant aloha shirt's values and way of thinking – hence kaiis are all about thoughts."

How our heart – thinks.

What if I'm putting by my heart towards the doll?

A tsukukami – undeserving ghost can be said to be born this way. Believing that there is a god in everything, the Eight million gods mindset is said to be the mindset of most Japanese people. However, the act of putting our heart towards living or non living things can be found anywhere in the world. So tales of kaiis can be said anywhere in the world. Because of humans – the stories can be told.

Yeah, that was something that was acceptable. No, for me, it was something that I had to accept. For me, who has told numerous stories of different kaiis.

About a vampire.

About a cat.

About a crab.

About a snail.

About a monkey.

About a snake.

About a bee.

About a phoenix.

For a person who told these stories before, I could only accept. And now, yet again, I am about to tell another story about a doll, but it seems to be a bit exaggerated. Urban legends, tales on the streets and conspiracy theories becomes nothing more than just idle chat when exaggerated. The seriousness or the meanings becomes lost.

Thinking about the events that started from the first day of the second semester, or the events that took place at the end of the year with Sengoku Nadeko becoming a snake god, I felt reluctant about the events that happened around me. How long will this continue?

Continuously meeting kaiis, I would feel despair at each situation. However, those are just luxurious feelings. I had to realize not to think about when this would all end. Well, I won't start even if I say these things now.

Because all stories must come to an end. 'Why don't I continue my noisy and disruptive daily life a bit longer?' Even if I say these positive thoughts, there will be a limit where I wouldn't be able to endure any longer.

The story that I will tell about the doll now, is about what I have realized – what I realized without meaning to.

So this is the beginning of the end. A story about a human named Araragi Koyomi; me who is Araragi Koyomi.

It is the story about the beginning of the end

“Onii-chan! It’s morning!”

“It’s time to get up!”

This morning I seriously had to think about whether or not I needed an alarm clock. Actually, I don’t like the word ‘alarm clock’ or the alarm clock itself. I didn’t like it since a long time ago. I really disliked it. I hated it. I have never liked it once. The possibility of me liking an alarm clock was absolute zero.

If a person was to ask me why didn’t I like alarm clocks, my answer would be ambiguous. It’s hard to decide whether I disliked it because it was an alarm clock, or that it’s an alarm clock because I disliked it, or it woke me up because it was a clock that I hated. I really wished that all alarm clocks would go to hell.

There shouldn’t be anything wrong with me, but I don’t think that everything that goes to hell should be alarm clocks. At all. If I was to believe such a thing, isn’t there a possibility that I might turn into an alarm clock? The horror of me being an alarm clock. I would never want to fight against that trauma.

It’s just a hypothesis, but I want you to listen to the things I thought about before. It wouldn’t be a hypothesis if you don’t listen to it. If I tell you why I hated alarm clocks, the world! ... Hmm, that was a big bluff I told.

Anyways, most people might hate alarm clocks like how they hate the enemy of their parents or the enemy of their daughters. These are the things that come to my mind naturally when I think about the reason why I hate them. Actually, these may not be just a hypothesis, but the truth.

Talking to myself as if I just made a quiet breakthrough, I think I hated alarm clocks<sup>[1]</sup> because it sounds similar to water that had been boiled <sup>[2]</sup>.

Cool down the boiled water.

Cool down the long waited boiled water.

Back to square one, cool it down.

Speaking like this makes me feel like going against the law of entropy.

The unpleasant feeling that you get when you wake up in the morning. And that’s why we, that is the world, hates alarm clocks.

I would call this nuance a hypothesis.

Apart from alarm clocks and water that had been boiled, for things that sound similar, the emotions start to take over and form thoughts about the word.

There are a few examples. Let's say Bruce Lee and Blu-ray [\[3\]](#). You should have some subjective feeling on which one of these two are cooler. However, we cannot accept that our emotions will sway the way we feel about alarm clocks.

Firstly. The symptom where you hate alarm clocks is common for all people around the world. However, to put all blame on the alarm clocks and water that had been boiled relationship which is only unique to Japan is unfortunately too far fetched. There is no way that the global hatred towards alarm clocks originated from Japan.

Secondly. This is what they would call an 'objection that doesn't allow objections'. Rather than saying secondly, it might be better to say the ultimate disproof. Anyway, the disproof is that a normal Japanese student who has been taught with the national curriculum would have learnt the word 'alarm clock' before they learnt 'water that had been boiled.'

This disproof.

Nothing can be said.

Even after I said it, I still don't know the official meaning of water that had been boiled.

Boiled water, cool it down.

Describing the 'water that had been boiled' as boiled water which has been cooled down would be my guess at the official meaning of 'water that had been boiled', but for the official meaning, I would be speechless. I would just become silent.

Even so, I hate alarm clocks.

Like what old people say, there is no reason for likes and dislikes. There is no reason for liking something or disliking something. Hence, according to this saying, saying 'I don't want to think of myself as a snotty person who chooses his likes and dislikes' is the truth that can't be hidden.

People want to have a distinguishable side to them. Even if it is forced, they want to act by their chosen personality, to be prideful of themselves without being seen as a snob.

Could I be the only person who thinks so ambiguously? Of course, I have to give credit to the old people who influenced my thoughts, though it wouldn't be right to put the blame on the old people for my foolishness.

Back to the topic, alarm clocks.

Alarm clocks.

Alarm.

In regards to the second nuance hypothesis, it can be applied not only to words that sound similar but look similar as well. For words that look similar, we can get similar feel as well. We conclude that



things that are similar are the same. Therefore, if the first hypothesis is about the sound of the word, the second hypothesis is about the visual of the word.

To put it simply, ‘clock’ and ‘lock’ that are two different words with different pronunciations, by taking away a letter <sup>[4]</sup> the two words becomes the same. So it would be natural for the two words to have similar nuances. In this case, bear and beer would also be under the same effect.

Under the same hypothesis, the words ‘alarm clocks’ (目覺まし) and ‘unawareness’ (自覺なし) would be similar. The difference between 自 and 目 is the dot at the top and when you compress the character な from both sides, you end up with ま.

So it would be appropriate to say that alarm clocks and unawareness are similar.

It isn’t exactly the same, but can be said to almost the same.

For now, it would be impossible to find any evidence to deny this.

In any case, the phrase unawareness does not carry a positive nuance, whether it is being used in a sentence or a dialog.

In the world, what matters is not what someone says, but the person who said it. It’s something that I’ve been hearing about all my life. However, no matter who says that someone is unaware of things around them, it will carry a negative nuance. If it gets worse, it will turn into curses.

‘You have no awareness, do you?’

‘Me? What about you?’

After hearing these things, no-one would think ‘Wow, I got praised!’ Even if a teacher or a professor that you respected says it in a playful manner, you would still be hurt in some way.

Thinking that this hatred of mine is related to me hating alarm clocks is somehow so unnaturally logical, intellectual, and correct that there can be no arguments against it.

But the reason why I wasn’t presenting these hypothesis and theories to the society weren’t because I wanted to avoid the fame brought by the sheer brilliance of them. I had two of my own reasons why I was keeping them to myself.

One was because the analogy of alarm clocks and unawareness can only exist in Japan. Also, you would learn the word unawareness before you learn the word alarm clock. Actually, putting the trivia knowledge of the order you would learn the words in aside, there would be no human who wakes up suddenly worrying about having no awareness. While I think that relying on our intuition while we are trying to deduce something would be foolish, our intuition seems to be spot on most of the time. To give an example, when we feel uneasy, there is trouble around the corner. It would be because unfortunately, in reality, a life that doesn’t have a single bad day doesn’t exist.

So to be on the safe side, it’s not a bad idea to say ‘there might be something good today’ innocently when you wake up in the morning. You don’t know what might happen, but it’s like saying that you have a good feeling about that day. After all, a life that doesn’t have a single good day doesn’t exist as

well. No, to be in an environment where you have the leisure to say such a thing is enough to be grateful about that day.

So your intuition is bound to be correct in some ways.

And I believe you would understand that there is no relation between alarm clocks and unawareness whatsoever without any explanation.

So let's forget about the whole theory on nuances for now.

That was such a bad joke.

Let's just lock away that bad theory.

To find the relation between alarm clocks and unawareness would be in vain just like trying to find someone that looks like you.

Back to alarm clocks.

Alarm clocks, alarm clocks, alarm clocks.

Armclocks al.

If you keep repeat saying alarm clocks over and over, it would start to sound like dried sardines<sup>[5]</sup> and for an average Japanese person such as myself, I can only imagine breakfast. Even though it is a pleasant thing to visualize, I choose not to continue thinking about it so I would stop.

Let's talk about the arguments.

If you look at the word alarm clock (目覺まし), it consists of the kanji 目 (eyes) and 覺 (remember/realize), which would translate to 'eye opening'. So an object that would open 'my' eyes would be called an alarm clock. That would be the exaggerated definition of an alarm clock. If it doesn't open my eyes, there would be no reason to call it an alarm clock.

Considering that they forcefully open our eyes, no wonder that people hate alarm clocks. In the first place, people open their eyes naturally when the time is right. I didn't like the fact that alarm clocks disturb the natural method of waking up and force it by artificial means. It felt like I was suffering in the same situation as were the workers of the Luddite movement in the late 18th and early 19th century.

Also, there was another reason why opening our eyes unnaturally was bad. By opening our eyes was to wake up from a dream, which wasn't great. To put it bluntly, it was bad.

We dream of things that we can't achieve in real life, and that is the reason why we hope to dream every night. But how *dare* they destroy our dreams repeatedly.

Alarm clocks should be collectively called they from now. They cannot be forgiven.

If possible, I don't want to open my eyes.



Or I don't want to move my muscles.

There is the term 'good morning', but if it is too early in the morning, it can be said latter on. If you said 'good night' before going to sleep the night before, at least let me have a good night's worth of rest. I feel betrayed by the people who say 'good night' and 'good morning' on the next day. Being betrayed is quite sad.

Frankly, it is an actual fact that people shouldn't wake up in the morning, and it is supported by historical records. One of the cultural aspects that the Japanese take great pride in is anime. Just by looking at the airing times [\[6\]](#), it can be clearly understood that humans are nocturnal creatures. It is something that even biologists should accept. This is no joke and it is an unshakable truth. Studying and working are also activities that we do late at night. By becoming nocturnal, humans are making new evolutionary progress. At this rate, the very definition of the moon and the sun will swap.

For these reasons, people should sleep in the morning, and alarm clocks that disturb that evolutionary progress should be seen as an enemy to the entire human civilization.

It is understandable.

It is understandable that we want to rely on a piece of machinery called an alarm clock, but isn't it the time to let it go?

It is time to part ways.

There's no need to, right?

Isn't it alright not to open our eyes?

Shouldn't we live looking at everyone smiling?

So we should say this to all alarm clocks.

Not with an ill heart, but with a grateful one:

"Thank you, now good night."

"Don't sleep!"

"Don't sleep!"

I got it.

I got kicked.

I got prodded

My head got beaten.

It hit my vital spot.

Since there are many vital spots in the human body, I won't specify which one, but it was a vital spot that would give a high critical damage. But I had to curl up into a ball.

"Why do you want to give out so much excuses for not waking up, Onii-chan." "In the first place, we're not alarm clocks but sisters. Alarm sisters."

My little sisters Araragi Karen and Araragi Tsukihi were standing next to my bed like a pair of Deva Kings<sup>[7]</sup>. When I say standing like a pair of Deva Kings was not a metaphor, or something that I used to make it funny.

It was really 2 Deva Kings standing.

While in Deva Kings pose, they were complaining to me.

It was an interesting pose.

I wanted to make a figurine of them.

"It's alright. According to Professor Koyomi's hypothesis on nuances, similar words are classified to be the same."

"Don't compare alarm clocks to little sisters!" Karen kicked me while using a different accent. Her accent was beyond bad. The last part sounded like 'oysters'. Sounds delicious.

"Clocks<sup>[8]</sup> and little sisters<sup>[9]</sup>, they aren't remotely similar," said Tsukihi. Even though she didn't put much thought into her comment, something clicked in me.

"I've got a great idea. What about selling Clock Sisters? The minutes hand can be Karen, and the seconds hand can be Tsukihi. The Clock Sisters will wake you up every morning. With Kitamura-san (Kitamura Eri, Araragi Karen's VA) and Iguchi-sans' (Iguchi Yuka, Araragi Tsukihi's VA) voices."

"You can't actually say their names you know."

"Onii-chan, the anime is already finished. The goods won't come out now."

"Is that so..."

How sad.

It's the sad truth.

It's the sad truth that must be accepted.

Karen and Tsukihi both looked disappointed, since the anime was based on them.

"Hmmmmmm."

My head cleared up and was fully awake.

It wasn't because I had to face the harsh reality.

It was simply because I woke up while chatting with my sisters.

I stretched myself from the ball position I was in.

I resembled a female leopard. I hope you didn't imagine it. Araragi Koyomi's leopard pose.

"Alright, I'm all awake now. My brain is working." I turned to face the Clock Sisters, my little sisters that is, and asked. "What century am I in?"

"Why are you pretending as if you woke up from a cold sleep?"

"You didn't sleep enough to sleep through centuries."

They were picking on me for things to trip me over about.

What a beautiful harmony.

In a 3-way conversation, to have 2 people picking on me, it was a refreshing feeling.

To enjoy this feeling a bit more, I continued to give them opportunities to cut in.

"If I woke up, it must mean that the cure has been developed."

"Why are you sounding as if you were put to cold sleep until the cure is discovered?"

"The cure that works for you hasn't been developed yet."

How fun.

"Has the nuclear war finished yet?"

"What are you saying, it's not finished."

"What...!?"

At Karen's answer, Tsukihi tripped up. The chain of the 3-way talk has finished. By 1 person not catching on, the rhythm has crashed and I felt sorry for Tsukihi.

"But we can use this. Araragi sibling's preview."

"Umm Onii-chan. We said that the anime is already finished. So there will be no previews."

"There won't be any PVs either."

They were too much.

“I see... well lets wind back the seconds hand and start from one. Let’s start from one body. ”

Saying one body will probably make Kanbaru happy, but let’s put that aside.

“So Karen. What time is it now?”

“One, two, three, four, five, six... huh?”

Although she was living in the present as a 3rd grade of middle school, she didn’t know how to parody this situation. She stopped half way. Tsukihi also didn’t say a word. It seemed that this was the limit for 2 people to make come backs. Without waiting for the other person to answer, they both looked towards the desk clock in the room. For your information, I had 4 different clocks in my room. None of them has an alarm function though.

I did have an alarm clock before, but it was destroyed by Karen’s righteous fist, the fist of justice.

Wow

I never knew that metal could rip apart like newspaper. According to Karen, “Waking you up is our job! We won’t let a machine replace us!”

She really had a strange personality.

You could even say that she is sort of a luddites.

To awake me up at a set time each day means that they wake up earlier than me. Why would they put so much effort as if their life depended on it?

Ah, that’s right. It should be from middle school. Ever since I was in middle school, they started to wake me up. I wonder why? Why do they wake me up? I wonder if they are trying to make up for that gap between us... if so, when did that gap appear?

I turned around that check the clock to find that it was 6 o’clock. The minutes hand and the seconds hand were at 1800. There was no way that it was 6 PM, so it must be 6AM. Since I didn’t fall into a deep sleep, it must mean that today is...

“It’s 13th of February.”

I had check by listening to my voice.

Even though it’s a room with 4 clocks, there is no calendar.

‘What nonsense is it for Araragi Koyomi to not have a calendar<sup>[10]</sup>!’ That sort of feeling I guess.

I wasn’t exactly living up to my name. It’s not the name that represents the person after all.

“So, it’s the day before Valentines. My little sisters, have you prepared the chocolates to give to me?”

“Wha~~” It was Tsukihi who answered in such tone. It was as if she saw a withered flower.

“Poor you... to ask for chocolate from your sisters so boldly, it is so sad. It’s not what a human should do. So this is the standard a person can fall to.”

“What are you saying. It’s not that pitiful.”

“You’ve reached to the ends of how a person can be so pitiful. It was something that you should have never said. Poor Onii-chan. You saying that you have a girlfriend is sure to be a lie. Senjougahara must be an extra that you hired for 1000yen per hour.”

“Don’t treat Senjougahara as an extra. She isn’t the type of woman to be moved by money.”

Even if I say this, Senjougahara was quite addicted to money. At 1000yen per hour, she would accept it. At a brilliant speed.

Tsukihi had a smile on her face, as if she knew about it. The boyfriend doesn’t know anything about his girlfriend type of look.

Well, I probably don’t know much about her. I might be ignorant. But for some reason, ever since I introduced Senjougahara to my sisters, they became really friendly with each other. It must be because her personality is similar to Tsukihi, so even if they didn’t prepare any chocolate for me, they probably did for Senjougahara.

“I see... so you are trying to push out with yuri<sup>[11]</sup> situations you merchants.”

“I don’t get what you’re saying. What is yuri? Plus, it would be better to push out BL <sup>[12]</sup> rather than yuri if we’re trying to sell.”

My sister was planning a frightening marketing strategy. As expected of the brains of Fire Sisters, a calculating strategy.

“Anyways, it’s not like you to worry about Valentines is it? Right?”

Karen stepped on me while she said that. Stepping on me who was in the leopard position, she continued.

“The entrance exams is only about a month away you know? You know that right? If you didn’t know, isn’t it better for you to die? I’ll kill you?”

Thinking about it, the entrance exam was certainly a month away, on the 13th of March.

Finally it would be me, Araragi Koyomi’s entrance exam date. Thankfully, I didn’t fail brilliantly in the trial exams. The situation should be considered a miracle. If you ask if it was a close one or not, it would be considered to be a close one, but...

“That’s why you are trash,” said Karen, with her arms crossed.

Wasn’t that too harsh? Although it’s an expression frequently used in anime and manga, to call a person trash in real life was extremely rare.

“You can’t see what you have to do clearly. You can only see the thing that you should do tomorrow, so

you're not thinking about the event that's to take place in a month. It's like having your eyes closed, being dead. No, you won't die like that now. If you did somehow get into uni, the problem will continue. Even thinking about it is worrisome. For me to experience such defeat isn't that great? It's really great you goodwill ambassador."

"A goodwill ambassador you say..."

I think I am the only person who would put up with such an insult. Even though Karen is in middle school and I'm in high school, we were both 3rd years. But since she went to a school with an escalator system, she didn't have to study as much. She was looking down on me even when she didn't need to. Even though she was a lot taller than me (even though it's unbelievable, she is still growing! Being taller than me is a given, she is taller than anyone around her), even for her personality to change.

At this stage, instead of a complex, I feel pleasure being stepped on by my little sister who is taller than me, while listening to the thing that I'm not doing right in life. Meanwhile, the littler sister kept staring at me.

"Hurry up and study. Compel yourself."

"Although I admit that I should aim to do better, I don't think that you have the right to talk. Do you have the leisure to worry about me?"

Catching her off guard, I turned around and grabbed her foot that was stepping on me. It might be because she is tall, but her foot is quite big, I couldn't hold it with both of my hands.

"I'll tickle you. Hahahaha"

"Hehe, I'm not ticklish. I've been training after all. My feet are thick you know?"

"Well, I'll lick you!"

"Hyaan!"

Whether I licked her foot or she pulled free before, we'll keep it a secret for our privacy, but in the end I massaged her foot.

I was granted freedom without the foot pressing down on me and jumped out of bed. Now, I was completely awake.

I was at an age where if I let my guard down, I would fall back to sleep, but I don't think I would today.

"I feel fine now."



Showing a satisfied look, Karen nodded her head. All she had done was to wake me up, but she looked surprisingly pleased with herself.

“Well I’m going for a run now, so could you get the bath ready at the highest temperature possible? Do you want to come with me Onii-chan?”

“Do you really think that I can keep up with your pace? Your running distance is like a marathon. Go and find Kanbaru to run with.”

“I do meet Kanbaru every now and then around this time.”

“I see.”

Now that I think about it, my lovely junior did say that she dashes 10KM twice every morning. It wasn’t a full marathon but half of one. So it wasn’t surprising that they ran into each other along their morning exercise. Although their types are different, I wonder who is better Kanbaru or Karen?

“You might be sad while I’m gone, but I’m off now. Let’s meet again when we have breakfast. We will decide it then!”

“What are we deciding?”

That that I can think of any.

“Farewell! Tot-chan Onii-chan!” [\[13\]](#)

As soon as the words left her mouth, she bolted out of my room. Whether it’s a 100m run or a marathon, I really wished that she wouldn’t start running from the house. It was just like her to start up the engine from the house.

“Karen’s hair got longer,” said Tsukihi who was watching Karen leave.

“It grew a lot. I was really surprised when she cut her ponytail during the summer holidays, but now it’s almost back.”

It must be because she is growing rapidly.

“Well yeah, I guess so...”

The expression cut it herself sounded like as if a lizard cut its tail off so it was a bit scary, but it was true.

Anyways, Karen's ponytail was almost back to normal. She could tie back her hair, even though she couldn't before.

"It's not as long as yours, Tsukihi."

"It's not as long as yours as well, Onii-chan."

"Don't compare it to me, you."

If there was a reason for her to mention our hair lengths, it would be because it was not normal. Tsukihi used to change her hair style really frequently but now, for some reason, she kept growing it. Right now, it is long straight hairstyle that reaches up to her ankles. With her habit of wearing Japanese style clothes, she looks like a female ninja that uses her hair as a weapon.

Kunoichi<sup>[14]</sup> Tsukihi.

A Tsukikage<sup>[15]</sup>.

As for me, in order to hide my wounds on my neck, my hair doesn't quite reach up to my ankles, but it's fairly long.

It was reaching half way down my back, so it was around the same length as Karen's previous hair length. After putting it off repeatedly, it grew up to the length it is at now.

It was an honour to have my hair this long.

"Never mind me, but wouldn't it better for you to get a haircut before your exams? It would give a bad impression at the interviews."

"There are no interviews. At the entrance exams, there are no interviews, since it's not like a part time job. But I better give a good impression to the exam supervisors though. It's not like I'm growing my hair because I feel like it you know, I really do want to get it cut. But my photo on my application sheet has this hair style, so if I cut it now, I would look like a different person," I said, while fiddling with my hair.

"I'll cut it after the exams then. I'll cut it clean."

"It feels hot just by looking at you, even though it's winter."

"I don't want to hear that from you. Your hair is more like a trench coat than hair..."

I reached out and grabbed at Tsukihi's hair. It was an impressive amount.

I don't like to blame others, but I think that I didn't realize how long my hair was because of Tsukihi's hair length.

It was trying to figure out which line was longer.

Tsukihi's was way longer though...

"Well... I better prepare the bath for Karen now. She's going to drag her sweaty body here so early in the morning. I better prepare some warm bath water."

"It sounds like you are asking for my help Onii-chan. You are pressuring me too much."

"She is training herself to be like a sharp sword. Why won't she join a club or something."

Araragi Karen was a karate girl. So it would be good for her to join a karate club or something... Not caring about my sisters activities before, I never thought about it until now. It worried me now that I do think about it.

"Karen won't join any clubs. Really, you don't know anything do you."

Tsukihi was acting triumphant. It was good that she liked to teach people, but she showed an unpleasant attitude like teaching. Well, it's not unusual for Tsukihi to get angry so I'll ignore it for now.

What did bother me was that Karen wasn't joining any clubs. Why?

"Why won't Karen join any clubs? I never heard about it before. For me to not know something about my own sisters, it cannot be."

Did she get onto some black list? Or maybe because she was too busy with the work of Fire Sisters? If the reason was because of her activities in the Fire Sisters, than the Fire Sisters should be disbanded immediately.

"No no, it's the karate dojo's rules. Students are not to join any club activities. It would be dangerous. Really dangerous. Dangerous. Rous."

I tilted my head. "If you are my sister, than talk in a way that I can understand you idiot. Acting like The Fool. [\[16\]](#)"

"What attitude you have... my attitude isn't great, but yours is the worst. The worst. That's why martial arts are learnt. If you have a pro boxer's license, you can be treated as a murder weapon."

"Alright... calm down."

Hmm, I thought that was a myth, but I found out why Karen didn't join any clubs. It was because of the set rules of her dojo.

It was too dangerous. I wasn't sure if that applied to the user of the techniques or the receiver. Either way, having experienced Karen's karate moves first hand before, I think I understood the restriction. When used against normal humans, the power balance would crumble.

I wouldn't want to face against a person who can thrust a hole into a magazine with bare hands.

"Actually, I heard about it before. I forgot it till now because I didn't really care what happened to my little sisters."

"Care to elaborate?"

"I remembered it thanks to you... to meet her master some time. But Tsukihi, don't you think it's a waste of talent for her to be active in a club?"

"Me?"

"Even if she isn't as good as me, it is for sure that she is overflowing with talent. Shouldn't she should be active on a global level? Not in a dojo or in Fire Sisters, but at the Olympics!"

My foot got stamped on.

It wasn't a cute stomp, but it was a stomp with the body weight behind it. At a pin point accuracy. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that my foot got crushed. It was the truth. My toenail broke.

"What are you doing!"

"Huh? Well, it was because you said something that made me angry..."

Her angry face disappeared and was replaced with a face that said that something was strange.

"Someone who tries to break up the Fire Sisters won't be forgiven even if you are our brother."

"But you told me that you were considering disbanding it. You said that you would invite me to a disbandment party with only middle school girls."

"I get angry when I hear it from other people."

She really was a blunt person. She was dangerous. Dangerous [\[17\]](#)

"I get angry you know. To hell with the Olympics. It's mannerism. Repeating the same events every time."

“Don’t call tradition mannerism. Don’t treat the event that takes every 4 years to be mannerism. Don’t talk about the Olympics like that. What kind of a person are you.”

“Well, even if you don’t say it, Karen will eventually leave the Fire Sisters for sure though.”

If she puts it so bluntly, I have a hard time treating her well.

“When she moves onto high school, the situation will change. Her environment changes, but I don’t think she’ll quit the dojo. She is fascinated by her master after all.”

“Hmm...”

To hear that my little sister was fascinated by her master I have never seen before, it was unnerving. I really had to meet her master for sure.

“Master won’t let Karen leave either. He observes her physical condition more than you do.”

“What? He observes Karen more than me? What kind of a guy is he? Does he even know soft Karen’s tongue is?”

“No, I don’t think he knows that...”

She looked at me with a face that said ‘when did you find that out’.

“How come you know about Karen’s oral insides in so much detail?”

“Um...”

It was time to retreat. That’s enough for today. It’s just some pointless chat. I really didn’t think that I would get much more by talking to Tsukihi this morning.

I confirmed these things from her. One is that Tsukihi was hesitant about disbanding the Fire Sisters and the other is that she didn’t forget about the disbandment party promise.

I don’t know how my entrance exam will be like, but it is certain that my surroundings will change soon.

Before that, Karen and Tsukihi. There was no way that I didn’t have any worries about them, I was always looking for ways to advise them. Soon, it will be the time for the Fire Sisters to open their eyes.

I had to as well.

Araragi Karen and Araragi Tsukihi.

My two little sisters, referred to as the Fire Sisters of the Tsukanoki Middle School, wake me up every morning whether it is because of a good heart, a habit or to show predominance against their older brother. I don't know why, but they just do. They consider waking me up their top priority. Be it weekdays, Sundays and public holidays, no matter what day it is, they wake me up.

They wake me up as if their lives depend on it.

They wake me up with all their might.

I used to be harsh towards my sisters because of this (especially during the 1st year of high school) they weren't bothered at all and continued to wake me up. No matter what the situation was, they would wake me up even if that meant ignoring the situation completely. I could feel the obsession they had with waking me up.

These days, I couldn't afford not to study for my entrance exams. I would often study late into the night. In those situations, I was actually grateful for my little sisters' alarm function. To be honest, I am grateful even now. No, when I think about it, I should be grateful at any time. I became mature enough to consider their acts as something to be grateful about.

However, it is now February and I didn't have to go to school because I was a third year. So I didn't have to wake up early in the morning. When I consider my health or my study efficiency, I need a certain amount of sleeping hours. I could just ignore it, but my little sisters aren't the type that can be stopped by my ignorance.

Let alone studying for my entrance exams. I had a lot of recorded absences, late arrivals and early leaves ever since the 2nd semester of my first year of high school due to various reasons. In fact, I had so many absences, late arrivals and early leaves that my graduation became questionable. It was the Fire Sisters that saved me from my situation, so I couldn't just ignore them.

Not considering whether it was just, my little sisters' earnest act of waking me up couldn't be ignored because of its merits. The people who helped me improve academically to get ready for the entrance exams were Hanekawa Tsubasa and Senjougahara Hitagi for sure, but the people who helped me graduate safely were Araragi Karen and Araragi Tsukihi without a shadow of doubt. If I think about it this way, it is humane to repay the help received in some way. It is human nature.

Just to clarify, it's not because I'm a sis-con<sup>[1]</sup> or anything. Sis-cons only exist in manga and anime (how many times have I repeated this?). To describe it psychologically, it is the principle of repayment (when a human receives a favour, it feels compulsory to repay the favour in a suitable way). This must be the reason. Humans had the 'habit' of wanting to repay the help to the helper in some way.

We do get the feeling that humans are really fair creatures, with a fair mindset, but that's not necessarily true. To summarize it would boil down to 'it is uncomfortable to be in debt at a person'. I think people try to clear the debt by repaying their help or repaying their help beyond what was originally given to



show a superior side to them. That is why I want to slowly repay my debt to my sisters who kept waking me up for the last half year—no, the last 6 years. This is my obligation as an older brother and as a person who cares about their future and wellbeing.

“Although for Karen, as she has a strong body, I don’t think I need to worry too much about her future career prospects. Even if I leave her alone, she’ll excel at something on herself.”

I grumbled to myself as I walked down the stairs.

Someone might eavesdrop what I say. What's more, the vampire in my shadow will also know.. Since I didn’t know when or who might be listening, I stagnated; still, I was worried about Tsukihi.

Araragi Tsukihi.

I’m seriously worried about her future. It was impossible not to think about it. I can’t imagine what she will be doing around this time next year. She thinks fast, but she uses her mind in the wrong way. Her head is full of idling thoughts.

She is the strategist of the Fire Sisters: the living weapon who likes to use unreal violence and large scale action. There were only a few reasons why Tsukihi was able to be active as part of the Fire Sisters duo. If she was given the permission to do whatever she wanted, who knows what she might do. Rather than saying it was something unimaginable, I would tell you I didn’t want to imagine about it. If Tsukihi had the chance to live the life that she wanted to without any limits, she would; however, we want to avoid holding a criminal interview in our house.

After mulling over these thoughts, the only thing that I, with the high school graduation approaching me, should be worrying about is the entrance exams. The next thing I had to worry about was the future of my little sisters—more specifically, Tsukihi. I’m not thinking about it in a parental view. If I get accepted into university, I would probably leave the house. If I do, I can’t just leave my little sisters behind.

I think it’s irresponsible as an older brother.

Should it be as a human being rather than older brother?

To repeat myself, it didn’t matter what becomes of them. They are free to live the life they want. I just wanted to do what I can so that I won’t be blamed by how they turn out in the future. So I started to heat up the bath for Karen who would arrive home drenched in sweat.

‘Look, I’m not being irresponsible. I’m not being over-cautious you know? Look, I’m heating up the bath water for her.’

Those were the lines that I had prepared to object with a triumphant face.

Ha ha ha ha.

I shall warm it up to the temperature that she likes. It was I who was caring about her while speaking like a bad person. Karen's favourite temperature, a temperature where it feels like you'll get burnt, was a temperature that I also liked.

While cleaning the bathroom and arranging the bathroom objects, I felt like having a bath as well. It wasn't like I sweated or anything, but apparently people lose approximately a cups worth of sweat per sleep. So it wasn't unjustifiable to have a shower in the morning even if I didn't go for a run or a jog. Furthermore, I tend to have a shower in the morning to get my head straight when I wake up after studying. It was quite common for me.

“...”

That's right.

During the ancient times, the leader of an army would employ a lot of people to taste their meals to see if it has been poisoned or not. That's why some say that when the leaders actually ate anything themselves, the food was often cold. There must have been a lot of people who tasted a bit of the food and died of food poisoning. That is how much life-threatening it was. So going by this theory, if I really valued Karen—her body and her future prospects—then what I should be doing isn't heating up the bath water for her, but to check if the bath was dangerous or not.

The bathroom is said to be the place with the highest death rate in a safe house. I had to check the safety of the bath before Karen comes back from running. I had to check the lethality of the bath water with my own body.

Oh well.

And so, I decided to take a bath.

I decided to lay back and enjoy a peaceful bath.

Kyaa, it's hard being an older brother.

To unwillingly take a bath for his precious little sister was what an older brother should do.

While having those thoughts in my mind, I striped down in the change area.

But at that moment.

“Huh?”

Tsukihi suddenly turned up in this place.

She turned up half dressed—in other words, she was half naked.

It looked like she took off her yukata in front of the bathroom door and walked in.

It was something that occurs frequently.

Tsukihi tends to take off clothes without much thought. So the person who had to take care of the clothes she striped off was of course people who weren't Tsukihi herself (often me).

Tsukihi glared at me while being half naked and said,

“You pervert!”

“That's not it, you're the worst! You said that you were preparing the bath for Karen-chan, but you wanted to go in first! You are the worst!”

“No, looking at you, it looks like you were thinking of the same thing as me...”

In my case, I didn't heat up the bath water for myself but for Karen and I was just checking the safety of the bath.

Aren't you even worse than me?

Saying such hypocritical things to me, I was really worried about Tsukihi's future. It was so surprising to see how she has survived for the last 14 years with that sort of personality. Anyways, Tsukihi had a fast metabolic rate. To put it simply, she sweats easily. So she bathes whenever she can. She was like Shizuka Minamoto from Doraemon.

She probably came thinking 'I won't let this slide!'

She really has no gaps.

“Never mind that. Onii-chan, I'm going to use the bath. If you are planning to disturb me, I won't look over it even if you're my brother.”

“You are trying to introduce a bathing order in the morning that might break our relationship as siblings...”

How scary.

Does she really want to live a life being so obsessed about bathing?

“But I really feel like taking a bath. My body is here, but my mind is already in the bathtub.”

“Don't be silly. The water is only half filled.”

“It has my body weight already in there.”

“A girl shouldn't boast about their weight.”

It was really hard to let her go first. I also was in the mood to take a bath. Unlike Tsukihi, my mind wasn't in the bathtub yet. Both my body and my mind were in the bathroom. Even so, just because a little sister requests to use the bath first, letting her go first would damage my authority as an older brother.

If it was a situation where the little sister was preparing to take a bath, and I let her take one before me, would obviously be the correct thing to do, but the opposite was unacceptable. You could say that I wasn't taking the full responsibility of an older brother.

So I could speak with my chest stretched out (I'm naked from my waist upwards. It was face to face with a half naked sister and a half naked brother). I was able to declare to Tsukihi.

"My little sister, if you really want to take a bath, you have to take me down fir..."

I was just able to dodge. What Tsukihi threw without any hesitation was a bottle of shampoo. She's only a middle school girl, but she has her own shampoo bottle. She is really different from Karen who just uses soap to wash her hair. It must be owing to the face that she wants to be a stylish girl. But a real stylish girl wouldn't throw a spinning shampoo bottle at someone's face.

"Tsk."

Moreover, stylish girls shouldn't click their tongues either.

My little sister is really scary.

What is she thinking?

Doesn't she think?

"That was dangerous! What do you think you're doing?!"

"Trying to take you down."

"No no, when I say take me down, I meant psychologically. Don't try to take me down physically. I really wish that you would be more responsible."

"How annoying."

She locked the door with one hand while she was talking. She didn't lock it with a key, but it showed that she wasn't going to get out by her own will. She went to pick up the shampoo bottle that she threw at me. At the same time, she tried to step, with a smooth motion, into the bathtub. Her actions was so natural I panicked and stopped her. I stopped her by blocking her with my manly body.

"If you want to pass throu..."

This time, she poked my eyes with her fingers. Eye poking was an attack that Senjogahara attempted when we first met (it didn't end with only an attempt though). However, in Senjogahara's case, she was showing her tough side to hide her own problems and worries, while Tsukihi simply wanted to take a

bath.

“That’s enough Onii-chan. Your role ended when you heated up the bathwater.”

“That’s also something that you also shouldn’t say.”

“Move.”

“No.”

I didn’t know why I was still holding her back, but I think it was because I didn’t want to lose my bathing priority to her and I didn’t want to be weaker than her. Or it could simply because I was frozen of fear. She was really staring me down.

You’re not a yandere<sup>[2]</sup>, so please stop that.

A yandere can’t exist if the dere<sup>[3]</sup> isn’t there.

If it’s not there, what’s left is just a sick person.

“I was the one who heated up the bath, so I get the priority.”

“Be happy for thinking that you heated it up for me, Onii-chan.”

This talk is going nowhere. The conversation itself hasn’t taken proper form yet. It just didn’t flow. To say it negatively, it was like that moment before a fight breaks out. In Tsukihi’s or my head, Karen who was running happily was completely forgotten.

While Karen was getting some fresh morning air, we were having a fight. When Karen comes back drenched in sweat, and turns into a 3 way war, the victor is obviously Karen. It’s obvious to let the person who was drenched in sweat to take a bath first. Even if me and Tsukihi were to form an alliance, we wouldn’t stand a chance against Karen. That’s why Tsukihi and I were able to be on equal grounds when arguing. As a guy, I have more strength than her, but Tsukihi has an advantage that I don’t have: to aim for my vital spots.

At this rate, I could imagine Karen is now walking in and taking a bath while Tsukihi and I are still arguing. Tsukihi probably realized this as well. She probably realized this earlier than me, since her brain works a lot faster.

“Alright, Onii-chan, let’s go to the middle.”

“To the middle?”

A compromise huh?

Heh, as expected of the brains of the Fire Sisters.

In our case, the right to take a bath first was limited to a single person. To somehow form a compromise in this zero sum game (game where you get plus-minus zero). If one side wins, the other side loses, so it

would be impossible to form a compromise. But it was Tsukihi who suggested this compromise. It must be this charismatic quality she has that made her venerable amongst the middle school students. The brains of the Fire Sisters Tsukihi suggested this compromise to me.

“We’ll go to the middle. Let's bathe together.”

#### Translator's Notes

1. Sister Lover
2. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yandere#Y>
3. Being loving