



My Little Sister

Can Read

漢字 KANJII

Author: Takashi Kajii
Illustrator: Halki Minamura

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**"NII-SAMA!" THE GIRL YELLED IN A
CUTESY SOPRANO.
SHE LOOKED SO OVERJOYED THAT
TEARS WERE WELLING UP IN HER EYES.
"I-I'MMA...
I'M YOUR 'REAL' LITTLE SISTER,
AMANeko MAKOTO-NODESU!"**

(CH. 2 ISH MINE)





THERE THEY ARE.

**EVERYONE WAS THERE IN THE
CENTER OF THE OPEN SPACE.
THERE WAS ODAIRA-SENSEI,
IN THE FORM OF A GIRL,
KUROHA, MIRU, YUZU-SAN,
AND I COULD SEE
PROFESSOR CHOUMABAYASHI
THERE AS WELL.**

(CH. 6 TOWER OF CULTURE)

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There was a debate which had raged for ever and ever, without even a lull, among Japanese literary circles.

The eternal struggle of non blood-related little sister vs. blood-related little sister, *i.e. gimai vs. jitsumai*.

Advocates for either camp would make their case toward the other side, but there was no end to this dispute in sight.

It even went beyond the literary world. If one were to look back upon the history of Japan, even within the world of politics the argument over *gimai* and *jitsumai* refused to go away. Let me describe for you an example.

In the year 2170, when the very first 2D prime minister Kurumi-chan took office, it was said that the greatest fault-line in Japanese politics was whether or not to have her official character description be as a *gimai* or a *jitsumai*. It came to be known as the “2170 What Should We Do About Kurumi-chan Problem.”

In the end, the *gimai* wing won out, and Kurumi-chan became “The People’s Little Sister (Non blood-related)”, but there was such fierce debate and protest from the *jitsumai* wing that a number of politicians ended up coughing up blood and dying in fits of furious anger.

The current 2D prime minister Nyamo-chan was officially a *jitsumai*, but it could be said that the persistent call of “Remember 2170!” from the *jitsumai* wing had ended up changing the balance of power in government.

Personally I was a member of the *gimai* wing, but it wasn’t as if I hated characters who were *jitsumai*. With *gimai*, you have the benefit of being able to marry them, but there’s something special about the love between an older brother and his blood-related little sister... I believed that each one had its own merits. All little sisters were worthy to my eye.

That being said, my favorite genre of literature was *gimai* books, and the author I most respected, Odaira-sensei, was 100% for *gimai*, and my actual little sisters were all *gimai*, so it wasn’t like my life was particularly influenced at all by any “blood-related” little sisters.

Or so it should have been.

If you are wondering why I am speaking in such a roundabout fashion, it's because I had been contacted by my blood-related little sister.

Thinking back on that day, it was right after the end of the rainy season, on a Saturday afternoon right before school was about to go on summer break. I still had no clue about the existence of my *jitsumai*, and my head was, as usual, filled with ideas for my novels.

Chapter 1 - Write-On-The-Body

I was in my room, sitting at my desk, staring at my PC's monitor. The screen was showing me a website where people could post their novels, and there were many fascinating comments displayed on the page.

What were these comments about, you might ask? They were reactions to my novel. Here are some examples: ▪I DONT GET IT☹

▪2MANY SYMBOLS! BAD WORK OF DUMDUMMY☆

▪MAKE MAINCHAR PERSON IDIOT

“Ahaha, it's a bloodbath...”

After repeatedly entering my novels into the Newcomer's Prize and failing to be selected, I had decided to upload my latest novel to this website. I wanted to get some unvarnished criticism and reactions from readers who weren't my close relatives.

And the result was, well... You've seen it for yourself.

I let out a bitter chuckle, and spun around in my desk chair. Standing immediately behind me were two girls.

One of them was my elder little sister Kuroha, whose well-constructed facial features gave her an adult look. The other was Yuzu-san, who had a beauty akin to fine art, and gave off an aura of friendliness.

Both my sister Kuroha and my friend Yuzu-san, who had come from the 21st century, were currently living together in the same house as myself. The three of us were often together in my room like this.

“Kuroha, Yuzu-san, take a look at the reactions to my latest work,” I said.

The two of them looked past me to the monitor and read the comments on display.

“Onii-chan...”

“Oh, my...”

Both of them got a troubled look on their faces.

“Um, Gin-san? Don’t let it get you down, okay?” said Yuzu-san.

“Ah, this isn’t anything to be worried about, trust me,” added Kuroha.

Honestly speaking, I was a little depressed about it. But I was already used to people saying that they couldn’t understand my novels.

“I mean, if they were going to take the time to post a comment, the least they could have done was put in some concrete suggestions,” continued Kuroha.

“With just this, how are you supposed to know how to make it any better, Onii-chan?”

“Well, I’m just glad people read it and gave their opinion,” I said.

“But...”

“Yeah... I made the pair of talking pantyhose the main character, but he didn’t seem to really resonate with the readers. Maybe making his favorite food daikon radish was a little too boring?”

“Onii-chan, I don’t think that’s what made the difference,” sighed Kuroha.

“But I really liked the image of a pair of black pantyhose wrapping itself around the long white daikon and just munching it down, you know. Isn’t that cool?” I asked.

Kuroha took a moment to respond. “I think that kind of sensibility is quite... unique. And the way you wrote about the pantyhose and the daikon were very much in your style. It’s ‘■⇒▷,’ right?”

“Yes, that’s the part.”

That’s a very “me” style of prose, don’t you think? I felt proud about my work and puffed up my chest.

“I really think the second half where the main character awakens his love of his little sister isn’t half-bad,” added Kuroha. “But the problem with your novels, Onii-chan, is that the hurdles people have to jump through to get there are just too high.”

“You’re just ahead of your time, Gin-san,” consoled Yuzu-san.

You think so?

As I muttered to myself, “Ahead of the times...” Kuroha’s expression changed.

“...Oh, what’s this? Look, there’s someone who is praising it, Onii-chan!”

• WOW! GENIUS! THIS WORK THE FUTURE! NOVEL OF FUTURE!

Among the harsh critics was a single person who’d praised the novel. This person said that there was a deep meaning behind me making the main character a pair of pantyhose.

• PANTIES/PANTYHOSE PAY ATTENTION!

She was trying to point out the relationship between panties and pantyhose, it seemed.

First off, there is the fact that panties are the symbol of the orthodox literary style. All 80 million citizens of Japan know *that*, without a doubt. And then there’s the fact that pantyhose wrap around panties. The main character is the pantyhose who wraps the panties inside... The commenter was saying that the novel was a metaphor for an “Encapsulation of orthodox literature.”

“I can’t believe that the pantyhose I wrote contained such a deep meaning!” I exclaimed. It was an interpretation so deep I could have never imagined it.

This person said that my novel encapsulated the orthodox style and that it didn’t cater to the tastes of the current-day, but rather was a work that looked toward the future. This person wrote angrily about how wonderful my work was and that those who criticized it just couldn’t see the qualities that made it great.

“Man, this is almost embarrassing to read...” I blushed.

“It looks like you’re happy about this person reading things into your novel that weren’t there, but are you sure that’s a good thing?” asked Kuroha. “They’re totally interpreting it wrong, you know? I wouldn’t be happy about that, myself.”

“It’s fine. The moment an author publishes their work, it becomes the readers’ to do with as they wish.”

“This person looks up to you a lot like you look up to Odaira-sensei, Gin-san,” said Yuzu-san.

“Yuzu-san, to even be considered in the same breath as Odaira-sensei is so far beyond the pale... But, it makes me a little happy,” I responded.

It was probably the first time in my life that someone had praised my novels like that.

Oh, how about I try emailing them?

“Let me just check their address... Oh, it’s not public,” I said, disappointed.

Unfortunately it didn’t look like I’d be able to make contact. I double checked their profile, but there wasn’t a single entry that was public. They didn’t even have a username.

“I wonder... if I uploaded another work, would this person comment again?” I asked.

“Good question. If they were so impressed with your previous work, they’d probably read it, don’t you think?” responded Kuroha.

“Yeah!” I could feel the motivation welling up from within me. I wanted this person to read more of my stories! “Only the main character was a pair of pantyhose this time, but I think for my next work I’ll make every character a pair of pantyhose. It’ll be a full house of ’hose! And I’ll make sure there are even more symbols than before!”

Kuroha gave me a disapproving look. “Wait a second, Onii-chan. It’s true that your work might have some merit among the avant-garde, but I think you should at least attempt to think about the feelings of the vast majority of normal people out there in the world.”

“Normal people?” I asked. “What are you trying to say?”

“I mean, wouldn’t it be better to write something that was a little more universally appealing?”

...Sometimes Kuroha’s level-headedness frustrates me.

“Your novels are really amazing and really difficult, Gin-san,” added Yuzu-san. “With all those symbols everywhere, my eyes start blinking just from looking at

it. You could make money selling eyedrops!”

“You honor me!” I cried. “I’m going to fill your entire field of vision with symbols!”

Yuzu-san smiled and laughed, but then her expression got a little serious. “Why is it that you use so many symbols when writing novels, Gin-san?”

“Oh it’s just his whim, that’s all. Whatever strikes his fancy. There’s no special story behind it.” answered Kuroha, shrugging her shoulders like she was brushing it off.

“No, there’s a story,” I said definitively.

I was not lying. There was indeed a specific reason why the novels that I wrote had so many symbols in them.

“And what is that reason, then?” asked Yuzu-san.

“Kuroha.”

“What?! Me?!” cried Kuroha, her face suddenly getting flustered. “Wh-What did I do, exactly?!”

“Oh, my... Now I’m really curious. If you don’t mind, will you tell me the story?” asked Yuzu-san.

“Sure, no problem.”

I began to tell the story of the origin of my prose writing to Kuroha and Yuzu-san...

.....——

The water in the tub went *splish*.

It was back when we were little, and Kuroha and I were taking a bath together. We were facing each other with the water up to our shoulders. I could see Kuroha’s young body through the bathwater. Her chest and stomach were as flat as the wide open plains.

We used to take baths together until we entered elementary school. It was also usually with Mom or Dad, but sometimes it would just be the two of us.

I could see that Kuroha was getting really flushed.

“Uuuuhh...” she groaned, her eyebrows showing her discomfort. There was clearly something weird about how she was acting.



I was curious about what her deal was, but I decided to have fun by myself in the bathtub.

First, I made a letter “V” with my pointer and middle finger, and floated them on the surface of the water. Then, I started to move them up and down kind of like how a person would when swimming. The water splashed up...

“The lower body of a beautiful girl is as energetic as ever!” I announced, pronouncing each word individually and clearly. The “V” I made with my fingers was supposed to be the legs and waist of a girl. “Take this! And that!” I cried, moving my fingers more and more violently. “And how about this?! And some of that!”

I was absorbed in my play and completely forgot about how odd Kuroha was looking.

“O-Onii-chan,” she stammered.

“Huh?” I said, looking up at Kuroha, and I saw that her cheeks were redder than I’d ever seen them before. “Whoa... What’s the matter?”

Kuroha stayed silent, but she kind of groaned in agony.

“I’m not gonna know unless you tell me,” I pried.

“.....ee.”

“What?”

“...pee,” Kuroha said, sinking her head down a little in embarrassment. “O-Onii-chan, will you come with me...?”

When Kuroha was three years old, there had been an accident when the lock on the door to the toilet room had broken and she had been trapped inside. It had been really traumatic for her, and she hadn’t been able to go to the bathroom by herself anymore. That was why it wasn’t a surprise that she would bug me to come with her, but...

“I won’t,” I replied.

“D-Don’t be mean...”

“I’m not being mean. We have to count to 100 pairs of black stockings before

we get out of the bath, remember?”

Back then, Dad had told us that we had to count “one pair of stockings, two pairs of stockings...” all the way up to 100 pairs of stockings before we could get out of the bath.

“We can do that later, 'kay... Please, come with me...” Kuroha begged.

“No way. We have to follow Dad’s rule.”

Kuroha shot back with a “You big idiot!” and glared at me like she was trying to curse me or something.

You look like you’re about to cry, you know... I mean, I want to go with you, I do, but we’ve gotta follow the rules.

Oh, I know!

Dad had said that if counting all the way to a hundred was too boring, that we could do “something fun” instead. As long as we did that, we could get out of the bath. I suspected that he’d been trying to nurture our childish creativity.

“Kuroha, let’s hurry and do something fun! That’ll be faster than counting to a hundred!”

“W-What are you...?” she asked. When I explained what Dad had said, she nodded in agreement. “Then, what should we do?”

“Hmm, let me think...” I said, craning my neck. “How about we play write-on-the-body?”

“Write-on-the-body?”

“We’ll write letters on each others’ bodies,” I said. I was thinking I wanted to do something I’d seen in an educational anime. There was a famous scene where the main character tells his big sister, “You’re going to be my manuscript paper,” and writes sentences on her as she slowly relaxes.

“I’ll go first,” I said. “Come on Kuroha, turn around.”

Kuroha scrunched her hips around and turned her back to me. Kuroha’s white back wavered through the water. *If I don’t hurry up, Kuroha’s gonna have an accident, so let’s start playing write-on-the-body right away.*

When I put my pointer finger on her back...

“Th-That tickles...” said Kuroha, her whole body shivering, making waves in the water.

I wrote hiragana and katakana characters on her back just like the main character of that anime, but Kuroha was so ticklish that I didn’t get the reaction I was looking for. Dad had said we needed to do something “fun” before getting out of the bath, so if Kuroha wasn’t having fun, then our mission wasn’t complete.

“Hurry up, Onii-chan,” whined Kuroha.

I’m trying, but it’s hard to come up with something...

“I-I don’t think I-I’m gonna make it...”

“B-Be strong, Kuroha!”

Come on, think, Gin Imose! I’ve got to write something fun quickly, or...

...Ah! Eureka! This is it! I can write this and it’ll be fun right off the bat!

I wrote a character quickly with my finger on Kuroha’s back.



“Onii-chan, what’s the crooked arrow mean?”

“Life itself,” I replied.

“Life?!”

“You try and move forward, but you run into a wall and move sideways off in a different direction, and after a while you end up in a far different place than you intended. That’s the way life is.”

“...Onii-chan, I don’t really get it...” said Kuroha, squirming her little butt somewhat violently in the bath...

This is bad... She’s reaching her limit!

“But... I guess I thought it was kind of funny...” she admitted.

Yes! She said it was funny! That's close enough!

I was overcome with the feeling of a divine revelation. Rather than writing a string of boring letters, just writing one really impactful symbol could give people happiness!

"All right! Then next, I'll do..."

"I gotta pee first!"

"Thank you for the request! You want me to write a character that represents going to the bathroom, yes? Let me think for a sec..."

"O-Onii-chan...!"

.....——

"I was really happy when Kuroha told me she thought it was funny. Ever since then, I've thought that it's better to use symbols if you want to give people happiness."

That was the reason why I used some many symbols in my novels, but didn't when writing normal sentences.

"Oh, my... That's such a wonderful reason you have behind your very 'unique' writing style, Gin-san!" gushed Yuzu-san.

"Yeah... I guess his writing is all my fault..." said Kuroha, her cheeks ever-so-slightly pink.

"Not all 'your fault'! It's all 'thanks to you'! And why are you blushing? Is it because you ended up ammonia ah-ing in the bath after that?" I asked.

Kuroha twitched.

"It was just like that scene in that famous work of orthodox literature, *DRINK PEEBATH OF LILSIS*," I explained, but Kuroha had already taken out the dictionary she was carrying under her arm, holding it up at the ready...

...and she swung it sideways trying to mow me down.

Watch out! I twisted my upper body to avoid her attack.

Even after returning to the 23rd century, she was still carrying that dictionary around with her all the time, in order to study modern Japanese. She wasn't

doing it as a hobby, but was studying modern Japanese with a laser focus. She had always been able to read and write at a high level, but she seemed to want to completely perfect her knowledge.

And the reason for that was...

“Honestly! I can’t believe you would just go on and blab about those sorts of things!” yelled Kuroha.

“Isn’t it a lovely memory of your childhood? If you asked me about my favorite memories of bathtime, it’d have to be the times I tied up my brother and dunked him the bath up and down and up and down like a ship!” exclaimed Yuzu-san. It seemed Yuzu-san had only done it after her brother had begged her to, saying that he’d die if she didn’t do it. “Honestly I’m a little jealous of you two...”

“Then you want me to do it with you, too, Yuzu-san?” I asked.

“What?” “Huh?!” said Yuzu-san and Kuroha, their faces both looking surprised.

“I’d be happy to write letters on you if you want.”

“Oh, my... Speaking of which, my brother had a lot of manga where there were girls with the kanji 正 written all over their thighs. He was always saying he wanted that to happen to him, one day. I guess having your body written on is something wonderful, no matter what time period you are in...”

“I wonder why I feel so incredibly icky right now... Anyway, we’re not kids, so we can’t play write-on-the-body anymore,” said Kuroha, giving me a nasty glare to indicate that she was dead-set against the idea.

“Even though it is the origin of my writing style...” I began.

“Anyway! Your writing style... Well not just that, but your stories, too... They’re really an acquired taste! I think you should try writing something a more general audience can appreciate,” Kuroha said.

“Like, what exactly?” I asked her.

“Hmm... This novel site has a ‘most read’ ranking, so why don’t we read the novel that’s ranked number 1?”

The novel site I had uploaded my story to was mainly intended to help train amateur authors and get them criticism and feedback, but the works at the top of the rankings had a huge number of passionate fans.

They might be more useful examples than crappy novels from real publishers!

“Fine, let’s see,” I said.

I switched the webpage to the ranking list. The work at the top was *DOUBLE LILSIS*. It was a story where both a *gimai* and a *jitsumai* appear. The main character was living with his *gimai*, but one day his *jitsumai* suddenly appears, and the main character has to choose between them. It seemed he ends up getting together with his *jitsumai* in the end. It had a reputation of taking the best parts of Gai Odaira and Haruka Haruka’s works together.

“His blood-related little sister just shows up one day? That’s ridiculous,” scoffed Kuroha after she read the story intro. Clearly she was not a fan.

“The *jitsumai* was innocent and tickled the male instincts, while the *gimai* was really clever but kind of opinionated. With a setup like that, it’s no wonder one was way more popular than the other,” I said.

“...So all that matters is that someone is childlike and innocent?” asked Kuroha.

“Well, little sister characters being innocent is the standard trope. Odaira-sensei says that all that time.”

For some reason, Kuroha went quiet with a pout. She opened her mouth a little as if she were going to say something, then stopped herself and reached into her pocket to check her cellphone. “Yuzu-san, it looks like she’s already left her house. She’s surprisingly punctual.”

“Oh, then we need to hurry and get ready ourselves,” replied Yuzu-san, looking a little concerned.

The two of them were heading out to do something. The “she” Kuroha had referred to was a classmate of hers, and the three of them plus Miru were going for a girls’ outing.

...I mention this like it was nothing particularly special, but for the Imose

household this was a historically big deal!

When she wasn't in school, Kuroha was the type to bury herself in modern literature books, and she almost never made any friends in her class. If she wasn't talking, she was the quintessential "cool beauty," so it must have been hard to approach her. It seemed like she was always by herself at school.

For Kuroha to go out and have fun with a classmate was as uncharacteristic as Odaira-sensei showing interest in a high school girl!

You might ask why Kuroha had suddenly gotten so chummy with someone from her class. It was because she had won herself a certain award. Thanks to that, it seems like some of the people around her were actually talking with her.

"Onii-chan, don't do anything weird while we're gone, okay?" said Kuroha, and she and Yuzu-san left my room.

Left to my own devices, I decided to write. I hadn't figured out what I was going to do for my next work yet, so I was planning on continuing my 21st century personal experience diary—which, since I'd returned to the 23rd century, was more like a personal diary.

As I turned toward my PC to start writing, I paused. *Let's check my email first...*

I had posted my email address publicly on the novel site, so maybe someone had emailed their thoughts on my writing. As I opened the email application with high expectations... *Oh! I've actually got mail!*

I wonder if it's someone's thoughts on my writing?

I looked at the subject and from fields...

Subject: ONII-CHAN SAVE ME!

From: UR REAL LILSIS

My real little sister?!

Suddenly a little sister I'd never known about had appeared out of nowhere... It was a plot that happened all the time in orthodox style literature. For

example, the work that had won the Homyura Prize many years ago, *LILSIS FUNGUS*, had had *jitsumai* sprouting up like mushrooms in the main character's room without any warning at all. If you were to just think about the stories that are out there, having a new little sister appear in the middle isn't really that rare, but this was real life! I couldn't believe it was happening to me!

I started to fantasize about what this little sister I had never known must look like.

Since I'm in my second year of high school, my little sister will probably be a cute girl in middle or elementary school, right? Or maybe she's a cool, mature high school first-year like Kuroha?

I began to read this email from my real little sister carefully, one character, one word at a time.

(Translator's Note: In order to express the nuances of the meaning, I have translated the body of the email into modern Japanese.)

Dear My Real Onii-sama,

My name is Reika, and I manage a karaoke bar in KEISEI TATEISHI in the KATSUSHIKA district of TOKYO. My business had been doing well so far, but lately we have been losing customers, and I have fallen into considerable debt. If you, my dear brother, would find it in your heart to not abandon your poor little sister, please click **here**. It will open a website which will do wonders for your personal finances. Did you click? Ah, you did. Very good. Now please click the button that says "register" in the upper right...

This is a serious problem!

My little sister who ran a karaoke bar in KEISEI TATEISHI (never heard of it), was in trouble! I hurried and clicked the link "here" that was in a bigger font. But it opened up a stock trading site for beginners called "STOCKS FOR CARELESS LILSIS." It seemed like it was recommending stocks to buy...

Is stock trading really something you want to do carelessly?!

Still in shock, I started reading the website.

—Five minutes passed.

Huh? This is kind of strange. I mean, I just spent five minutes seriously reading a stock site! Could that letter I got be one of those “spam” things I’ve heard of?

I couldn’t be sure, so I thought maybe I’d forward it to someone else and get their opinion. *Now that I think about it, my classmate Sugawara-kun was saying that he’d be interested in having his fourth girlfriend have some kind of really out-there attribute. A little sister that runs a karaoke bar? That’s revolutionary! Okay, I’m gonna forward it to him!* When I was about to click his address, I noticed something. Another email had arrived.

The subject read: “DEAR NII-SAMA,” and it was from: “REAL LILSIS.”

Oh, not again.

I figured this was probably another suspicious email. I was curious which kind of site it would lead me to, though... *Maybe a site for marriage arrangements with 2D characters?* I decided to go ahead and check what its contents were.

I gasped.

Just from reading it, I could tell... this was not spam!

The sender was a girl who was my blood-related little sister, and she said that she wanted to meet and discuss something. Her name was Amaneko, which didn’t ring a bell for me.

She had written the place and time she wanted to meet: 3 PM at my hometown’s busy shopping district, today. I knew just from that it wasn’t spam. But that wasn’t all...

She had written information about my birth.

“How could she have known...?” I couldn’t believe it.

The circumstances of my youth were somewhat uncommon. Not the fact that I was adopted, but the details around my birth were a little out-of-the-norm. The only people who could have known about it would have been myself and my family.

...No. I shook my head.

There were other people who naturally would know about the circumstances of my birth.

My birth parents.



にいさまへ
あなたのほんとうの気持ち

DEAR NII-SAMA
FROM: YOUR 'REAL' LILSIS

But I'd heard that my birth parents had both passed away soon after they'd given me up for adoption. How in the world did this person know about how I was born? Could she really be my blood-related little sister? My jitsumai?

My heart was beating a mile a minute.

Something I had no experience with was approaching... I re-read the mail in confusion. The final sentence was this:

WANT TO MEET YOU NII-SAMA

*

One day in the 23rd century, Kuroha, Yuzu-san, and I were together in Kuroha's room.

"Kuroha, Yuzu-san... Odaira-sensei really is an author that I should revere from the bottom of my heart! He's even thinking about the future of our youth!" I declared.

"Oh, my... Gin-san, what are you so elated about?" Yuzu-san asked. "Is it that book... *Arithmetic with Gai Odaira*?"

"It's an arithmetics problem book that Sensei wrote himself for middle-schoolers," I confirmed. "Let's read it!"

Special Edition: "Arithmetic with Gai Odaira"

ANSWER WORD PROBLEM W/ ★

MIKO-CHAN GO SHOPPING

COMESIN → MIKO-CHAN

MIKO-CHAN: "GO SHOPPING W/ 5000 YEN"

MIKO-CHAN → ELEMENTARY SCHOOLER ◎

TWIN-TAILS SHINY SPARKLY BLONDE

EYES LIKE DEEP OBSIDIAN

LIPS LIKE PRETTY PINK CHERRY BLOSSOMS

BOOBS APPROPRIATE FOR AGE LIKE FLAT BOARD ← DFC

CUTE FAIR-SKINNED TOOTSY ← ∩ DUMDUMMY
ME → WANNA TAKE HER HOME FOR REALS
SO
I WILL ASK A QUESTION NOW

HOW OLD IS MIKO-CHAN?

“Onii-chan... How is this an arithmetic problem?” Kuroha asked.

“It’s actually a book on philosophy.”

“Philosophy?!?”

“The answer to the question is extremely simple. Miko-chan is a character that Odaira-sensei wrote, so she’s going to be 10 years old. That’s common knowledge for all 80 million people in Japan, you know? To ask a question that anyone already knows the answer to... See, it’s philosophy-y! Sensei is truly a sage for our time!”

“...It says it’s an ‘arithmetic’ problem book, but it’s just another collector’s item for his true believers...”

Chapter 2 - Ish Mine

In the 23rd century we can control the temperature, so it's lovely all year-round. Actually, that's a total lie. At the end of July, the late afternoons are as you might expect, witheringly hot.

Even my usual SCHOOL UNIFORM was just too suffocating, and I eventually decided on wearing a T-shirt with an illustration of a cute girl on it tucked into a pair of beige slacks. It was a sporty, yet traditional combination sure to be a hit with the girls.

"Lookin' good," I told myself.

I was going to meet a girl one-on-one, after all, so it was only natural I would be careful about how I dressed. I had arrived at the busy shopping area around the nearest train station called "AKIHABARA Road" in order to meet with the girl who claimed to be my blood-related little sister.

It didn't really hold a candle to the actual AKIHABARA, but a bunch of AKIBA-like shops lined the street. These days most towns had streets named after AKIHABARA, but in the past they had been named after GINZA instead, I'd heard.

At the entrance of AKIHABARA Road was a small park, and there was a large statue of the wife of the mayor, a 2D preschooler. Mr. Pedoro, our mayor, had created the park and erected the statue, so we citizens really adored it. We called it the "Pedo Park" out of respect.

The girl who claimed to be my *jitsumai* had said we should meet at the Pedo Park statue. Looking around the base of the statue... I wasn't able to see anyone that looked like it was her. Just in case, I went over the body of the email she had sent me again in my head.

This girl named Amaneko had known quite a lot about the circumstances of my birth. Here's an example of one of the sentences in her email.

NII-SAMA WAS BORN FROM LOVE OF DAD AND MIKAERU-CHAN

Mikaeru-chan...

She was a heroine that had appeared in the second season of the cult-classic shrine maiden anime *MIKO/ARCHANGEL*. She was, of course, 2D.

And she was... the person my birth father had married. It seemed my birth father had had quite a thing for shrine maidens. In the 23rd century, humans and anime characters could get married and have children. I was the child of a human and a 2D character... a so-called "2.5D kid."

These days 2.5D kids weren't all that rare anymore. But compared to children born from two flesh-and-blood people, *i.e.* "normal" kids, 2.5D kids weren't very common. In the past, it seemed like they had been discriminated against, and even today a small segment of people despised them.

So there were some people who would publicly talk about being 2.5D kids and some who wouldn't. In the moe-filled society we had today, there wasn't any disadvantage to being 2.5D, but I personally didn't tell anyone unless there was some reason to. It wasn't something I'd go out of my way to talk about.

The email from Amaneko didn't just talk about how I was a 2.5D kid, but even wrote the exact name of the 2D girl that my dad had fallen in love with.

Where did she get that information? I want to meet her and find out right away...

She had set the meeting time for 3 PM in the afternoon. I checked my wristwatch. It would be in just a few minutes, but I still didn't see anyone that could be her.

I looked up for no real reason and saw the statue's panties.

"If you see panties, make sure to pay your respects" was what my dad had always taught me. But just as I was about to place my hands together in thanks...

"I'm sh-sho-shorry!" someone nearby me yelled out. "I totally screwed up!"

It seemed like a girl was apologizing to someone. Everyone in the area immediately focused on where the voice was coming from. When I turned to look myself...

There was a girl in a blue sailor uniform bowing her head up and down rapidly. As she arched over I could see her little butt underneath her pleated skirt. In front of her was... a life-sized figure of a beautiful girl.

“Um... Can you please say something? If you don’t, then I’mma...” She stopped herself, shook her head, and corrected herself, “Then I will... Pleash forgive me for bumping into you!”

This girl was apologizing to a figure, as far as I could tell. At first the other onlookers were aghast, but as they figured out what was going on, they moved away with smirks on their faces. The girl seemed unsure of herself...

“Huh? Are you a figure, maybe? W-Wow-nodesu! This is my first time seeing a life-sized figure-nodesu!”

She spoke with a -nodesu tic, like a cute, strong-willed anime character.

She mistook a life-sized figure of a beautiful girl for a real person...? In 23rd century Japan? Ah... They don’t have figures on the streets in some other countries around the world, so maybe she’s a foreigner who isn’t used to Japan...

As I couldn’t help but look at the interesting girl, she turned around and looked in my direction.

Our eyes met.

Her big, upturned eyes were the thing I noticed first. She looked like she was in middle school. I could tell from her sharp eyes that she was strong-willed, but her small nose, lips, and healthy cheeks were adorable.

Hanging to the left, almost like an animal’s tail, she had tied up her hair with a little bell, and every time she moved it would jingle. The bell was louder than a normal one, and I got a sense that the sound was announcing to the world, “I am here!”

And then...

“Ahh!” As she raised her voice, her eyes opened wide, and she covered her mouth with her right hand and pointed at me with her left. Immediately after that, she trotted up to me, her side-tail swaying back and forth, like how a pet

dog would make a bee-line after seeing its owner.

“Aaaaaa...” She looked up at me, making sounds that weren’t actually becoming words.

Then it dawned on me.

Could she... Could she be...

...mistaking me for a life-sized figure?! I needed to clear up any confusion.

“I beg your pardon, but I am a human.”

Perhaps the girl didn’t understand what I meant, as she didn’t respond and just nodded vigorously.

Hmm? Maybe it’s my imagination, but doesn’t she look like someone I know...?

—!

“Ah!” It was like a bolt of electricity ran through my body. Of course I would recognize her! Her eyes and nose... The area around her mouth... They looked like me! Just as I realized this...

“Nii-sama!” the girl yelled in a cutesy soprano. She looked so overjoyed that tears were welling up in her eyes. “I-I’mma... I’m your ‘real’ little sister, Amaneko Makoto-nodesu!”

The mysterious little sister had appeared before me!

The blood-related *jitsumai* had shown up at the feet of the older brother who lived together with his non-blood-related *gimai*... What an incredibly *literary* development!

I was extremely overjoyed, but also at the same time a little nervous. After all, this girl, Amaneko-chan, was just too full of mysteries. The first step would be to establish smooth communications...

I could use that line the main character used when he met a girl for the first time in that orthodox literature book I read the other day...

“What color are your panties?” I asked.

For a second, Amaneko-chan made a disgusted face, but her cheeks started to

blush and she replied, “B-Black-nodesu...”

“Oh, that’s unexpected,” I replied.

“I-I guess people are way more open in how they communicate over here... It piques my curiosity-nodesu!”

Yes. That was a very literary conversation.

Perhaps it was because of my initial question, but Amaneko-chan was extremely friendly. After she said she was a second-year in middle school and I replied that I was in my second year of high school, she looked at me from head to toe and said, “Nii-sama... You’re really, *really* an adult-nodesu!”

“Do I really seem that adult to you?” I asked.

“Yes! Those beige pants you have are just a little baggy, just a little past-your-teens... Very proper-gentlemanly! Amazing-nodesu...”

Man, getting praise so straight like that almost tickles... I’m sure glad I dressed up!

Well, I have a ton of things I want to ask, but if I go and suddenly barrage her with questions, I’ll feel bad about it, I worried, as Amaneko-chan looked around at AKIHABARA Road.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“Well... Nii-sama, I have a favor to ask-nodesu.” Amaneko-chan’s eyebrows were arched and with how her eyes curved upwards at the sides she made quite an expression. “I want to go for a walk together with you, Nii-sama! It really piques my curiosity-nodesu!”

“Huh? Oh... Sure.”

The two of us walked down AKIHABARA Road. Amaneko-chan was clearly on cloud nine. It wasn’t like this was the actual AKIHABARA, so it was pretty odd for someone to get this excited for just a local city’s shopping district.

“Nii-sama! Look at this! There are so many 2D characters-nodesu!” she cried.

As we started walking down the road, Amaneko-chan kept reacting with glee at all the 2D characters on the billboards or that were shown on the big screens.

“I saw pictures on the internet, but... the real thing is something else-nodesu,” Amaneko-gushed. “There are so many 2D characters-nodesu. I bet there’s a lot of anime on TV.”

“Good question... What kind of anime do you like to watch, Amaneko-chan?” I asked.

“The only anime I’m allowed to watch is educational anime for kids-nodesu.”

“Japanese anime?”

“Yes.”

“If you’re talking about educational anime... Something like *SO WHAT IF THEY’RE BEIGE!?*”

“No, not that. Ones that really push old-fashioned morals on you-nodesu. Like ‘protect the old traditions’ and stuff like that...”

I was surprised. *SO WHAT IF THEY’RE BEIGE!* was a classic anime with a pointed moral of “you mustn’t discriminate against different colors of panties.” *What’s going on with her?*

Just then, a panty-flashing anime poster came into view in the front of an anime shop. You could just barely see a pair of panties with a strawberry pattern on them.

“I wasn’t able to watch proper anime where the girls actually show you their panties because of my house’s rules-nodesu,” she said.

Wow, she must have grown up in a pretty screwed-up household...

Amaneko-chan lightly touched her hand to the strawberry panties on the poster and said, almost as if uttering something forbidden, “So this is what they call current-day culture-nodesu...”

Perhaps Amaneko-chan really was from overseas. She had mistaken a life-sized figure for a human being, and had been raised in a household with questionable values... I didn’t believe she could have been raised in Japan.

Her expression had darkened just a bit, but she immediately returned to her bright smile.

“Nii-sama, please look at this!” She moved beside the life-sized figure in front of the anime shop and stood next to it, posing with double peace signs. “I think they might be a little taller than me, but... what do you think?”

She’s so innocent and cute... almost like a real little sister...

...Yeah, that’s right, it’s not like, she really is my “real” little sister. At least according to her.

We’d met up, introduced ourselves, and walked around town. But we still hadn’t talked about the important issue here. I had so many questions I wanted to ask, and they were all lined up, waiting in my head. *But walking around on the street isn’t the time to start asking difficult questions...*

“Ah, are you hungry?” I asked.

“Huh?”

“My treat. Let’s get something to eat.”

Amaneko-chan demurred at first, but when I told her, “Really, it’s no trouble,” she slowly pointed to a restaurant. A nation-wide conveyor-belt foie gras chain restaurant.

“Whoa! This is my first time in a restaurant like this-nodesu,” she said.

Conveyor-belt foie gras restaurants catered to all kinds of people, with various foie gras dishes passing by customers on a conveyor belt. Everything was really cheap, so I could afford it even with my allowance.

In current-day Japan, “conveyor-belt XX restaurants” were really common, and just looking up and down AKIHABARA Road, I saw a number of other ones like conveyor-belt shark fin and conveyor-belt *kaiseki*... It seemed it was a culinary tradition that dated back to conveyor-belt sushi restaurants in the Showa Era.

Amaneko-chan and I were led to a booth where we sat down facing each other.

Oh, yeah. I remember Odaira-sensei telling me that he wanted to try something in a restaurant like this one day. He wanted to take off the food from

one of the plates and replace it with a pair of panties... A pair of panties rotating around the conveyor-belt... How surreal and wonderful! Sensei truly is the embodiment of literature!

Amaneko-chan was very impressed at how the staff were all 2D characters and how the food was all produced completely automatically by machines.

Just watching her makes me feel refreshed...

After we finished eating, it was time to get down to it and ask the serious questions. It wasn't really the kind of restaurant you'd have a deep conversation in, but it was way better than just chatting on the street.

"So... can I ask you some questions?" I asked.

"Sure!"

Good. Well then, I guess I'll just go down the list of questions in my head in order.

"Which would you choose out of pantyhose, knee-socks, leggings, or stirrup pants?" I asked.

"Huh? I-Is that something important-nodesu?"

Shoot! That was the second question on my list!

"If you'd like, I'd wear... a-all of them..." she said a bit hesitantly, her eyes clouding a bit.

Sorry, sorry! What I really wanted to ask first was...

"...Are you really my blood-related little sister?"

After I asked the question so bluntly, Amaneko-chan started to look upset.

"I knew you wouldn't believe it-nodesu... But, you're right to question it-nodesu. That's why I've prepared something-nodesu." Amaneko-chan took out a small, round capsule from her pocket. "This is the latest genetic testing kit."

Oh, I've heard about this. A famous inventor had collaborated with genetic scientists to make a really easy-to-use genetic testing device.

Amaneko-chan pressed the capsule against her arm. Then, she pressed it softly against my arm. I felt a little prick, but it wasn't enough to make me

actually bleed. After a few seconds, the previously-white capsule had turned green.

“Green! In other words, you and I are related by blood, Nii-sama!” cried Amaneko-chan, handing me the instruction manual for the capsule. It looked like it turned green when the two people were immediate family members (parents, siblings, twins...). “Do you believe me now?”

She looked at me with her eyebrows in the shape of the 八 kanji.

“...Yeah.”

I still didn’t believe her 100 percent, but seeing her make such a transparent expression, I felt like I had to tell her that.

“I’m so happy! The technology here is really amazing-nodesu!” she cried.

“*Here?*” I asked. “You mean Japan?”

“Yeah!”

I knew it. She was born overseas.

That was what I had deduced, but it was completely shot down with what she said next...

“Here in ‘Outer Japan’-nodesu!”

“Outer Japan?” I asked. I had never heard that term before.

Is there some country that refers to Japan that way?

As I got a confused look on my face, Amaneko-chan noticed, started to look apologetic, and told me, “I’m sorry Nii-sama. ‘Outer Japan’ is what people from our district call the other parts of Japan.”

“Your district?”

“Yes, the Special Cultural District,” Amaneko-chan replied.

“Aha!” *I see now!* All the questions that I’d had about her since we’d met were now answered.

Amaneko-chan must have been raised in the Special Cultural District. That was why she’d had such a reaction to those things that weren’t very special to

me at all. I could even understand her apologizing to that figure.

The Special Cultural District was a special administrative district which preserved old Japanese culture that was located in the ARIAKE area of TOKYO. If I went into the specifics of how that area had been established, it would take quite a while, so I'll omit the details. Simply put, the area had been created thanks to how we had corrected history. The culture and values of the area were quite different from the rest of Japan, and much more like the Japan of the past. I had seen the area on the news; all the billboards had kanji on them, and it looked really retro.

"So you were born in the Special Cultural District?" I asked.

"Yes..." she replied, her voice lowering in tone instantly. "I don't like the place-nodesu. It's all old-fashioned, and conservative, and strict... I'm sick of it-nodesu."

The smile had disappeared from Amaneko-chan's face. I didn't know the reason, but it seemed that Amaneko-chan didn't think highly of the Special Cultural District. But I really didn't have anything I could say to her.

"Um, Nii-sama, can you read kanji?" she asked.

"No, I can't..."

"Yes... That's normal for people from Outer Japan," said Amaneko-chan, who I guessed could read kanji since she had been born in the Special Cultural District.

It turned out she even had a name that was written in kanji. She taught me it was written 眞琴 (Makoto) 周子 (Amaneko). According to Amaneko-chan, it was "a name so old-fashioned you wouldn't even believe it."

"I'm sorry I can't read it," I apologized.

"Don't worry about it! Honestly, it's better if people can't read kanji-nodesu," she said. "But..."

As she said that, I thought I saw a glimmer in the back of her eyes...

"There are a bunch of idiots in the Special Cultural District that say things like 'Let's resurrect kanji in Outer Japan!'-nodesu," she said.

"Resurrect kanji?"

“My grandfather is one of those people-nodesu.”

I could tell from the way she said it that she considered him her enemy. *Does she hate her grandfather?*

“I think that’s ridiculous-nodesu! After all, kanji came originally from another country-nodesu. I can’t believe they actually call it a treasured Japanese tradition-nodesu! You agree with me, right, Nii-sama?”

I honestly had never thought about it.

We had traveled back in time in order to return the world to one that didn’t use kanji. We had meddled in history. But it had really just been to restore the world to one that I was more used to. I had never had any special thoughts about the history of the language or anything like that.

“And it’s not just kanji,” she went on. “I think it’s best if we don’t even use the alphabet-nodesu.”

“Because that’s something we got from other countries?” I asked.

“Right!”

As the topic changed to this subject, Amaneko-chan seemed quite different than before. It was almost like she was her own fantasy revolutionary preaching her side. She seemed like a completely different person from the innocent girl who had been strolling along AKIHABARA Road before.

I was like that, too. When the conversation changed to something I was really into, I was the type to completely lose myself. *Something in our blood, maybe?*

“The way I think about it, it’s not just kanji and the alphabet, but eventually even hiragana and katakana need to bite the dust!” cried Amaneko-chan, her voice raising higher and higher.

“What?!” *I think that’s maybe a little too radical here...* “But hiragana and katakana were invented in Japan, weren’t they?”

“Both had their origins in kanji. Nothing but inferior imitations of borrowed goods-nodesu,” she said.

“Inferior imitations...”

“Nii-sama, it’s not that I reject other countries-nodesu. Please don’t misunderstand me. What I reject is the Japan of today which has been too influenced by other great nations-nodesu!”

Th-This conversation has gotten kinda complicated... Is she really in middle school? I wonder if all the kids in the Special Cultural District are like her...

Amaneko-chan had completely worked herself up with her own speech. Her cheeks were flushed red as if she were drunk, and she was breathing heavily.

“I want to know-nodesu. Why do the people of the world just accept the way things are and the way things have come to be? For example, the people in the Special Cultural District use kanji like it’s perfectly natural. And the people in Outer Japan use hiragana and katakana in current-day writing. And those facts are not even questioned-nodesu. It vexes me-nodesu. Why do we think of these borrowed letters and inferior copies as ours? Don’t you think we should create something of our own instead?!”

As she finished her speech, she slammed her fist into the table. Her fierce eyes peered at me, demanding an answer.

I was so completely overwhelmed, I couldn’t even speak. I mean, her speech was very impressive and all, but what she was saying was completely unrealistic. After all...

“If we stop using kanji and hiragana and katakana and the alphabet, wouldn’t all literature disappear from Japan?” I asked.

“That’s right. And that’s why we need to make new words-nodesu. You see, I am...” Amaneko-chan raised her chin and puffed out her chest in pride. “...a member of the ‘New Word Order.’”

“...What’s that?” I asked.

According to Amaneko-chan, the “New Word Order” was a community on the internet dedicated to creating a new Japanese. At first, I thought it was just a bunch of people doing it for fun, but it seemed like they were pretty serious about their activities.

“Creating new words, huh?” I asked. “That’s quite a monumental effort. It’d be amazing if you did it, but it seems pretty difficult.”

“Yes! I thought it would be really hard, too, actually... but then a savior appeared!” said Amaneko-chan, looking me squarely in the face with a strange passion in her eyes. “And that savior is you, Nii-sama!”

“M-Me?” I was so shocked, I pointed at my own face.

“I read your novel you posted on the internet-nodesu. It was so incredible, it knocked me off my feet! You used so many symbols... That is indeed the writing of the future!” said Amaneko-chan, giving me a warm expression. It went beyond just happiness. It was almost like she was infatuated with me...?

“Oh wait, were you the one who posted those comments to the novel I just uploaded?” I asked.

“Yes! That was me-nodesu!”

I knew it!

Amaneko-chan said that she had done some research on her long-lost brother (that was me) beforehand. Perhaps she had hired a detective or something. As soon as she’d learned that I had posted a novel to the internet, she had read it.

“It was like a revelation to me. My brother and I had the same vision... I couldn’t wait any longer!” she cried. She had immediately fled from the Special Cultural District and come to see me.

Wait. I have the same vision as her?

“I really understand... You also feel like words need to be revolutionized, right, Nii-sama?” she asked.

I do?

“I mean, that’s the only reason you’d write things with so many symbols-nodesu! The brother I’d wanted to see for so long actually had the same dream as I did... I felt it was fate-nodesu!”

I was glad that she was so supportive of my writing but... that was quite the misunderstanding.

“I think that the symbols you use so many of are very visual, very global-nodesu,” she went on.

“Global...”

Amaneko-chan continued, writing words on the table with her finger. “For example, if you wanted to write the word ‘pantyhose,’ you could write it like that, or you could write: [𐐇] ”

“Which one is easier to understand? The second one, of course.”

“Yeah.”

“And instead of writing out ‘drop-kick,’ you could just write ‘♀v,’ and that’s way easier to understand the meaning of, you know?”

“Definitely.”

“Or ‘walked lightly despite having a hunched back’ versus ‘λ,’ that’s clearly the latter, right?”

“Of course.”

“And when the letters are visually based, they’re easy to understand for people from other countries, too, not just Japanese-nodesu.”

She might have a point...

“English might be the language of the world today, but if your words come to be used here in Japan, I bet they’ll spread across the world-nodesu. Don’t you think that would be wonderful, Nii-sama?”

I thought about that. “If it really came true, it might be the greatest invention Japan would ever create...”

“That’s right-nodesu! Japanese will rule the world-nodesu!” cried Amaneko-chan, clenching her fists. “And for that sake, we have to hurry up and weed out the old and the new. To create, one must first destroy-nodesu. Now come, Nii-sama! Let us create the future, together!”

She looked at me, entranced.

This conversation went in an unexpected direction...

Let’s mentally summarize what Amaneko-chan had proposed.

1. It is of serious concern that current-day Japanese has been borrowed from

other countries.

2. Therefore, it is necessary to create a new Japanese.

3. To that effort, she wants to use my novels to influence the world.

Yeah, that's about right.

I dreamed of becoming a novelist, so of course I was somewhat picky about my prose, but I'd never really thought very deeply about Japanese itself. Rather, I was much more concerned with creating the backgrounds and situations, choosing which type of panties or pantyhose my pretty girls should wear, and how best to show them off. I couldn't believe there were people that were thinking about the future of Japanese and all that... not to mention that one was my long-lost blood-related little sister.

Spread my novels around the entire world... Create the future with my novels...

I mean, I was happy she was saying those things. While I listened to her impassioned words, I almost felt like I really could give birth to new words. But... something felt off. Maybe it was that what she was saying was just too preposterous, or had too many delusions of grandeur, but that wasn't really what I wanted to say...

I wasn't able to explain to myself yet what that brief feeling in my chest of "something about this isn't right" was all about.

Although I wanted to talk more with Amaneko-chan, she said that she had a curfew and that her grandfather was really strict about it, so we left the restaurant. We headed to the nearest train station, back down AKIHABARA Road the way we had come.

On the way back, Amaneko-chan was super excited walking down the center of the road, skipping as she sang, "I met my Nii-sama! I met my Nii-sama!" and smiled a smile made of pure purity. There were still a lot of questions surrounding her, but she didn't seem like a bad girl to me.

It wasn't long until we had reached the statue where we had met at Pedo Park. I mentioned how the statue was "super pedo, don't you think?" and she blinked at me. In current-day Japanese calling something "pedo" meant that it

was youthful and cute, but for some reason she tilted her head at me in confusion. *Maybe that's not a word they use in the Special Cultural District?*

“Nii-sama, today was really fun. I’ll come again soon.”

“Sure,” I replied.

Behind the statue, we could see the station building. I gathered that Amaneko-chan would be taking the train back. From the closest station to my house, you could get back to TOKYO Station in about 20 minutes on the “SUPER EXPRESS NEXIA.” And she said that it took five minutes to get to the Special Cultural District from TOKYO Station on the Ariake Liner.

“In the past it would take almost two hours on the shinkansen, you know. When I think about that, I’m really glad I was born in this time period-nodesu,” she remarked.

“Why’s that?” I asked.

“Because it makes the distance between us all the closer, obviously!” she replied, sticking out her tongue bashfully.

Well, if she's gonna set me up with a pitch like that...

“I’m pretty sure the actual distance between us isn’t any shorter, though...”

“Oh, Nii-sama, you!” she said, puffing up her cheeks.

We made a good comedy team.

She said goodbye, and bowed her head to me. I had a ton of things I wanted to ask her, but she did say that we’d see each other again soon, so I figured I could just ask her next time. We waved goodbye to each other, and then...

“Nii...”

I heard a voice I recognized come from beside me, and it was not pleased. I turned to look, and saw my younger little sister, Miru, wearing her cat-eared beret. Standing behind Miru were Kuroha and Yuzu-san, who was carrying some shopping bags.

If I recalled correctly, they had been invited by a classmate of Kuroha’s to hang out today. Since there was only the three of them, that must have meant

that Kuroha's classmate had already left.

"Oh, what a coincidence," I said, as they all approached me. They were looking... not at me.

Huh? It seems like they're looking past me? They were looking at Amaneko-chan, who was standing behind me.



Oh, that's right! They've never met Amaneko-chan before. I need to introduce her to them.

I turned around and the moment I saw Amaneko-chan, I sputtered out, "Uwah!"

Why, do you ask? Because Amaneko-chan had undergone a radical transformation.

The tips of her eyes and eyebrows were pointed up, and her mouth was shut in a tight line. I could see something surrounding her back. It was...

...flames.

Amaneko-chan's eyes and entire body were emanating flames.

Well, I don't mean that she was actually on fire or anything. She just had an expression that made me want to describe her that way. Not a single bit of that previous friendliness remained.

"So you show yourselves-nodesu..." said Amaneko-chan, almost growling, taking one step after another in our direction.

Perhaps she sensed the charged atmosphere, but Kuroha's expression looked like she was taken aback.

"Onii-chan, who... is this girl?"

"So you're Kuroha-san, I see-nodesu?" said Amaneko-chan, standing right in front of her. Thanks to their height difference, she had to look up at Kuroha.

"How do you know my name?" Kuroha asked.

"I did my research. How do you do? I am Nii-sama's little sister, Amaneko Makoto."

"Onii...-sama? His little sister?"

"Yes."

Kuroha looked at me, asking me with her eyes, "What's going on here?"

"Um..." I started to try and explain about Amaneko-chan, but she quickly slid in between us. It seemed like Amaneko-chan was still in a fighting mood with

Kuroha.

“Kuroha-san, I know all about you. For example...” started Amaneko-chan.
“...you’re going to make your debut as a translator of classic literature.”

Kuroha was shocked. So was I, actually. *Amaneko-chan, you even know about that?*

It was true. Kuroha was going to have her first translation of classic literature published. It was all thanks to that article in the June issue of *Literary Gal* which featured an article with translations of the Man’yōshū. I hadn’t been aware of it until just recently, either, but it was Kuroha’s translation that had been published in *Literary Gal*.

A wealthy individual had taken a liking to her translation and ordered a translation of a work of modern Japanese literature from her through an editing department. They had said her translation would be published as a proper book and everything.

In the current time period, it was not uncommon for wealthy individuals to sponsor professional publishing. Kuroha would handle the translation, and the book would be published by the publishing company. The cost of the publishing and translation would be covered by the wealthy individual.

It was unheard of for a high school student to make their debut as a translator. Even at school, Kuroha had become quite the person of the hour. It seemed another girl with similar hobbies had actually spoken to her for a change, and they had become friends. She had asked Kuroha to teach her how to read modern Japanese. It was that friend which had invited her and the others to hang out today.

“Translating ‘classic literature,’ so-called modern Japanese, to current-day language? What foolishness that is-nodesu,” scoffed Amaneko-chan.

“Foolishness...?” asked Kuroha.

“I use the language of today because I have no other choice, but I want to eliminate both the past and the now-nodesu. It seems that you and I are fundamentally incompatible-nodesu.”

“Amaneko-chan, Kuroha just loves old books, that’s all. She doesn’t have any

big philosophy or dreams or anything,” I said.

“Argh, I’m so jealous that Nii-sama covers for you like that-nodesu!” shouted Amaneko-chan, getting more and more upset. “And the way you refer to him like ‘Onii-chan’ really makes me mad-nodesu. If we had grown up together instead, then maybe I’d be able to call him ‘Onii-chan’ so casually like you-nodesu!” Her words were filled with jealousy. “We would have taken baths together-nodesu!”

“Yeah, I did take baths together with Kuroha a lot when we were younger,” I added.

“I-I knew it-nodesu!” she cried.

“Kuroha and I would both be naked, and that’s actually where we learned about the differences between boys and girls. We were like two peas in a pod, starin’ at our naked bods without a care in the world when we were little. There wasn’t a nook or cranny we didn’t inspect.”

“Onii-chan, you’re sounding like a pervert!” yelled Kuroha, her face red, hitting me with her dictionary.

But when we were little, she totally stared at my body out of the corner of her eye...

“You can even hit him like it’s something that happens all the time... I guess anything goes when you live together-nodesu,” Amaneko-chan accused. “I bet you get into hot situations late at night when your parents’ eyes aren’t looking, too-nodesu... I’m not sure if I’m more jealous or enraged. Either way I’ll never forgive you-nodesu.”

“H-Huh? Seriously, what’s with this girl?” Kuroha demanded.

“What’s with me? Well I’ve got an answer to that...” said Amaneko, putting on an invincible smile. “I am Nii-sama’s future. And you, Kuroha-san, are his past!”

...Wh-What?!

Both Kuroha and I were dumbfounded and at a loss for words. As Amaneko-chan bathed in our wordlessness, she turned her gaze to Miru and Yuzu-san.

“I know about the cat-eared little sister and Miss Boobs here, too-nodesu.”

Miru met her gaze but said nothing back, while Yuzu-san smiled and responded, “Oh, my. It’s nice to meet you.”

Amaneko-chan replied, “It’s nice to meet you, too,” and gave a polite bow. It seemed Amaneko-chan was very careful about being polite.

She continued to glare at Kuroha and the others for a few seconds, but then she said, “Nii-sama, I’ll be going home now,” turned around briskly, and headed toward the station.

As she walked past me, she told me this:

“Nii-sama, I’ll make your dreams come true.”

“You mean making new words?” I said. “Well, about that...”

If I could really do that, it would be pretty incredible, but that was not the dream I had. I was about to correct her when she interrupted me.

“That dream is far away, and very, very big-nodesu. I know that it won’t be simple-nodesu.”

“Huh?”

“But it is a dream that is realistic-nodesu.”

After saying that, she started to run off toward the station.

“Wait!” cried Kuroha to Amaneko-chan’s back. “I don’t know who or what you are, but if you do something fishy to Onii-chan, I won’t forgive you!” She said it like someone warning someone else not to touch their stuff or they’d regret it.

Amaneko-chan stopped in her tracks.

“I’m not going to do anything fishy to him. But you need to understand,” she said, as she turned around to give Kuroha her parting shot. “Nii-sama ish mine!”

...That’s quite the time to mispronounce things.

Amaneko-chan’s cheeks blushed slightly, and she turned back around.

“Nii-sama, until next time-nodesu,” she said, and her little body disappeared into the crowd of people.

The four of us just stood there with our mouths open, looking at each other.

Miru came up to me and tugged at my girl-print T-shirt.

“Nii, who was that?”

“My... real little sister, it seems.”

“So, she’s delusional?”

“...I’m pretty sure it’s not a delusion, actually.”

I explained to everyone about Amaneko-chan. About how she had emailed me and we had met. About how she knew that I was a 2.5D kid. About how she was born in the Special Cultural District and that she wanted to create new words.

“She’s quite the handful, isn’t she?” asked Kuroha, who wasn’t pleased. For some reason, Amaneko-chan seemed to take an unnaturally antagonistic position toward Kuroha. I supposed that it only made sense that Kuroha would get angry back. “Onii-chan, why did you see her without saying anything to me first?”

See, I told you she’d get angry.

“But everyone else was gone, right?” I asked. “I didn’t have any chance to tell you.”

“What about calling me on my cellphone?”

“Do I have to tell you every little thing I do?”

“And what about if you’re lured out somewhere and get caught up in some crime? What about then?!”

What are you, the nagging mom I’ve never had?!

“I’m telling you, Amaneko-chan isn’t a bad person. You just have that impression because you just saw her there at the end like that,” I shot back.

“And what kind of person did you see, Onii-chan?”

“She acted like someone from the Special Cultural District where everything here was really new and rare to her. She was running around without a care in the world, laughing and smiling... She was really cute.”

“Oh, that’s what you’re into? You damn lolicon,” said Kuroha, scorn oozing from her voice, as she stared at me.

Hey, Odaira-sensei will get pissed if you call someone who goes after middle-schoolers a lolicon! It’s gotta be elementary schoolers or younger!

“Gin-san, you said that she was from the Special Cultural District and found everything here new and rare. I’m from the 21st century, so absolutely everything is new to me!” said Yuzu-san.

“But Yuzu-san, you don’t really have that kind of reaction... I mean, you’re really even-keeled about it,” I said. She had completely slipped in to living in the 23rd century.

“O-Oh, my...” she murmured.

“Nee, you’ve gotta watch out for that girl. Nii’s tasted fresh meat,” said Miru.

“...Miru, what is that supposed to mean?” demanded Kuroha with her arms crossed, looking annoyed. “So she knew about your birth and is from the Special Cultural District, huh? The whole deal about her being your real little sister is ridiculous, though. But if she was born in the Special Cultural District, then...”

Kuroha had switched into her “Great Detective” mode that she enters sometimes. I started turning around everything I knew about Amaneko-chan in my head, as well. But then Yuzu-san suggested something to all of us.

“Um, the Special Cultural District is the city that came about because we changed history, right? So in that case, why don’t we all think about it together?”

“Together, you say?” I asked.

“That’s right.”

Aha! I’d figured out what Yuzu-san was trying to say. There were some people who we had changed the future with who weren’t here right now.

I took out my cellphone and called up Professor Choumabayashi and Odaira-sensei.

One day in the 23rd century, in Kuroha's room.

"Kuroha, Yuzu-san! Odaira-sensei's radio program today is gonna be amazing! He has Miru and Haruka Haruka-sensei as guests!"

"Onii-chan, don't Odaira-sensei and Haruka Haruka-sensei have a bitter feud over *gimai* versus *jitsumai*?" Kuroha asked.

"Oh, my... In the Japan of the past they used to say that the more you fought, the closer you were," Yuzu-san said. "I bet the two of them actually get along really well!"

"At any rate, it's not something we should miss!" I announced. "Let's all listen together!"

Special Program *Gai Odaira Hour*: Original Broadcast July 15th, 2202.

Guests: Haruka Haruka (Author), Miru Imose (Elementary Schooler/Illustrator)
"Letters from the listeners segment"

From Listener A:

Earlier when I took my little sister to a conveyor-belt foie gras restaurant, she complained, "I can't believe you'd take me out to a cheap place like this!" What kind of place should I take my little sister out to?

Haruka: "First, I just must know whether your little sister was a *jitsumai* or a *gimai*. If she is your *jitsumai*, take her to a five star restaurant. If she is your *gimai*, she can eat alone cooped up on a toilet."

Odaira: "On a toilet? Did you hear that, Miru-chan? This is why I hate *jitsumai* fundamentalists as much as I do. Although being cooped up in a girls' bathroom with a *gimai* is just where I'd want to be..."

Miru: "And may you never leave it again."

From Listener B:

I know you focus on elementary schoolers, Odaira-sensei, so if you could become any object in an elementary school, what would you be?

Odaira: "I'd like to be a kiddie chair made for little girls, I think."

Haruka: “Hmph. So cliché.”

Odaira: “Fine, then what would you like to be, Haruka-kun?”

Haruka: “A thermometer.”

Odaira: “...Damn it, I didn’t even think of that...”

Miru: “What a waste of brains.”

From Listener C:

I can read kanji, you see. Don’t you think the kanji for little sister, 妹, and the kanji for stock, 株, look similar?

Odaira: “I have no idea what this person is talking about. 妹 is made out of the characters for female, 女, and unripe, 未. The meaning is completely different!”

Haruka: “Unripe girl... Unripe girl! Could you get any more enticing?!”

Miru: “Someone call the cops.”

From Listener D:

I have no idea what’s so great about young little sisters. They’re brats and in the way... When it comes to women, it’s got to be ones who are older and mature. I especially hate girls who think that cat ears are cute.

Odaira: “Die.”

Haruka: “Die.”

Miru: “Die.”

Chapter 3 - Q&A

TOKYO, KANDA

The day after we had all met Amaneko-chan, we paid the professor a visit. Professor Choumabayashi's research laboratory was located in the town right next to AKIHABARA. The professor and Odaira-sensei had said they wanted us to all put our heads together to try and figure out what the deal was with Amaneko-chan.

It was the first time I had ever been to the professor's research lab, but there were expensive-looking devices crammed into every nook, and there were unfinished moe goods scattered all over the floor.

"Hmm..." said the professor, pacing back and forth across the center of the room while deftly avoiding the moe goods everywhere.

She must be deep in thought about something...

"Have you figured out about Amaneko-chan?" I asked.

"I'm having trouble deciding-noda..." she said.

"So even your genius brain can't solve this conundrum...?"

"No," she said. "I'm debating in my head right now which tentacles are the most beautiful among all art and historical art in Japan-noda. The first series of *Mahou Shoujo Ai* is a pretty strong contender, but..."

I should have expected no less from the professor! She's been thinking all day about works of art from the earliest times!

"I guess I'll have to consult the Director of the Meguro Tentacle Museum-noda," she said at last.

The Meguro Tentacle Museum was the only museum in the world dedicated to tentacles. Originally they had exhibited insects, but due to overwhelming demand from the people, they had changed the museum to display tentacles instead. I had learned that the competition in the art of the grotesque was quite

fierce.

“This conversation is so specifically fetishistic that it’s getting on my nerves...” said Kuroha, giving us a stare down.

The little blonde girl next to her shook her head *no*. Odaira-sensei was, as usual, in the form of a young girl with blonde twin-tails.

“You realize that Hokusai Katsushika drew tentacles, yes?” he asked. “The Japanese are a people who love tentacles from the bottom of their hearts.”

Hokusai Katsushika was a famous Ukiyoe artist who had left behind a work of a woman being ensnared by an octopus.

“Hokusai Katsushika was in charge of creating the insert images for the novels of the great author, Bakin Takizawa,” Odaira-sensei explained. “The two surely would be considered the greatest pairing of writer and artist in the history of Japan. That being said, ‘the history of Japan’ only counts up to the present time. Because it will not be long before myself and Miru-chan’s work is released to the world, and a new golden collaboration will be born! ...Wait a second. Not ‘golden,’ but ‘golden shower’! Yes, Miru-chan, let’s become legends!”

“How about you shower in some molten gold and die, geezer?” replied Miru with her usual barb.

Odaira-sensei had chosen Miru to be the illustrator for his latest work, *KIRARIN! PANTYS SKYBLUE*.

“Why are you even here, geezer?” Miru added.

“I’m here to see you, of course!” he beamed. “But I’m also here to help figure out what the deal is with Gin-kun’s mysterious little sister. And I think it’s about time to get started.”

We all moved over to the break room and began to discuss with each other about Amaneko-chan. We were all seated on a couch that wrapped around a table.

There were so many unanswered questions about Amaneko-chan. First, I couldn’t be completely sure that she was actually my real little sister. The results of the DNA test had been positive, but it was also possible that the

testing device had been fake.

And, if we assumed that she really was my blood-related little sister, my *jitsumai*, then how in the world had Amaneko-chan even been born? My birth parents had passed away, as far as I knew, so if Amaneko-chan was their child, then did that mean they were still alive? She had said that she'd been born in the Special Cultural District, so could it have been that our changing history had affected my birth parents somehow?

I asked everyone all these questions that were popping into my head. And then...

"Actually, Odaira-sensei and I already have a theory based on what you've told us so far-noda," said the professor, matter-of-factly.

"Y-You do?" I stammered.

"Yup. It's simple-noda. *Jitsumai*-chan was born in the Special Cultural District, right? So it's pretty obvious that our changing history, which resulted in the creation of the Special Cultural District, also gave birth to *Jitsumai*-chan-noda."

I could picture it in my head. A map of Japan, painted solid red... then, in the ARIAKE area of TOKYO, the Special Cultural District began to be painted over in blue, and an SD Amaneko-chan popped up.

"And that's that-noda," said the professor, clapping her hands together suddenly. A screen lowered down from the ceiling with a loud clatter.

"What is this for?" I asked.

"Before I explain our theory, I think we should go over the Special Cultural District once again-noda," she said.

Oh, I see! She's going to show the Special Cultural District.

We all focused on the screen, and a video of a magical girl being entangled in tentacles was displayed.

"Uwaaaah! Stop it! You're going to break me!" the girl squealed.

Squeeze... Slurch...

I was surprised. *The Special Cultural District really is just like the popular art of*

the past! This is exactly like those scenes from old computer games, so they must have maintained the traditions precisely.

“Oops, wrong video-noda,” the professor said.

Kuroha had rushed to cover up Miru’s eyes while glaring at the professor. “‘Wrong video-noda’ my butt! Don’t show Miru stuff like this! Hurry up and change it!”

The professor clapped her hands once again, not seeming the least bit guilty, and the screen changed immediately. Now it showed a cityscape of a town that used kanji everywhere.

“This time it’s actually the Special Cultural District-noda,” she said.

I could see an old-fashioned city and people wearing retro-looking clothing. It really did look just like ancient Japan. A 2D character popped up, just like on TV, and announced, “Tonight we bring you a special report on the Special Cultural District!”

The program began by interviewing residents of the district. Young and old, male and female, about ten people answered questions. Each and every one of them talked about how the Special Cultural District was great for preserving the old traditions of Japan and how Outer Japan was terrible and should go back to the previous culture.

“Nii, why do all of these people say the same thing?” asked Miru.

“They all probably want to be voice actors and are just reading off a script,” I explained. “But if that’s the case, they should have used a famous line from *I Want To Have Onii-chan’s Baby* or *I Want To Have Grandpa’s Baby*, at least...”

I Want To Have Grandpa’s Baby was said to be like the bible for retirees, and was another example of a great work of orthodox literature. It was a seminal work about how a grandfather falls in love with his granddaughter. His son and daughter-in-law are against it, but he elopes with her to ATAMI (three nights, four days), and the two of them eventually accept it. It’s about standing up to those (the granddaughter’s parents) who might get in the way of love. This was also a common element of little sister literature, just so you know.

“It’s not a script-noda,” said the professor. “This is how the people who live

there really think-noda.”

“Really?” I couldn’t believe it. It wasn’t like they didn’t have freedom of speech, so why were they all saying the exact same thing?

I recalled what Amaneko-chan had said to me:

“It’s all old-fashioned, and conservative, and strict... I’m sick of it-nodesu.”

Hmm, maybe it is kind of strict...

“I think this TV program must be biased,” said Kuroha. “Something doesn’t seem natural about how it only shows a single opinion.”

“You might have a point, Kuro-chan...” said the professor. “Well, let’s put aside the opinions of the residents for now-noda.”

The professor once again clapped her hands, and the screen went back up into the ceiling.

“Now then, Choumabayashi and I would like to tell a story,” said Odaira-sensei.

The professor and Odaira-sensei explained their theory for how Amaneko-chan, who shouldn’t have been born, had come into existence. I will summarize the most important points.

After giving me up for adoption, my birth parents should have ended up passing away due to some circumstances or another. However, because of how we had changed history and the world, after giving me up for adoption, they’d ended up moving to the Special Cultural District and surviving. They then gave birth to Amaneko-chan.

In other worlds, the existence of the Special Cultural District had saved the lives of my birth parents.

“I see... That really connects the dots,” said Kuroha, seemingly convinced. “But why would moving to the Special Cultural District allow them to survive?”

“Imose-kun, *Jitsumai*-chan said that she had a grandfather that was still alive, right?” asked the professor.

“Yes. Her grandfather loved old traditions, and it seemed like Amaneko-chan

really hated him...”

“Maybe your birth parents were helped out by this grandfather?” the professor theorized. “They met him in the Special Cultural District, he helped them out, and they survived! Then *Jitsumai*-chan was born. This has gotta be right-noda!” exclaimed the professor, laughing proudly at herself.

I see... But I can't accept it at face value just yet. Why? Because...

“Professor, we still haven’t solved the most important mystery,” I said. “This theory is all based on the assumption that Amaneko-chan really is my *jitsumai*. But we don’t know that for sure, right?”

“Yes, we do,” she said. “*Jitsumai*-chan is without a doubt your blood-related little sister-noda.”

“How can you be so sure?” I asked.

“Because the genetic testing device she used was an invention of mine-noda!”

Aha, so that's it!

She went on to say with full confidence that her invention was 100% accurate-noda and it couldn’t make a mistake-noda. If she was that sure, I figured that Amaneko-chan must be the real thing.

“I guess in that case your theory is probably correct,” I admitted.

“That’s right-noda. Also, maybe this is a little late to ask, but couldn’t we just ask her directly instead of worrying ourselves about it?”

“True,” I said. “I thought maybe it would be better if I put it off until the next time we met, but Kuroha made me write her an email with a lot of questions. That was just yesterday, though, so she hasn’t replied yet.”

“Asking over email takes too long,” the professor said. “Let’s call her up directly-noda.”

“I forgot to ask her for her phone number.”

The professor let out a exasperated sigh. “When you meet a girl, the first order of business is to get her contact info, sheesh-noda!”

“Well, I bet that we’ve pieced together the main story ourselves, no?” asked

Odaira-sensei. “Gin-kun, do you have any other questions?”

Questions, huh? I thought some more to myself...

Why hadn't my birth parents tried to get in contact with me? Maybe they didn't consider me their child anymore. It made me a little sad to think that, but I suppose that was the way it had to be. They probably had their reasons, for better or worse. But I figured that if I said this aloud it would just bring everyone down, so I kept those thoughts to myself.

Now that we had settled the major question, the professor started asking me all kinds of things about Amaneko-chan.

Was she cute? What kind of fashion was she wearing? Was she my type? etc...

As I answered, Kuroha started to look more and more upset, and even Yuzusan looked ever-so-slightly concerned. Miru was pouting, as well.

“Looks like you've gone and made a few upset stomachs-noda...” commented the professor.

“Oh, should I go buy some stomachache medicine?” I replied.

“Ah ha ha! Never change, Imose-kun,” she replied. “Is there anything else you want to say about *Jitsumai*-chan?”

“Let me think...” I pondered. “Amaneko-chan said she wanted to revolutionize language.”

“Revolutionize language?” asked Odaira-sensei, looking apprehensive.

“That's right,” I said. “It seems like she's working to create a new Japanese. She said that not only kanji, but hiragana and katakana should be erased from Japanese, as well.”

“Well, that's quite radical of her, indeed,” Odaira-sensei said. “If what *Jitsumai*-kun wishes for actually comes to pass, that would be the greatest revolution of language since the evolution of modern Japanese to current-day Japanese... No, even greater.”

A language revolution...

At the end of the 21st century, the population of Japan had been shrinking,

and the government had wanted to import workers from foreign countries, so they'd eliminated kanji from use as well as restricting the language to only simple grammatical structures in order for foreigners to more easily understand Japanese, in effect legislating the "current-day" Japanese.

As a result, there had been an increase in the number of immigrants moving to Japan, but according to Odaira-sensei, the greatest benefit had been the higher chance of running into a little girl that was actually a natural blonde.

"Sensei, it's true that the government had a specific reason to move to current-day Japanese, but the base of support for that decision was also an important part of it, yes?" I asked.

"Ah, yes," he said. "As we all know, Kurona Gura's *Oniaka* had influenced the DNA of Japanese."

We all knew that what he said was correct. A single work of literature in the latter half of that century had radically changed culture. Amaneko-chan had said that my novel would change the era, too...

"Oh yeah... You made a joke about the 38th century and how they only used symbols and numbers, didn't you, professor?" I asked. "Amaneko-chan is trying to bring about a Japanese like that, I think. She said that my novel would revolutionize Japanese."

"W-What are you t-talking about-noda?" said the professor, looking shocked. "I told you, I was just joking back then, right? Don't make it sound so serious, come on-noda..."

"You might have meant it as a joke, Choumabayashi-kun, but we shouldn't be so sure. Just as Kurona Gura's novel affected Japanese culture, Gin-kun's writings could well change the future," said Odaira-sensei, excitedly, writing letters on the table with his finger.

PAST→MODERN [Girl]

PRESENT→CURRENT [GIRL]

NEXT→FUTURE []

"Gin-kun, write how you would express 'a girl' in the space for me," he said.

I agreed and wrote “▽” in between the brackets.

“Nii, what’s that supposed to be? A smiley-face?” asked Miru.

“Miru-chan, knowing Gin-kun, it is surely a triangular pair of panties,” said Odaira-sensei. “I do wonder about it, though... I told him to write ‘a girl,’ but he wrote ‘a girl’s soul’ instead. In any case, I’m very much against you wearing such adult-looking panties as these!”

Ah, Sensei... Ever-so-literary of an analysis! However, that had not been my intention.

“You see, this is a symbol for a little girl whose head is buried in the ground with just her lower body sticking out,” I explained.

Everyone went silent.

Yuzu-san jumped in with a little joke after listening to our debate. “If your novel ends up affecting the future, Gin-san, then maybe someone from the future will come here, just like how we went to the 21st century.”

“So Amaneko-chan is actually like, my granddaughter from the future or something?” I asked.

“Not possible-noda,” the professor said. “My device said she was your immediate sister-noda.”

Kuroha told us all to stop making stupid jokes, and we left it at that.

“But it’s quite a strange dream for a middle schooler to have, creating a new language...” pondered Odaira-sensei. “She should only care about the pattern of her panties. Was there something that sparked her interest, I wonder?”

“It’s probably thanks to her grandfather or the Special Cultural District, I bet,” I said. “She seems to be sick of old-fashioned things, after all. I think it’s wonderful that she has such a big dream. Oh and by the way, I think her panties are black.”

“Big dream? Yeah, right! Creating a new Japanese isn’t even the slightest bit realistic!” complained Kuroha. She clearly didn’t have a good impression of Amaneko-chan, so she wasn’t going to give her any benefit of the doubt. Perhaps the black/white panty divide they shared was also a factor.

“Kuroha, can you really not understand how Amaneko-chan feels at all?” I asked. “Well, I guess if the language changes again, you wouldn’t be able to become a classic literature translator any more...”

“It’s not about my future job... I mean, most people would be against it. Imagine how difficult it would make daily life!” she exclaimed.

“Ha ha ha...” chuckled Odaira-sensei. “But it won’t be people like us who create the future. It will be the generations after us, and we probably won’t understand what they are thinking at all, either.”

And with that, we finished discussing Amaneko-chan. It felt like today’s lecture had just finished.

“Professor, I’m sorry about coming over to your place like this,” I apologized. “I guess we should have just called.”

“No, I definitely wanted to see you today-noda,” said the professor, looking straight at Kuroha.

She wanted to see Kuroha?

Kuroha was chatting with Yuzu-san and didn’t seem to notice the professor looking at her.

“All righty then, that’s enough of that! Since you’re all here, how about we watch some anime together-noda?” asked the professor. “Sensei, what would you recommend?”

“Oh, I’m not picky,” said Odaira-sensei. “I know, why don’t we ask Yuzu-san? Anime in the 23rd century must all be new for her.”

Oh, Sensei has a point. I’ll ask Yuzu-san what she wants to watch. I turned to look at Yuzu-san...

I ended up in complete shock. The most surprised I had been the entire day. I saw Yuzu-san looking a way I almost never had before... It must have been something more shocking than Odaira-sensei showing interest in a middle school student or Kuroha hanging out with a classmate.

“Kuroha, that’s just... wrong!” yelled Yuzu-san, reacting with confusion and anger to something Kuroha had said.

For Yuzu-san, who almost never loses her cool, to react like that...

“Kuroha, what the hell did you say to Yuzu-san?!” I yelled back.

“Onii-chan...” Kuroha said, sheepishly. “I was talking with Yuzu-san and I started telling her about how you were born, and... I told her.”

“Told her what?”

“That you are a 2.5D kid.”

Both Odaira-sensei and the professor looked surprised when they heard what Kuroha said. But they both were people from the 23rd century, so they shrugged it off with an, “Oh, I see.”

But, Yuzu-san wasn't from our time period.

At first, Yuzu-san had just smiled at what Kuroha said, remarking, “Oh, my, you can get married to people from anime? If my brother had been born in the 23rd century, he would have been on cloud nine just from hearing about it, and started fantasizing about this and that until he passed out.”

But Yuzu-san's attitude completely changed when she heard that those married couples could make 2.5D kids.



I could understand that. *I bet anyone from the 21st century would react the way Yuzu-san did when they heard about 2.5D kids.*

You might ask, “How does a person and a 2D character have a child?” We were called 2.5D kids, but there wasn’t actually any real difference. We were born from human women, after all. It was impossible for someone from 3D and someone from 2D to have a kid together, even in today’s time. So a surrogate was artificially inseminated instead of the 2D character.

When Kuroha had explained that to Yuzu-san, she had snapped. “A human woman is a surrogate for a 2D character?! If you have to go to such lengths, you shouldn’t need to have kids in the first place! Why should they even want kids?!”

It’s very common for people who marry 2D characters to not want real children. But there was a certain subset that did want children as an heir to continue a family line, or who wanted to leave something behind as a legacy of their love for their wife.

“There’s something very wrong with this! Babies should be made by two people who love each other!” cried Yuzu-san. She seemed to be saying that you needed to think about it from the perspective of the woman. Her anger wasn’t subsiding.

“Yuzu-san, I know it might seem wrong from the viewpoint of 21st century women... but in our time period it’s not considered strange at all,” said Kuroha, trying to calm her down. “The women who give birth to the kids take a pretty hefty guarantee. They can have a much more stable life than some flimsy marriage.”

This guarantee continued for the woman’s entire life, so lately there had been a rise in strong women who’d decided to remain single and serve as surrogate mothers for 2.5D kids in order to focus on their careers or hobbies.

“Even for the woman, there are reasons they become surrogate mothers,” explained Kuroha.

“But...” Yuzu-san protested.

“Indeed... The ethics of our time and the time from which you came are

different, Yuzu-kun,” said Odaira-sensei. “It’s only natural for you to have this reaction.”

“I think in Yuzu-cchi’s case it’s more her personal opinion than ethics, but the difference in time periods is a factor-noda,” added the professor.

I should console her, too...

“Yuzu-san, please listen to what I have to say,” I said. “There are also couples who are brought together thanks to the 2.5D kid system. Usually the man and woman’s identities are kept secret from each other, but upon request they can sometimes meet, and sometimes they even fall in love with each other.”

“That’s what happened with Oniichan’s birth parents...” finished Kuroha.

My father had divorced the 2D character, Mikaeru-chan, and had remarried the woman who had given birth to me. That sounded pretty cruel to Mikaeru-chan, but she didn’t even have an artificial intelligence and was just a normal anime character, so it didn’t really cause any issues, I suspected. (FYI, if your “ex-wife” was a 2D character that had a powerful artificial intelligence installed, you would run into the same divorce issues as normal human couples did.)

“So in the end, Gin-kun was born from a man and a woman who loved each other,” summed up Odaira-sensei.

“...I see,” said Yuzu-san, not seeming very convinced, but at least no longer angry. “But I am completely against bearing a child like that. I want to have a child with someone that I love, and if it’s a girl I’m going to name her Kan’u!”

Kan’u? Wasn’t that the name of the Heisei character that I said I’d like to name my daughter after?

Yuzu-san continued by saying, “If it’s a boy I haven’t decided yet,” looking me straight in the eyes.

We changed subjects after that, and continued to chat about random stuff for another two hours before calling it quits. The professor said she had research to continue, and we all decided to leave. Then...

“Kuro-chan, wait a second-noda,” asked the professor as we were about to leave. “A present for you-noda.”

“Huh?”

The professor took out a small box from the little bag she wore on her waist. “This is a present to commemorate your debut as a translator-noda!”

Are those playing cards?

“These are the ‘Lolicon Deck’ that came special with the April 1982 edition of *Animage!*” she exclaimed. “It came up for public auction and I had to get it right away-noda!”

The professor took a number of cards out of the case, explaining, “This is the heroine from one of Director Something-or-other’s anime series.” I didn’t know the names of the characters she was saying like Clarisse or Fraw Bow or Sapphire, but the names of the directors rang a bell as important people from the arts in the Showa and Heisei eras that I had read about in my textbook study guides.

“‘Lolicon Deck’... Ah, the Showa era must have been nice. I can just picture it...” Odaira-sensei got a far-off look in his eyes.

Presented with a treasure of legendary value right in front of me, I was ecstatic.

“Th-Thanks...” said Kuroha, tentatively.

Hey, Kuroha! What’s with that lame reaction?!

“So the reason you wanted to see Kuroha was to give her that incredible present, right?” I asked. “I have to express my thanks, as well.”

“Ah, it’s nothing much-noda,” the professor said casually. “And besides, Kuro-chan really is something! For someone her age to debut as a translator is unheard of-noda!”

“Easy for you to say that, Professor,” said Odaira-sensei. “And Miru-chan is going to debut as an illustrator at the age of ten!”

“Professor, Sensei, Miru-chan, Kuroha-san... Everyone here is really exceptional, you know?” said Yuzu-san, smiling at me.

...I’m sure Yuzu-san didn’t intend to be mean... I was a little conflicted, after all. My little sisters were all debuting their talents to the world, while I was still

being rejected from Newcomer's Prize competitions.

"You'd better get your game on, Imose-kun!" encouraged the professor.

"Yeah..." I said.

Now that I think about it, the professor's brother had been consumed with jealousy about his little sister's success. I kind of understand how he felt. Just a little bit. But my sisters' success would surely be good inspiration. I'm not gonna lose to them. When I get back home, I'm going to get right back to writing!

"See you around," I said.

We said our goodbyes to the professor and left the laboratory.

That was when my cellphone rang.

The display showed a number I didn't know. I shushed everyone and answered the call.

"Um, is this the cellphone of Gin Imose?" spoke a male voice I didn't recognize. Judging from the voice, it was from a middle-aged man around the same age as my dad. "How do you do? My name is Takahashi, and I am from the 'Future Creation Company.'"

It wasn't a company that I had heard of before, but he said it was a publishing house.

"Why would a publisher want to talk with me?" I asked.

"Okay, okay, that's an obvious question to ask," he said. "You know of Amaneko Makoto-san, yes?"

This man was an acquaintance of Amaneko-chan, and he'd gotten my cellphone number from her. (I had put my phone number in the email I'd sent.)

"We heard about your novels from Amaneko-chan, see," he explained. "She gave them an extremely strong recommendation, see. And so I read the work that you uploaded to the internet, you see."

"I see."

"Let me cut to the chase," he said. "Please allow our company to publish that novel."

“...Huh?”

Did this person just say... publish?

Publish... PUBLISH... Publish...

Publish... my book...?

Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa?!

Somewhere in my completely blank head, I remembered what Amaneko-chan had said...

“I’ll make your dream come true.”

“It’s a very realistic dream-nodesu.”

It all clicked into place. A realistic dream. In other words...

I would be able to debut my work?!

*

One day in the 23rd century, in Kuroha’s room.

“Kuroha! Yuzu-san! In order to become a novelist, I need to gain all different kinds of knowledge,” I said. “How about we read the newspaper together today and study about the government?”

“Hmph,” Kuroha said. “I guess even you can have a good idea once in a while, Oniichan.”

“Oh, my... So we can read about what Nyamo-chan has been doing? That sounds like a lot of fun,” said Yuzu-san.

(Translator’s Note: The newspaper article has been translated into modern Japanese for your convenience.)

Special Article: *NIPPON TIMES*

July 2nd, 2202, Morning Edition

(New York) Prime Minister Nyamo-chan held the fourth in a series of talks today (yesterday, as viewed from Japan’s time zone) with President Reyes in the headquarters of the UN. The talks stretched for the entire afternoon.

The talks were supposed to be focused on the problematic issue of *yakiniku*

importation. However, as Prime Minister Nyamo-chan declared, “Meat-stuff? Eww! Whatevers!” the talks ended without any significant progress.

Although the talks between the two heads of state were not seemingly able to bear fruit, there are signs of movement within the U.S.

Some segments of the U.S. have started to call for the role of the president to be given to a 2D character, following after Japan. However, President Reyes said that he was thinking of dressing up like a superhero for their next meeting, which was interpreted as a concession to tamper down that growing public opinion.

However, in response, Prime Minister Nyamo-chan stated her disapproval of the idea. “No matter what you do, you ain’t gonna be 2D,” she said, and her “Affection” stat toward the U.S. dropped by 1 point. Her “Friendliness” and “Upset” stats remained unchanged.

After the conclusion of the talks, the Prime Minister held a press conference at a hotel in New York, stating, “I don’t care about all that complicated stuff,” and “I’m just gonna let Reyes-oniichan decide everything,” towing the line of her usual foreign policy.

“That’s Nyamo-chan for you!” I cried. “No matter what anyone says to her, she’s always like, ‘You decide!’ and ‘Don’t care!’ She avoids any trouble so easily! Truly a master at foreign relations!”

“Since her ‘Affection’ stat dropped by 1 point, that means it’s currently at 5, right?” Kuroha said. “If her ‘Affection’ and ‘Friendliness’ stats are maxed, then we go into ‘Lovey-Dovey!’ mode, right?”

“Yes. But you can’t rest easy even after maxing ‘Affection’ and ‘Friendliness,’” I said. “There’s also the ‘Upset’ stat. There’s a rumor going around the other countries that if that goes up to the max, then Nyamo-chan will feel hurt!”

“Those foreign countries sure have it rough dealing with Nyamo-chan...” Kuroha mused.

Chapter 4 - Literary Experience

—The next day.

The classroom was bathed in the rays of the summer sun. It was the final day before the start of summer vacation, so the mood in the classroom was happy and filled with anticipation.

My classmate Sugawara-kun had taken out his girlfriend-cards and was making plans for a summer vacation trip. At first I didn't notice anything strange, but then, without any warning, he let out a yelp and fell over onto the floor. It was like an invisible person had punched him, or something.

I guess it's time for today's Sugawara Theater.

"P-Please, forgive me!" he howled. "I promise I'll take everyone with me on the trip! So please, just... no more!"

But Sugawara's pleas fell on deaf ears, it seemed, and he once again let out a scream. He held his hand over his right eye, yelling, "My eye! My eye!!!" and running in place.

He had told me that his third girlfriend was a *yandere*, so the jealousy must have made her snap and she had aimed for his eyes. That was how the scenario was set, it seemed.

Man, I'm so jealous of him!

Sugawara-kun had meticulously crafted the story about his third girlfriend and was currently acting it out. As someone aiming to become an author, I was a little envious of his creativity.

...wait. Realization flooded over me. Oh, yeah. That's not true right now. I'm... I'm not someone that aims to become an author anymore.

"Hey, you? Are you even listening to me?" demanded the suspicious-sounding voice of my 2D teacher, Kazoe-sensei, from the small screen on the top of my desk.

“...Huh? Oh, sorry,” I apologized.

“Listen to your teacher when she is speaking! An idiot like you needs to work ten times harder than everyone else, you know!” she declared.

“Heh heh heh...” *If only she knew...*

“What’s with that creepy laugh?!” she exclaimed. “Are you some kind of masochist that enjoys it when people insult you or something?!”

“Good question. What do you think?” I asked, genuinely curious.

“Hell if I know! Idiot!”

Sorry, Sensei... Please, go easy on me this time. See, I’m kind of on cloud nine right now. I mean, if I can’t take it easy at a time like this... after all...

“I’m gonna make my debut!” I yelled in glee.

“K-Keep your voice down! Maybe you’re such an idiot that you’re a lost cause...” she muttered.

“That’s right,” I said. “I’m an idiot. I’m an idiot, but I’m going to make my debut. I’m going to make my debut as a high school student! Isn’t that amazing?!”

“Debut as what? You’re finally gonna come out as a pro idiot? Wow, congrats. I guess your brain’s melted in the summer heat. Well, see if I care,” snapped Kazoe-sensei angrily, and she disappeared off the screen. She wouldn’t show back up for a little while.

The phone call I had received the previous day was going to change my life in a big way. Takahashi-san was a member of the “New Word Order” that Amaneko-chan had created, and he had said that he was moved by my writing. He praised it as carving open a path to the future, just like Amaneko-chan had.

“Yes... I was especially impressed with your usage of ‘£.’ To think you would write such things about the British economy...” Takashi had said on the phone call.

“No, that’s a symbol for the heroine dashing forward with her hands outspread,” I corrected him.

“Ugh... Okay, okay... of course I knew that, yes. Your novel’s true heart lied within the ‘¥,’ of course. It was a treatise on the Japanese yen, the economy...”

“That’s a symbol of a maidservant having her *obi* unwrapped by the lord, then spinning around saying, ‘Banzai!... So dizzy...’”

“It’s what?! ...I mean, okay, okay. I knew that, yes, I knew that. And then... ‘✂.’ That’s... uh...”

“That’s a symbol that shows a Takefuji Dancer kicking her leg up in the air,” I explained.

“Were you even born in this century?! That’s so old no one would ever get that!” he sputtered.

The “Future Creation Company” was a small publisher, but they said they would make sure my book was on display at every book store in the country. He said that when it came to specifics like the contract, etc., that he would explain it all when we met in person.

“Please give Amaneko-chan my regards,” he said formally. “I, Takahashi, am prepared to do anything for her, even become her servant. Amaneko-chan is like a natural angel descended from heaven when it comes to a middle aged-man like me who is exhausted dealing with his work and family life. No, she’s a holy angel! I’ll just say it... I’m publishing your book because Amaneko-chan asked me to!”

When I told Kuroha about the phone call, she said that it “sounds fishy as hell,” and then kept harping about it. She’s the type that’s suspicious of any good luck coming your way, so I had figured she would nitpick it to death trying to find some problem with it.

She’s one to talk, after having her own debut as a translator fall into her lap.

“Well, I have my suspicions, but... basically, for now, I’m hoping for the best for you. Good luck,” finished Kuroha, not really making me feel any better.

Maybe she’s unhappy that my debut as an author is because of Amaneko-chan?

I remembered the discussion I had had with Kuroha that evening...

.....— —

To the outside observer, I bet that they'd see Kuroha and me as siblings that were very close. We often would spend time together in one of our rooms during the evening.

This evening the two of us were in Kuroha's room. Her room was relatively plain for a girl's room, without many decorations. It was nice and tidy and there wasn't any trash or dust left around. Even the window was washed clean.

It was already midnight. I was at my place by her low table, reading a book, while Kuroha was sitting at her desk, tapping away at her computer's keyboard.

"Kuroha, you seem to be making good progress," I commented.

"Yeah..." she replied off-handedly, trying not to break her concentration from the computer screen.

Kuroha was in the middle of translating, you see. She was working toward her upcoming debut as a translator. However, there was one thing that struck me as a little odd...

What she was working on right now wasn't classic literature.

She was translating current-day literature to modern Japanese, by taking all the katakana and hiragana in those books and converting them to kanji here and there.

"Who's gonna actually read that? Must be an extremely niche audience, no?" I asked.

"It's for people in the Special Cultural District, it seems," replied Kuroha. "But if it gets a good response, they told me they'll publish it nationwide."

It seems like the patron which was involved with Kuroha's debut was a wealthy person from the Special Cultural District. She had told me he was the one who had chosen what book she had to translate, and he had complete control over the process.

He must have some purpose if he's going to publish a book with kanji in it in this era.

I had jokingly suggested, "Will you translate my books into modern Japanese

one day?” but she had replied to me quite seriously, “Sure thing, that’d be nice.”

As I looked at Kuroha’s slender back as she pounded away at her translation, I really felt glad for her. In the past, “My Little Sister Who Can Read Kanji” had been just a non-conforming malcontent. She’d had amazing talent, but that talent had ended up causing problems with the people around her, like her being bullied for reading old books — those sorts of things — which had caused her to become really insular.

But she was different now. Her genius had been recognized by others, and she was going to spread her wings out in the world.

I can’t lose to her!

If I was to debut as a novelist, I needed to improve my writing skills.

“Kuroha, I’m going back to my room to work on my novel,” I said.

“Okay. Do your best,” replied Kuroha without even turning around from her desk.

As I was about to head out to the hallway, my cellphone buzzed. I’d gotten a message.

Is it from Amaneko-chan?

QUESTIONS: WILL ANSWER IN PERSON

WILL YOU DRESS UP FOR ME NEXT TIME ☆

Questions, huh?

I had sent Amaneko-chan questions about my birth parents before I had gone to the professor’s. She was saying she’d answer them the next time we met.

“When we meet, huh?” I muttered, and from behind me there was a sudden reaction.

“Wait a sec. Who was that message from just now? Was it... *her?*” pounced Kuroha, her crisp voice bouncing off my back.

"You're talking about Amaneko-chan, right? Yeah, it was from her," I answered.

"What did she say?" pried Kuroha.

I explained what she had sent me, and Kuroha responded immediately.

"No way!"

"No way," what? I don't get what you mean.

"Don't meet with her. No way," she said firmly.

"But she said she'd answer the questions the next time we meet, so if I want to get answers, I have to, right?"

"Just call her on the phone," she said.

"She said she wanted to see my clothes, so it has to be in person."

"Clothes? Your clothes?! I-I don't understand what that's supposed to mean... I-If you want someone to compliment your clothes, I'm happy to..."

"No, that's not it," I said. "Okay, let's meet her together. It'll be a *gimai-jitsumai* set! If I remember right, that famous restaurant with the big M sign has a value set like that..."

"What?"

"The soft bun above the hamburger was the *gimai*, and the soft bun below the hamburger was the *jitsumai*, and the hard piece of meat in between the two soft buns was the older brother," I explained.

"Why do you have to say it like something so lewd...? And wait, that's not a value set, that's just a hamburger..."

"Close enough," I said. "Anyway are you coming with me to meet her or not?"

"No way. I mean, she totally hates my guts."

"All right then, I guess I'll have to go by myself..." I began, but Kuroha immediately told me I couldn't again. We clearly weren't getting anywhere with this.

"Anyway, I have to respond to her message," I said at last.

“No!” Kuroha yelled like a little kid, grabbing my hand and pulling me forcefully in front of her TV.

“W-What’s with you?” I complained.

“We’re going to watch TV until the sun rises, so concentrate on the TV!” she declared.

“What about your translation?” I asked.

“I need to clear my head,” snapped Kuroha, turning off the lights and turning on the TV. We usually turned off the lights when watching TV together. I could see Kuroha’s face next to me, illuminated by the light from the TV in the darkness.

“‘Ish mine,’ my butt. I ain’t letting you have him,” pouted Kuroha to herself like a little kid. She wasn’t budging from in front of that TV.

Fine, I guess I’ll play along.

There was anime showing on the TV. It seemed to be a little sister show, where the older brother that was in high school and his little sister—
—were taking a bath together.

“Oooh, Onii-chan, no... No. Mom and Dad will hear us...”

It was a super simple love story.

The two of us watched it in silence for a little while.

“So, Kuroha...” I began.

“Wh-What is it?”

“What are you thinking about right now?”

She leaned over a bit, but didn’t answer my question.

“I bet you’re thinking the same thing I am, aren’t you?” I asked.

“What...? WhaaaaaatTTTT?!”

Why are you looking so shocked? And you’re blushing so much that I can even see it in the dim light from the TV!

“Well, wh-what are *you* thinking about, Onii-chan?” she stammered.

It's a scene about a brother and his little sister getting along in the bath, right? Well then, obviously...

"We used to take baths together a lot when we were little, remember?" I asked.

"Y-Yeah..."

"And the thing I remember the most was definitely playing write-on-the-body, you know?"

"So you were reminded of how we used to take baths a *long time ago*?" asked Kuroha, seeming like it wasn't what she was expecting.

Huh? Then what in the world were you imagining?

"Did you know that you're supposed to play write-on-the-body by writing directly on the skin, and not through any clothes? And if possible when both people are completely naked."

"*H-Hentai*. Completely naked? Yeah right," said Kuroha dismissively.

I suggested that maybe I should ask Miru, or Yuzu-san, or Amaneko-chan, but after I said each name Kuroha would shout "No!", without exception.

"I've explained this before to you, but you realize that write-on-the-body is the origin of my prose itself, right?" I asked.

"Y-You want to do it that badly?" she stammered.

"Yeah. It's been a while, and I'm getting the urge."

"I guess you'll end up doing it with some other girl eventually otherwise..." Kuroha seemed a little troubled, started playing with the end of her hair, and then said quietly to me, "O-Onii-chan, if you i-insist, then I guess I..."

"Oh, look at that, Kuroha!" I cried. "A sub-heroine has appeared to get in the way of the brother and sister pair!"

She said nothing.

We ended up watching TV together until nearly dawn. The two of us really got along. Anybody could have seen it, and I certainly felt like we got along really well.

—Maybe that’s why I wasn’t able to realize how Kuroha really felt that easily.

.....—

In the end, class was over before Kazoe-sensei ever reappeared. It was now summer vacation, and I headed over to Class 1-△.

I was going to invite Kuroha to eat lunch together. We did that occasionally. But I thought that it might be a good thing if we stopped doing that now, since Kuroha had made friends with classmates of hers.

Kuroha had been a loner ever since she’d started school.

“Kuroha, don’t just read books all the time. Why don’t you hang out with your friends?” I had once asked.

“...Don’t force your value system on me,” she had replied in disgust.

“Value Sis-dom? Some kind of cheap role-play?”

Kuroha had replied, “That’s not even funny. But I guess if I were able to be that forward with people, then maybe even I...” and she looked me straight in the face, letting out a deep sigh.

“Even I could make friends” was what she had probably wanted to say. So when Kuroha had actually become friends with some classmates, it was a thing to celebrate, I thought.

When it had been decided that she would debut as a translator, the people around her had changed the way they saw her. She had changed from “that girl who sits in the corner of the classroom reading ancient books” to “that amazing high school girl who is a professional classical literature translator.”

Kuroha herself hadn’t changed how she acted at all. And the rest of the class surely knew that she could read kanji and preferred reading modern literature. What had changed was how the people around her treated her. That was how, yes, even Kuroha had easily made friends.

As I was pondering all that, I arrived at Class 1-△. And when I went to peek inside from the hall...

——!

Th-This is...

I was at a loss for words. Kuroha was chatting with classmates of hers. Just seeing that before my eyes was a considerable shock to my system. The light shining in through the window made her glow like the sun.

Kuroha was chatting with an out-of-it-looking girl with glasses and an energetic girl with short hair. She had a page from a book of modern literature open and was pointing at it, explaining to them about one of her favorite stories.

"It looks like Kuroha is getting along with the other girls in her class! This calls for a celebration! Everyone, time to put on your celebratory red panties!" I yelled in jubilation, not able to control myself.

Immediately, I was met with the stares of everyone in the classroom.

There were about as many shocked faces as there were faces that were all, "Oh, this guy again." I guess I'd come to Kuroha's class enough that they'd started to remember me.

It all happened in an instant. The second I thought to myself, "Why is there a sudden gust of wind?" I realized that it was my little sister. I bent my body around into a comma, barely avoiding her dictionary attack that had come with no warning whatsoever.

"Why do you always yell all of a sudden like that?!" she complained. "Aren't I always telling you not to just yell for no good reason!"

"My bad..." I said. "I just got a little excited. And I had a reason."

"No excuses! Sheesh," said Kuroha, dragging me out of the classroom. "Listen carefully. Your mission is: Do nothing. Say nothing. Become like the air itself. Can you handle it?"

"Th-That sounds kinda hard..."

She wants me to become an Air Onii-chan? I remember how Odaira-sensei got into a heated argument on his radio show about his number three most-wanted "Things I want to become" being an invisible man, but...

"Just stay *right here*, okay? I'm going to buy lunch," she commanded.

“Wait, why don’t you eat together with those classmates of yours instead of me?” I asked.

Kuroha seemed a little torn for a second, but replied, “I’m not sure I can change my eating habits just like that, so I’ll eat together with you, Onii-chan.”

“Okay, understood.”

“Now wait here,” she said. “I’m going to go buy lunch.”

We didn’t have any lunch boxes from Yuzu-san like we usually did because she had overslept, and I had already bought mine.

As I watched Kuroha disappear down the hallway, I waited right in front of Class 1-△. We had the closing ceremony after lunch, and after that, it was the start of summer vacation.

“...-san...”

I could hear voices coming from inside the classroom. By the sound of it, two girls were talking with each other.

“...and Imose-san...”

Hmm? Imose-san... Are they talking about Kuroha? My curiosity was piqued, and I listened in.

“Imose-san sure is amazing, making her debut as a translator!” one cried.

“She’s cool...”

The first voice was clear and energetic, and the second was kind of out-of-it. I figured it was the two girls who had been talking with Kuroha before. The energetic one had the short hair, and the out-of-it one wore glasses. According to what they were saying, it was the one with glasses who Kuroha had hung out with the other day. Just when I was about to jump in and introduce myself, I remembered what Kuroha had told me, and I held myself back.

“I... really look up to Imose-san...” said the out-of-it girl, who clearly thought highly of Kuroha.

Kuroha was pretty, and smart. She was my little sister, and I was proud of her. As I’d thought, debuting as a translator had radically changed how other people

thought about her. I nodded in understanding.

“On the other hand, that brother of hers that just showed up... I mean, seriously!” said the energetic girl, like she was shocked. “Could he get any more awkward, you know? Have you heard anything from Imose-san about him?”

“...He wants to become a novelist, I think...” replied the out-of-it one.

“Ahh... He’s one of those typical useless brother types, then. He’s gonna become an author! Yeah, right! More like unemployed. People who want to become authors are either future professors or future NEETs. And that guy is clearly the latter!”

No way, dude! In fact, my debut is already decided! Actually, it was true that I had never even held a part-time job.

“What does Imose-san think about her brother trying to be a novelist, do you think?” asked the energetic girl.

Clearly she’s doing everything she can to cheer me on, duh! I confidently crossed my arms, but then I heard what they said next.

“...She said that... she is really troubled by him...” said the out-of-it one.

Huh?

“No kidding, right?” the energetic girl agreed. “Imose-san is so good looking and smart... and *that* guy is just, ugh! I wonder if she’s told him how much he bothers her properly?”

“...I’d rather not say mean things about him...” said the out-of-it one, disagreeing with the energetic one for the first time.

They changed subjects immediately and started talking about other topics. They talked about how the boy they both liked was into 2D and how it made them sad (it was, surprise, Sugawara-kun), and how if they couldn’t get married maybe they’d become surrogate mothers for 2.5D kids and get the guarantee, and how humans being a substitute for a 2D character was so irritating but at the same time kind of a sweet deal... things like that.

But none of what they were saying was getting into my head. Rather, the words one of them had said before were continuing to repeat like the refrain of

a song...

“...She said that... she is really troubled by him...”

Kuroha thinks I'm a bother?

No, Kuroha loves me like family, I'm sure of it. There's no way she thinks I'm bothering her!

...

Am I so sure of that?

Can I say that, with certainty?

I was trying to figure out whether I'd ever caused trouble for Kuroha, so I recalled a number of things that had happened in the past.

There was a time when I had suddenly barged in to the bathroom while Kuroha was in the process of taking off her clothes, trying to recreate the “Lucky Pervert”-style scene you would see so often in orthodox style literature.

There was a time when I had once asked Kuroha to dress up in a school swimsuit as a reference for my novels, but she had refused, so I had borrowed it from her and tried it on myself while completely naked underneath.

There was a time I had tried to eat Kuroha's panties, too.

And, oh yeah... there was that time...

It had been when we were in elementary school. When I'd told Kuroha I wanted to marry a *gimai*, she responded with a, “Yeah...”

She'd blushed and nodded for some reason, but when I responded with, “I meant Homyura, you know,” she'd gotten angry and wouldn't speak with me for a day.

...

Well, aside from that last one... Maybe I actually have caused her a lot of trouble? But none of that would be enough to make you hate someone, I'm pretty sure of that.

But...

Kuroha was the type that’s really careful about what she says to other people, you see. She might not have been able to tell me what she wanted to most of the time.

A good example would be what had happened today at lunch. She had finally made some friends with her classmates, so it would be such a shame not to eat lunch with them. I was sure that she had agreed to eat lunch with me because she didn’t want to disappoint me.

Maybe I’ve been causing her to really go out of her way... Maybe...

I’m sorry, Kuroha. Maybe I really am a big brother who causes trouble for you.

I felt so bad for her that I decided not to eat lunch together after all. I just wasn’t in the mood, so I headed to the roof. Before I left, I took my student notebook out of my pocket and tore out a page. I wrote down my confession to her, “I am going to the roof to reflect on my failures as an individual,” and left the scene.

“Onii-chan, where did you go during lunch?” Kuroha asked.

Kuroha and I were, as usual, walking home together after school ended.

“When I came back to the classroom you weren’t there,” continued Kuroha. “Didn’t I tell you not to go anywhere?”

“I was on the roof,” I replied.

“For the entire lunch break?”

“Yeah. I thought I left you a confessional note.”

“...Oh. I had figured that was something you wrote.”

Kuroha went on to explain that during lunch break the “mystery symbols” posted in the hallway outside of Class 1-△ had caused quite a commotion.

_____ | □□□

___& | □□□

_____ | □□□

What was mysterious about it? It's clearly a symbol that means "I am going to the roof to reflect on my failures as an individual," no?

According to Kuroha, she didn't think that I would use symbols like that except when writing my novels. She actually did have a point; this was a rare occurrence. I could only tell her that it felt like the right thing to do at the time.

"...Did... something happen?" she asked.

"No, nothing."

She listened to my answer, not replying. I really wanted to get a clear-cut answer from Kuroha about whether I caused her trouble or not. But if I asked her something like that directly, I was sure she would just say, "Of course not" and deny it. There was no way she would tell me what she really felt.

At the least, I thought, it was my duty as her older brother to do my best not to cause her any trouble in the future.

Our conversation having ended before it even really began, we continued all the way home in an awkward silence. And then...

There was a car parked in front of our house. It was a sedan with an illustration of a 2D beautiful girl painted on the front, which was quite common in the 23rd century. It wasn't Dad's car, that I was sure about, because the lower body of the girl wasn't even the slightest bit *thick*, and the lower half of the leg below the knee didn't look nearly silky smooth enough.

As Kuroha and I looked at the curious car, a back-seat door opened and a girl got out. The jingle of a bell rang out across the surroundings.

".....!"

I could feel the tension in the air around Kuroha next to me change in an instant.

I bet she has a fierce look on her face right now.

The person who had exited the vehicle was none other than my blood-related little sister, my *jitsumai* — Amaneko-chan.

“Hello, Nii-sama,” she said, approaching me and bowing her head a little.

Since I hadn’t had any warning that she was coming, I was a bit at a loss. Amaneko-chan was hardly somebody I would call part of my daily routine, after all. Rather, she was more a “daily routine destroyer.”

“I have come to pick you up today, Nii-sama,” she continued. “Please come with me.”

“Come with you... to where?” I sputtered.

“To the Future Creation Company. I believe they’d like to have a meeting with you-nodesu.”

This was yet another sudden happening. It seemed like she had asked a friend in her “New Word Order” to provide a car and had come to pick me up.

Well, it’s a bit surprising, but I suppose it would be better to get the meeting out of the way as soon as possible.

I replied, “Okay, fine,” but then...

“Wait a second!” yelled the up-until-this-point-silent Kuroha, physically jumping in between Amaneko-chan and myself.

“Oh, Kuroha-san. I didn’t realize you were here-nodesu,” said Amaneko-chan, staring at Kuroha with eyes that screamed, “Bring in on!”

“And why exactly does this meeting require you to go with him, huh?” pried Kuroha. “The meeting should be with the publisher and Onii-chan only. There’s no reason for *you* to be there.”

“I am the person who understands Nii-sama’s novels and prose better than anyone, so I will be there next to him as his partner-nodesu. It will be our book, together-nodesu.”

“What the hell? That makes no logical sense, and besides, I understand his writing better than you!” shot back Kuroha.

“Oh, you *what*, now? Nii-sama, write some symbol somewhere and let’s just see!” cried Amaneko-chan.

Huh? I was a bit at a loss being asked all of a sudden like that, but I wrote

what popped into my head.

∴

Kuroha looked like she was having a hard time deciding, while Amaneko-chan was chuckling to herself. The two of them gave their answer simultaneously.

“M-Moles?” said Kuroha, tentatively.

“The Three Part Reform,” said Amaneko-chan. “It was a reform plan from the government in the first part of the 21st century to reshape the relationship between the national and local governments, consisting of (1) reducing national subsidies to local public services, (2) transferring tax revenues to local governments, and (3) reforming the grant-in-aid system.”

“...Wow. You really know your stuff, Amaneko-chan,” I replied.

“How the hell are you two’s thinking so identical?!” Kuroha was indignant. “There’s something fishy going on here! And besides, there’s no way that Onii-chan knew that kind of thing to begin with!”

“My brain and Nii-sama’s brains fit so well together it’s almost scary-nodesu!” Amaneko-chan laughed, her voice rising higher and higher. “That’s why I am able to read the future writing that he creates-nodesu. You should be glad you can read those musty old kanji, and just focus on translating that beyond-dumb classic literature of yours-nodesu!”

For her to understand what I was trying to write so perfectly... maybe it really is because we’re related by blood?

“Now then, Nii-sama, let us go together and create the future,” Amaneko-chan said. “Your novels will change Japanese... no, not just Japanese, but Japan itself-nodesu!”

“Changing Japanese?” snapped Kuroha. “There’s not even a chance of that happening. Even if his work has a lot of influence, it’s not like something would change today, or even tomorrow. It would take a really long time, wouldn’t it?”

“Of course the effects won’t appear immediately-nodesu. But I do believe

that we will be able to see the signs of change while we are still alive-nodesu.”

“Not a chance,” answered Kuroha.

“There is a good chance-nodesu!” shot back Amaneko-chan. “And besides...”

Amaneko-chan paused to build up the power of her words, then said something that really surprised me.

“I have heard that it is now possible to travel through time. So we can go to the future and see the changes for ourselves-nodesu.”

What?! Kuroha and I looked at each other instinctively.

Amaneko-chan, you couldn't... You know about the professor's marshmallows?

“Amaneko-chan, you know about that?” I asked.

“Huh? About what?” she replied, quizzically.

She didn't look like she was putting on an act. It looked like she really didn't know. So what she'd said earlier must have meant she hoped it would be possible to travel through time, soon, I supposed.

Amaneko-chan and Kuroha stared each other down, fireworks going off, like a dog and a monkey... no, like a tiger and a dragon.

“Nii-sama, it is time to go-nodesu,” said Amaneko-chan getting impatient, and she grabbed tightly onto my left arm.

“Hold it right there!” yelled Kuroha, who immediately grabbed onto my right arm.

“...The only thing you have planned today is that meeting, right?” asked Kuroha.

“...Yeah.”

Amaneko-chan, I saw something in your eyes there for a second!

“You're not thinking about taking my Onii-chan and doing something weird with him, are you?!” continued Kuroha.

“P-Pardon the thought-nodesu! I have no intention of that-nodesu. And stop

with that ‘my Onii-chan’ stuff already-nodesu!”

Kuroha continued to glare at Amaneko-chan, and her eyes were getting bloodshot!

“I... I thought this might be the case, but... you... you actually... Even though you’re blood-related to him...!” Kuroha seethed.

“Nii-sama, let’s get going-nodesu!” Amaneko-chan tried to pull me toward the car.

“You think I’m going to let you have him so easily?!” Kuroha snapped. “Think again!”

“This has nothing to do with you, Kuroha-san! You’re part of the past-nodesu!” Amaneko-chan cried.

With both my arms being pulled by my little sisters, I was unable to move. I could smell the feminine scent of the hair treatment that the both of them used. Kuroha’s had her usual floral scent, while Amaneko-chan’s was a surprisingly adult, clean scent.

“Nii-sama!”

“Onii-chan!”

They were pulling on me left and right, and my body was swaying back and forth.

Are the two of them serious? Th-This kind of hurts, you know.

“Nii-sama, come with me, please!”

“Onii-chan, don’t go with her!”

Amaneko-chan was on my left, and Kuroha was on my right.

Th-This situation... This happens all the time in the ‘war zone’ style of orthodox literature! Odaira-sensei has even said that he is often pulled back and forth between the little sisters in his head. When we were walking down the street the other day, he had to stop in the middle of the road and scold them, I remember. I think I’ve taken another step closer to being like him!

But while I was feeling impressed with myself, neither of them seemed close

to letting go of me.

I need to say something to my little sisters!

In this sort of situation, there was only one thing to say. I closed my eyes in preparation, then opened them wide and shouted:

“I am now having an Orthodox Literary Experience!”

I cried that aloud, so moved that my voice reached far and wide.

Amaneko-chan was so surprised that she let out a yelp and let go of my arm, and I was naturally pulled into Kuroha’s embrace.

“Hee hee. That is exactly what he’d yell in this situation,” said Kuroha, proud of her victory and looking down at Amaneko-chan. “It’s exactly how Onii-chan would think. A normal person like you wouldn’t be able to understand!”

Um, is that supposed to be a compliment, Kuroha? Probably?

Amaneko-chan bit her tongue in frustration and glared angrily at Kuroha. “...Kuroha-san, what exactly is Nii-sama to you? Why are you trying to get in the way of his dream-nodesu?!”

“Get in the way?” she snapped. “I’m not getting in his way or anything.”

“Yes, you are-nodesu! Do you secretly despise him-nodesu?!”

“Don’t be silly. I...”

“Is it because he’s not your *real* Nii-sama?” pressed Amaneko-chan.

“Why, you...” Kuroha’s eyes flashed with anger. “There are some things you can and can’t say!” she yelled with a voice coming from deep down. “What the hell do you know?! You don’t have a clue just how deeply I...!”

Even Amaneko-chan was taken aback from Kuroha’s onslaught.

“Onii-chan, don’t go. You can have that meeting some other day, right?” Kuroha asked.

“Nii-sama! Think about your dream first! Don’t loose track of what’s important!” begged Amaneko-chan.

Amaneko-chan’s words echoed in my heart. *My dream, huh?*

My dream was to debut as an author and have my novels save people. I wanted to save others just like *Oniaka* had once saved me. Neither of them were against that dream. Both of them were cheering me on. But Kuroha was telling me *not* to go, and Amaneko-chan was telling me *to* go.

I was in a real pickle. It was just like that *gimai - jitsumai* set from that “M” restaurant I had talked about!

Damn it... What should I do?

I looked at Kuroha. I didn’t want to be a burden to her anymore. I didn’t want to trouble her, I thought.

I then looked at Amaneko-chan. She had said she would support my novels, and it would be our book, together. She had said she wanted to be by my side as my partner. Those words made me truly happy.

Wait.

I could not trouble Kuroha and go along with Amaneko-chan’s wishes by...

Ahh, why didn’t I see it? There’s a simple answer.

The choice that would make everyone happy in this situation was clearly...

I moved away from Kuroha and approached Amaneko-chan.

The reason that Kuroha was trying to pull me away from Amaneko-chan was clearly because she thought of her as a rival. She was strangely concerned about Amaneko-chan. But if she thought about it rationally, even Kuroha would see that there was no problem with me having a meeting at the publisher.

Kuroha, I don’t want you to have to worry about me anymore. You’re going to debut as a translator soon, so I want you to be able to concentrate on your work and not me.

“H-Hey... Onii-chan!” cried Kuroha, not understanding, and she went to try and pull me once more.

“Amaneko-chan, let’s go,” I said, not giving Kuroha the chance.

“Yes! Nii-sama!” said Amaneko-chan, moving quickly to embrace me.



As we walked toward the car, its back door slowly opened, beckoning us toward it. Amaneko-chan entered the car first, and just when I started to bend over to get in myself...

“Onii-chan, no! No, Onii-chan!” cried Kuroha from beside me, sounding almost childish. I looked over at her, and she seemed nearly in tears.

I was sure that she was envious of Amaneko-chan, but even in that case, why would she have that sort of expression? I felt I needed to say something.

“I’m sorry for always causing you so much trouble. I promise I won’t be a bother to you again.”

“Huh...? What are saying?” asked Kuroha, as if she didn’t understand.

I didn’t respond, and got into the back seat of the car. The automatic door closed with a hearty thunk.

Kuroha was screaming something, but since the car took off almost immediately, I wasn’t able to catch any of what she said.

*

One day in the 23rd century, in Yuzu-san’s room.

“Yuzu-san!” I said, excitedly. “I found something really interesting in the underground library.”

“Oh, my. What could it be?” she said.

“It’s a piece of paper that looks really old! The writing on it uses kanji and I can’t read it, so I thought I would ask you to read it to me.”

I held up *Special Article: “Comic Prisoner 20XX Volume XX Readers’ Corner.”*

“I see... I think this is a readers’ comment page from a manga magazine,” she explained.

“Oh?” I asked. “I see! Let’s try reading it!”

“★★-sensei’s bondage scenes are top-notch. I especially love how you draw those giant milk-bags getting squeezed so tightly! It’s the best.”

“Yuzu-san, what kind of manga was this message about, I wonder?”

“Let me think. It’s just a guess, but I think this has something to do with milking a cow.”

“A cow? So this is an animal manga?”

“I think so, yes,” she said. “Just thinking about the smell of barn animals can make you feel a little light-headed, after all.”

“I am always looking forward to your latest work, ◎◎-sensei. This month we finally got a raw birth scene with the heroine’s inflated stomach! I’ve waited so long for this! It made me super excited.”

“And what is this about?” I asked.

“It seems to be about giving birth to a baby. I suspect this is a manga about raising children.”

“A manga about raising children, wow!”

“That’s right. It sounds very heartwarming. Although I bet that raising kids can be really tough sometimes...”

“△△-sensei, I couldn’t get enough of all those juicy, pungent scenes in this month’s chapter. I was so glad you got to give us an extra portion this month!”

“And what is this one about?”

“Juicy and pungent? Perhaps it is talking about some kind of broth for cooking?” said Yuzu-san. “It is probably a cooking manga, as it also talks about making extra portions and freezing them, which is a good way to help save on your family budget.”

“I see. A nice warm soup is perfect for those cold winter nights.”

“Why don’t I make some for us sometime?” she asked.

“The *ahegao* you draw is the best ever, ■■-sensei!”

“What’s this one?” I asked.

“Perhaps this is a misprint for *asagao* (morning glory)? It is probably a manga about flowers. When I was in elementary school, I had to keep a diary about the growth of a flower.”

“Animals, child-rearing, cooking, flowers... All of these topics are things that women would enjoy!” I said.

“Yes! I wish we could read the actual manga and not just the readers’ corner,” replied Yuzu-san.

The next day, while Yuzu-san and I were cleaning the underground library, we actually found a copy of *Comic Prisoner!* Based on what we had read in the readers’ corner, we figured that it was a manga magazine for women, which would make it perfect for Yuzu-san and me to read together.

We looked at each other and smiled while we flipped open the magazine...

Chapter 5 - Bellybutton

“I need to apologize to you, Nii-sama,” said Amaneko-san apologetically as we ascended an elevator together. We were in a high-rise apartment building in the Tokyo Bay area.

After the previous events, we had gone to a meeting with Takahashi-san at the Future Creation Company in OCHANOMIZU, TOKYO.

“Takahashi-san, let me quiz you. What is ‘㐍’?” I had asked.

“...Okay, okay... Here’s my answer. A dragonfly?” Takahashi-san had said.

“Sorry, that’s wrong-nodesu. The answer is it’s the post-office symbol, right, Nii-sama?” Amaneko-chan had corrected.

“Yup. I can’t believe you didn’t know what that meant, Takahashi-san. You clearly haven’t studied enough,” I had chided.

“...I know you guys are doing this on purpose, aren’t you...?” he had muttered.

I had figured that after the meeting I’d call it a day, but as we’d been leaving, Amaneko-chan had told me, “As for the book, I think we should have another meeting.”

She’d said that she wanted to meet together with another person from the New Word Order.

Well, that’s how things went, but we’re in an apartment building now...

“I’m sorry...” Amaneko-chan repeated, bowing her head. We were in a room with a modern interior. “There isn’t actually another person-nodesu.”

“Huh?” I asked. “Then, it’s just you and me, Amaneko-chan?”

“Yes. I just wanted to talk together with you, alone...”

“I see...” I said. “What about the person who lives here?”

“I asked them if I could borrow the room for today.”

She went on to say it was an older woman who she knew from the New Word Order. When Amaneko-chan had explained the situation to the woman, she had replied with something like, “Ah, I see... Go for it!” and let Amaneko-chan use the room.

Go for what? I wondered. Amaneko-chan did seem a little nervous...

“N-Nii-sama. Since we’re so high up, why don’t we take a look out the window at the view?” she asked.

“Oh, sure.”

We were on a pretty high-up floor, so there was a great view. Looking over the sunny summer scenery, I could see a tower poking up out of the sea of tall buildings. It was shaped like a tall tube, and looked like a giant smokestack.

Isn’t that...? It was the tower that had been built in between the Special Cultural District and Outer Japan — the “Tower of Culture.” It was said to have been built as a symbol of friendship between the Special Cultural District and Outer Japan.

The outside of the tower had illustrations on it. The lowest levels of the towers were from ancient Japan — illustrations of flint tools from the Stone Age. The middle levels had illustrations of samurai from the Kamakura and Muromachi Eras. As you went higher, there were images from the Showa and Heisei Era, like *Gundam*, *Godzilla*, *Ultraman*, *Kamen Rider*, *Doraemon*, *Pikachu*, tentacles...

Near the top of the tower the outer walls showed current-day Japan — a beautiful girl showing a peace sign and flashing her panties.

As you went higher and higher on the tower, the era that was depicted advanced farther and farther into the future.

“This is the first time I’ve ever seen the Tower of Culture. It’s kind of a strange tower, don’t you think?” I asked.

“That’s right,” she said. “In order to draw more illustrations on the tower, every ten years they increase the height-nodesu.”

“Interesting.”

“Since I live in the Special Cultural District, I can see it all the time, so I don’t find it particularly special-nodesu,” she said.

The tower had been built in the middle of a large bridge called the “ARIAKE BRIDGE,” which was the one and only way to get to and from the Special Cultural District. On one side of the bridge, there was a city surrounded by a high wall. It would be an exaggeration to call it an iron curtain, but the city was most definitely isolated from the outside world. I wasn’t able to see clearly into the city from where we were, but I could see the old-fashioned buildings stand out.

“That’s the Special Cultural District, isn’t it?” I asked.

“I hate that tower and the Special Cultural District,” said Amaneko-chan, her expression clouding.

As I was fretting about whether or not to say something, Amaneko-chan lightened the mood by adding, “But who cares about all that-nodesu!”

Her expression can change in a second!

“So, Nii-sama... would you like something to eat first?” she asked. “Or will you take a bath?”

“Huh? Are you sure we can spend that much time here? I thought your house had a strict curfew?”

“Don’t worry!” she declared. “I told them I was staying the night at a friend’s place-nodesu!”

“Oh, you did? They’re pretty accommodating, I guess,” I said, a bit disappointed that the image I’d had of her being the rebellious daughter constantly at odds with her upbringing wasn’t exactly true.

“U-Um...” stuttered Amaneko-chan, her face suddenly flushed red. “Is this the situation where I’m supposed to offer a third option, ‘Or how about me?’”

She was clearly nervous, stuttering and slurring her words. Because of that, I wasn’t sure what exactly she meant.

“So, I can choose whichever one I want?” I said.

“W-Whatever is to your liking...” she replied.

“...I don’t mean to be rude, but... is going home not an option?” I asked, as the image of Kuroha on the verge of tears earlier came to mind. I had cut her off earlier, but it was still bothering me.

“Nii-sama, please!” Amaneko-chan exclaimed. “Stay with me here through the night! I want to spend as much of the little time I can together as brother and sister-nodesu...” Amaneko-chan made her best pleading face.

...Amaneko-chan, those cute little eyebrows of yours are against the rules. You’re making me want to say yes to you...

I took out my cellphone and started to type a message.

“Are you contacting someone-nodesu?” asked Amaneko-chan.

“My parents. I need to tell them I’m staying the night and not to make me dinner.”

I was worried about Kuroha. But I was sure that she was busy with her translating job, and I wanted her to forget about me for now and focus on her work.

“Yippee-nodesu!” cried Amaneko-chan, bouncing up and down in glee.

We spent the time talking about novels. Amaneko-chan told me that she would be happy to give her opinions on as many of my stories as I’d like.

Then we started to talk about my symbol writing.

“Your smile gives me about this much power, Nii-sama! — ‘∞’!”

“You’re embarrassing me...” I said. “Well, your cuteness level is about this much, Amaneko-chan! — ‘∞’!”

“I-I’m so happy-nodesu...”

“Do you get it?” I asked. “You see, the eight fell over, so it’s not a full 8 anymore. It’s about a 7.5 (out of 8),” I explained.

“Right! 7.5 points!” she exclaimed. “I kind of get the sense that you just said

something really cruel, but it's probably just my imagination-nodesu! Rather what you're trying to say is that I'm like your '7-5,' heaven-wife! I make you calm and safe, Nii-sama..."

We had a lot of fun.

There had never been anyone who could understand my writing as well as Amaneko-chan. She and I would carve open the future with my novels. It was a story of such a huge scale that I couldn't really grasp it, but it was the one thing my cute little sister was striving so hard for, so it was probably worth pursuing.

That was what I thought at the time.

The fun time we spent together flew by in a second, and it was now the middle of the night.

"Nii-sama, everything is ready," she said shyly.

"Oh, okay."

Amaneko-chan, wearing pink pajamas, beckoned from beyond the doorway to the bedroom. I had changed into blue pajamas myself, and was all ready to go to sleep.

After our talk earlier, Amaneko-chan had made dinner, we'd chatted, watched TV, and each took a bath. By the time I looked at the clock, it had already become the next day.

"I guess it's time to go to bed..." I said.

"R-Right!"

Strangely, Amaneko-chan had reacted to my comment with shock, almost like a convulsion. At the time I thought it was quite an overreaction...

As I entered the bedroom I couldn't believe my eyes. *There's only one bed!*

In the center of the dimly lit bedroom was a single semi-double bed. It was designed for two people, so there was plenty of space for Amaneko-chan and me to sleep together in it, but...

"A-Amaneko-chan, are you sure...?" I began.

I looked over and saw Amaneko-chan in the corner of the bed room doing some kind of exercise.

“Suu, haa, suu, haa,” she breathed in, then out, then in, then out... “Just doing warm-up exercises-nodesu.”

“Is there some tradition of doing exercises before going to sleep in the Special Cultural District?” I asked.

“N-No... Just warming up before getting some *real* exercise-nodesu.”

???

I don't understand. Well, whatever. I turned around and started to head back to the living room.

“W-Wait!” cried Amaneko-chan, grabbing my hand with both of hers. “P-Please... L-Let's... sleep together.”

Ugh... There she goes with those pleading eyebrows of hers...

But I can't give in to them this time.

“It's one thing to sleep in the same room, but sleeping in the same bed isn't a good idea,” I said.

“B-But, why? Aren't we brother and sister?”

“In my family, it's not allowed for siblings to sleep in the same room together after elementary school. And in the same bed is completely out of the question.”

“Nii-sama, you're such a gentleman-nodesu. Even though it's a given in the orthodox literature you love so much for a brother and sister to be all lovey-dovey, when it comes to real life, you're so delicate... How wonderful! I-I think I'm...” spouted Amaneko-chan, ending in a exhalation of sheer bliss, and falling to the ground.

“H-Hey, you okay?” I asked.

“I-It's no good-nodesu. Can you carry me to the bed in your armsh?”

I nodded and picked her up in a princess carry.

“Ah...” Amaneko-chan let out another blissful sigh.

I laid Amaneko-chan down on the bed and pulled the covers over her. I was about to leave her when she pulled on the sleeve of my pajamas.

“N-Nii-sama... Come here...” she said, one hand grabbing onto my pajamas while her other hand lifted up a corner of the covers. The gap opened up in the covers looked like the maw of some threatening beast to me.

“I’m not gonna lose!” I said, spreading out my arms wide like the mouth of a snake.

“Nii-sama, what’re you doing?”

“I made a snake.”

“Um, snakes hibernate-nodesu. Now, come to me...”

“Ha ha ha, I won’t be fooled by your tricks.”

“There’s a book of orthodox literature called *BE LIKE SNAKE, HIBERNATE WARM*, you know,” she said. “If you hibernate, you can have a literary experience-nodesu.”

“Okay, I’m coming in,” I said, hurrying into the space next to Amaneko-chan.

Has it been about an hour since I got into the bed?

At first we had talked a lot, but slowly our conversation had trailed off. As I stared absentmindedly at the ceiling of the quiet bedroom, I suddenly felt very sleepy. I closed my eyes, and let sleep overtake me—

And then—

“Nii-sama, are you still awake?” Amaneko-chan called to me in a whisper. “It’s a mystery-nodesu.”

“What is?”

“Nii-sama... You were just trying to go to sleep, yes?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s a mystery that you would try to go to sleep-nodesu.”

“It is?”

“Yes.”

I could hear the rustling of clothes. Amaneko-chan was moving closer to me, and I could feel the warmth of her body.

“You’re all alone with your little sister you know, Nii-sama...” said Amaneko-chan, her voice low and more adult-like than usual. “Why... Why...”

She pressed ever closer.

“Why don’t you ask about Mom and Dad?”

Ah, that...

“Are you trying to be considerate and not darken the mood?” she whispered. “But you must want to ask about them so badly... How gentlemanly can you be-nodesu...”

Looking at Amaneko-chan’s face, I saw that she was so filled with emotion that she had tears in her eyes.

“*sniff* But I think I need to tell you-nodesu,” she added.

“Yeah... If you don’t mind, I’d like to hear. Tell me about what happened to my birth Mom and Dad,” I said.

“Hokay...”

It had gone pretty much as the professor and Odaira-sensei had predicted back in the professor’s lab. My father had been a doctor in Outer Japan. He had worked at a clinic, but right after my birth, there had been some scandal, and he’d lost his medical license. The clinic had shut down, and my father and his family had been thrown out onto the streets because of all the debts he owed. My parents had wished that I, at least, could be raised in a proper household, and had given me up for adoption.

Before we had corrected history, that would have been the end of the line for my parents. However, as a result of how we had changed history, their fate had changed dramatically.

It seems like my father had said, “At the very least, I want to see a real shrine maiden with my own eyes before I go,” and had taken my mother with him to the Special Cultural District. They had intended to end it all there.

But when my parents had been looking at the shrine maidens in the shrine, an elderly man had collapsed nearby, and my father had rescued him without hesitation. That old man had been the person who would soon become Amaneko-chan's grandfather, and who was someone with great power in the Special Cultural District. He also was quite wealthy, it seemed.

Amaneko-chan's grandfather had a chronic illness, and she said that he employed my father as a specialist with knowledge of medicine from Outer Japan. He had taken a liking to my father and adopted him as his son.

After that, my father and mother had given birth to Amaneko-chan in the Special Cultural District. The reason that they had never contacted me was that they had not been given permission to do so by Amaneko-chan's grandfather — it was not that they had forgotten about me.

My heart warmed just a little bit.

But Amaneko-chan was angry at our parents for obeying her grandfather, calling them "pitiful" and "cold-blooded." It seems like the orders of her grandfather were absolute and could not be disobeyed...

"I begged Grandfather to let me be able to see you hundreds of times-nodesu," she said. "But he is so stubborn, and he always told me no. Do you know why?"

"No, why?" I asked.

"Because you are a 2.5D kid-nodesu..."

Ah, so that's it.

"I can't understand his thinking-nodesu," she said furiously. "After all, we have the same mom and dad, you know-nodesu?"

"That's true, but in my case I was artificially inseminated, so we're different," I said.

"What's different about us?! Grandfather says, '2.5D kids are an affront to my morals,' and he uses that as his only reason for not acknowledging you-nodesu. He's trapped by his old-fashioned ethics-nodesu! He's just prejudiced-nodesu!"

Old-fashioned ethics... Prejudiced...

“We’re siblings! There’s nothing different about us!” cried Amaneko-chan, not really speaking to me, but yelling out to her grandfather.

I felt like her grandfather’s reaction was only to be expected. Even Yuzu-san, who was from the 21st century, hadn’t been able to come to grips with 2.5D kids, so anyone who wasn’t in touch with the current-day morals would have a hard time accepting it.

“I think that my grandfather is a victim as well, sometimes-nodesu,” Amaneko-chan added.

“A victim?” I asked.

“Since he was born in, and has always lived in, such an old-fashioned place as the Special Cultural District, it’s only natural that his morals would get warped-nodesu.”

“His morals are warped?” I asked. “That’s quite a harsh way of putting it...”

“But it’s true! He even hopes to resurrect kanji in Outer Japan, and is super picky about traditions and history-nodesu. He says that all that stuff is really wonderful-nodesu. But if you ask me, I think that’s exactly why he’s gone so screwy,” said Amaneko-chan, who was off to the races. “History, traditions... all that stuff just gets in the way. We should be heading toward the future-nodesu.”

“...So that’s why you want to make new words and new culture?” I asked.

“Yes! It might be too late for my grandfather, but for us young people, the future is ours to make!”

Just how much does Amaneko-chan hate the Special Cultural District’s traditions, I wonder? Her rebellion against her grandfather is clearly no laughing matter.

It wasn’t as if I didn’t understand what she was saying. It’s quite common for the environment one is raised in to have an effect on one’s personality. For example if you have a real-life older sister who you don’t get along with, that can cause you to go to the little sister-side, or the other way around.

Even so, I couldn’t help but feel like something was off. The more that I heard

her impassioned speech, the stronger this uneasy feeling grew.

Amaneko-chan finally went silent.

She must have tired herself out with all that talking...

I had asked her what I wanted to ask, so I felt like we could continue this conversation tomorrow. I told Amaneko-chan, “Good night,” and closed my eyes, intending to go to sleep for real this time.

But then...

Amaneko-chan grabbed onto my body.

“Huh? Huh? What?” I yelped.

What the heck? What’s going on? She’d sucker-punched me, and I’d been completely caught off guard. Amaneko-chan was hugging my upper body tightly to hers.

Our chests were brushing up against each other, and I could feel her gentle mounds... A strange feeling was...

“U-Um, Amaneko-chan?” I stuttered. “What are you doing? Please, calm down...”

“I cannot-nodesu! Ever since I met you, my feelings have exploded-nodesu! I tried to keep them down, but it seems like they’ve begun to overflow-nodesu!”

I was taken aback. I could tell from her words, but even her tone of voice was tinged with a certain lewdness.

“Stop them from overflowing?” I asked. “Stop what, exactly?”

“Th-There are shree...” she said, slurring her words again, but she was beyond caring about that anymore, it seemed. She stuck out three fingers in my face. “The first is my feelings of rebellion against my grandfather. The second is my curiosity for Outer Japan,” she added, bending two of her fingers down.

And what’s the last one?

“The third is the feelings I have toward my long-lost brother,” she finished, her watery eyes visible behind her stiffly extended finger.

I gulped.

“I’m completely t-this right now-nodesu...” she said, lowering a finger to my chest. She traced the words:

♀≡←

“‘A maiden shot straight in the heart’...” I murmured.

“I knew you’d understand, Nii-sama...”

I was the one being written on, but it was the first time in a long time that I had played “write-on-the-body.”

“Then Nii-sama, what’s this?” she asked, tracing out another word.

✱

“...A bellybutton?” I asked.

“Close-nodesu. It’s not just any bellybutton, it’s ‘My sexy Nii-sama’s belly button,’” said Amaneko-chan, laughing a little. “I caught a glimpse of it when you were getting out of the bath-nodesu. It was music to my eyes-nodesu.”

“I-I see...”

“Hey, Nii-sama,” said Amaneko-chan in a sultry voice, getting ever closer to me.

“Wh-What?”

“There’s something that my grandfather’s old-fashioned ethics would never, ever accept-nodesu. I want to rebel against his sense of morals-nodesu. It would be the greatest revenge I could take on him for not allowing me to meet you-nodesu...”

Rebel against his morals... Does she mean...?

“Like... putting a plastic bottle into the burnable trash bin?” I asked.

“Yes, that is definitely a big no-no... Wait, are you cracking jokes like that on purpose to try and calm my nerves? You’re so kind...” she said, but then shook her head. “But that’s not it-nodesu.”

Then, what is she trying to tell me?

“Wh-What I want to do is... is...” Amaneko-chan paused for a second, building

up her strength, closing her eyes tightly, and then said a single word, “...inshest.”

My mouth made a “Huh?” shape, and I froze.

I-I-Incest...?

In other words you want to... have those kind of... relations... with me...?
Considering the situation we were in, her saying something like that meant...

“I won’t get another chance to stay together alone with you like this very easily, Nii-sama. So...” Amaneko-chan snuggled ever more closely to me, our lips almost touching.

“W-Wait, Amaneko-chan. W-We’re related by blood, remember?” I stammered.

“Yes, and so what? I see you as a man. Will you look at me as a woman?”

“Uh...”

I definitely can see you as a woman...

After all, even though she was my *jitsumai*, we hadn’t lived together. I didn’t have any sense of her as a part of my daily life or family. And Amaneko-chan hadn’t even existed before we had corrected history, so it was hard for me to accept her even as my *jitsumai*.

“In fact, I think it’s even better than we’re real brother and sister-nodesu,” she added huskily. “No matter how much we love each other, we can never get married. If something happens between us, people will start talking about us in whispers-nodesu. When I think about that, I get this strange tingly feeling around my back and hips that just won’t go away, and I love it-nodesu!”

Sorry, but I have no idea what you’re talking about!

“With you, Nii-sama, I can throw cold water all over those old-fashioned ethics of my grandfather-nodesu. Any other man won’t do-nodesu,” cried Amaneko-chan, her words getting more and more passionate.

Pour cold water all over his old ethics, huh?

I went silent. I realized that my confused mind had finally become clear. After

all — I felt like I had just had cold water poured over my heart, too.

“Amaneko-chan, look...” I started, my voice a little cold. Amaneko-chan must have noticed, as I could tell she was a little hesitant. “In that case, it doesn’t have to be me, does it?”

“What are you saying-nodesu?” she protested. “I only have one brother in the world-nodesu.”

“Yeah, but it doesn’t matter whether or not it’s me personally, Gin Imose,” I said coldly. “As long as I’m your ‘real brother,’ that’s good enough, right?”

“B-But...” Amaneko-chan’s doting eyes opened wide.

“So I’m just a tool for you to rebel against your grandfather, am I? And creating new words, is that also just you rebelling? You want to use *my* novels for that?” My words became sharp. “...It makes me sad...”

Amaneko-chan’s lips quivered, and I could see more and more tears welling up in her eyes.

“Th-That’s not it! I’m telling you, it’s not that-nodesu!”

“And yet...”

“Nii-sama!” cried Amaneko-chan, embracing me tightly. “Please believe me. The biggest reason I’ve fallen for you is your amazing genius-nodesu! When I read your novels, I felt the presence of God-nodesu!”

I said nothing.

“I would never fall in love with someone just because I wanted to rebel against Grandfather-nodesu. Please, believe me, Nii-sama!”

I said nothing.

“I won’t speak of it again!” she cried. “I won’t talk about his morals or ethics again, I promise! So just, please... please, don’t hate me...!” Big drops of tears were streaming down Amaneko-chan’s cheeks.

“I understand. For now, let’s just forget we had this conversation, okay?” I said, gently touching my hand to her face.

“Hokay...” nodded Amaneko-chan, wiping away her tears with the sleeve of

her pajamas.

But.

“But... But... After all the trouble I went through, not coming away with anything is hard to take... So, at the very least — Nii-sama, what’s that over there?!” Amaneko-chan suddenly pointed off to the side.

I took the bait and looked to the side, but nothing was there. Just as I was thinking something was odd about this, I could feel the cold air against my stomach. And then, shortly after...

Smooch.

Uwa! Wh-Wh-What?! What is this soft feeling against my stomach?!

I looked down, and saw that Amaneko-chan had flipped up my pajamas and had kissed my bellybutton.

“W-What are doing?!”

“Hee hee hee... I got your bellybutton, Nii-sama. And I’ll get the rest sooner or later-nodesu,” she said, grinning.



“I’m only doing this because it’s you, Nii-sama. I hate being touched by any other guys-nodesu,” she added.

She sure doesn’t give up, I thought from the bottom of my heart.

The next morning, I was sitting on the couch in the living room, spacing out a bit. When I had left the bedroom earlier, I had seen Amaneko-chan soundly asleep, her pajamas slipping off a bit.

Hmm, what should I do? Oh, that’s right, I should check my phone.

I hadn’t realized that I had had it on silent ever since the day before, so someone might have tried to contact me.

I took out my cellphone, and... *Huh? Something’s flashing. It looks like someone is calling right now.*

The display showed the name... It was Miru.

“Hello?” I asked.

“That you, Nii?” a voice snapped.

It was Miru, and she was clearly not in a good mood. Miru didn’t usually show this much emotion.

“Yeah...” I replied.

“Where are you?”

“Where? Um, TOKYO...”

“So you’re with the weirdo girl?”

“Yeah, we’re together.”

“I see. Listen carefully, Nii,” said Miru, her voice sounding more serious than usual. “—Nee’s dead.”

...Eh?

I nearly dropped my cellphone. *Kuroha is... dead?! That can’t be true!*

“She’s gone totally dead inside,” continued Miru.

“...?”

“She’s been moping around, not eating or doing anything since last night.”

O-Oh... So she’s okay, then. Phew... I breathed a sigh of relief. But wait, she isn’t eating? Why not?

“Nee wrote a note and I kind of ‘borrowed’ it,” Miru added.

I hesitated, but Miru began to read the note to me over the phone.

Onii-chan has been taken from me.

I’m a fool.

I know exactly why this happened.

I should’ve realized it sooner myself.

I should’ve acted on it sooner myself.

I was too complacent.

Onii-chan has been taken from me!

In the back of my mind, the image of Kuroha crouched over holding her knees to her chest appeared. This imaginary Kuroha was muttering, “Onii-chan” to herself.

I had no idea that Kuroha worried this much about me.

What must she be feeling, I wonder? I didn’t understand what was in her heart. All I knew was...

I caused trouble for her again, didn’t I?

“I called you, but you ignored me,” Miru accused.

It seemed Miru had called numerous times the previous night, but because I had set my phone to silent mode, I hadn’t noticed.

“What did you do?” she demanded.

“I talked with Amaneko-chan about novels, we ate dinner, then we watched TV...”

“.....You made Nee so worried and that’s *all*? The hell.”

“Huh?” I asked.

“I hate that weirdo girl, but you’re also really pissing me off,” said Miru with a quiet, seething anger. “I have an idea.”

“An idea?” I asked.

She didn’t respond to my question, and probably moved away from the phone as I heard her voice from a distance say, “...Geezer, get on the line.”

“Hey, Gin-kun, it’s me.”

“Odaira-sensei?!” I gasped. “You’re there together with Miru?”

“Yes. Miru actually invited *me* over for once. I completely cleared my schedule and ran right over.”

I was pretty sure this would have been the first time Miru had ever contacted Odaira-sensei. *Did something happen...?*

“I did a little work, you see,” explained Odaira-sensei. “And I have a message about that that Miru-chan told me to give you.”

“A message?” I asked.

“Ah, well, it’s nothing particularly important exactly...”

What is it? I wondered.

Odaira-sensei delivered his message as if it were something as insignificant as, “The main ingredient of the miso soup is panties.”

“I’ve prevented your book from being published, Gin-kun.”

...

...Eh?

I wasn’t able to grasp the situation.

“Perhaps I should repeat myself,” he said. “Your book is now non-publishable. I have used my influence to pressure the ‘Future Creation Company.’”

I was speechless. It would be trivial for someone with Odaira-sensei’s clout to prevent someone like me from debuting as an author. But there was no reason for him to do something like that...

“You might not believe me, but it’s true,” said Odaira-sensei. “*Jitsumai-kun* over there should be getting the word shortly.”

Even Amaneko-chan?

When I looked over to the bedroom where she had been sleeping before, she had just gotten up and was walking towards me.

“...Nii-sama...” Amaneko-chan had a cellphone dangling in her right hand, and her face was blank with astonishment. “I just got a call from President Takahashi at the Future Creation Company... They said they’re not going to put out your book... They said there was pressure on them...”

I recalled what Miru had just said a moment before: “I have an idea.”

...This was her idea?!

“...Sensei, I respect you from the bottom of my heart,” I fumbled. “But putting that aside for the moment, I can’t believe that you would pressure them just because Miru asked you to! That’s entirely too cruel!”

“Easy for you to say, but... you know I can’t say no to her, right? It’s like a reflex action for me. If she asks me for something, right then and there, that request is my life’s work,” said Odaira-sensei, with not even a hint of exaggeration.

“Sensei, Amaneko-chan looks like she’s about to cry. Don’t do it for me, do it for Amaneko-chan! Please, back off the pressure!” I pleaded.

“*Jitsumai-kun* is a second year in middle school, right?” he asked. “Sorry, but adult women are out of my range.”

This 70-year-old man is calling a second-year in middle school a grown woman! He is truly Gai Odaira, the pinnacle of literature!

...Wait, this is no time to be impressed!

“On the other hand, I have my own thoughts on the matter,” he added.

“Sensei, don’t you think this is going too far?” I begged, almost in tears.

“Gin-kun, stop such whining this instant,” he ordered.



“But...”

As reality continued to set in, Odaira-sensei’s tone got a little lighter.

“Hmph. In that case, work it out with the people involved,” he suggested.

“...Work it out?”

“Kuroha-kun and Miru-chan both have been your little sisters for over ten years,” he said. “Do you actually think being snatched away by some new girl who suddenly appeared had nothing to do with this?”

“Enough about my little sisters right now,” I said. “The problem here is getting my book published.”

“You might think that way, but that’s not the way your little sisters are thinking,” he told me. “The emotions of young girls are quite the tug of war, after all. I understand this very well when I look at my own little sisters...”

“But...”

“But nothing,” he said sternly. “First things first, let’s choose a location to have everyone meet face-to-face.”

“You mean Kuroha and Miru, too?” I asked.

“Yes.”

So Kuroha will also come? I’d been worried about her ever since Miru had said she was “dead inside.” Is she okay?

I decided to follow Odaira-sensei’s advice and have everyone meet up together.

I put the cellphone down and asked Amaneko-chan for her opinion. “Amaneko-chan, we’re going to meet together with Sensei and the others. Is there a place around here that would be good for that? I think someplace that’s easy to find and stands out would be good...”

“If you want a place that stands out, then that would be it-nodesu...” she said, pointing out the window.

She was pointing at the embodiment of Japanese culture through the ages that was thrusting up to the heavens, the “Tower of Culture.”

One day in the 23rd century. Kuroha's room.

"Kuroha, Yuzu-san! On Odaira-sensei's radio program today, Miru and Haruka Haruka-sensei are special guests!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, my... it seems like Miru-chan might become a regular guest," said Yuzu-san.

"I hope she isn't influenced too much by those two *hentas*," added Kuroha.

Special Episode: *Guy Odaira Hour*: Original Broadcast July 22nd, 2202.

Guests: Haruka Haruka (Author), Miru Imose (Elementary Schoolers/Illustrator)

"Letters from the Listeners, Segment #2"

From Listener A: "I'm 17 years old, in my second year in high school, and hope to become an author one day. I have two younger sisters: the older one has long, black hair, and the younger one wears a beret with cat-ears. I actually am an acquaintance of Odaira-sensei's. Can you please give me some advice?"

Miru: "Marry Miru."

Odaira: "Miru-chan, get married to me."

Haruka: "I don't understand at all. The true final happiness of little sisters is not marriage, but within your own heart."

Miru: "Who asked for *your* opinion?"

From Listener B: "I am able to read kanji. Don't you think that the kanji for older sister, 姉, looks a lot like the kanji for persimmon, 柿?"

Odaira: "I guess they do look similar..."

Haruka: "Neither this question nor its answer interest me in the slightest."

Miru: "Clearly."

From Listener C: "In Japanese class the other day, we learned the classic vocabulary word '*chippai*.' It seems that originally this meant 'small breasts,' but then the meaning seems to have shifted to 'smaller things are better.' What

I don't understand is why 'small breasts' ended up meaning 'better'? Isn't it normal for people to prefer big breasts?"

Odaira: "Oh my, what a vexing question this is! I suppose I must answer it seriously. As an example, Japanese technology has had a history of miniaturization and weight reduction. When it comes to electronic appliances, we Japanese have made everything as compact as possible, no? That is because for hundreds of years, we have valued from our very cores the small and economical."

Haruka: "Japan's land mass has never been large, you see. This small country is reflected within the minds of its citizens, yes? '*Chippai*' is a word born from our climate."

Odaira: "I want to lick *chippai*."

Haruka: "And chivalry such as that is also a blessing of our climate."

Miru: "Maybe climate change isn't such a bad thing."

Chapter 6 - Tower of Culture

The Tower of Culture was a free attraction, and people could enter it without paying. There was an open space at the top, which was where Odaira-sensei wanted us to meet. It seemed he was curious to check out the tower for sightseeing, as well.

While riding the elevator up inside the tower, Amaneko-chan looked tense. She must have viewed Odaira-sensei, as well as Kuroha and Miru, as enemies. To her we were like a hero and heroine diving straight into the heart of enemy territory.

I was filled with conflicted emotions. Although things had come to this state, I really didn't want to quarrel with Odaira-sensei or my little sisters. I hoped that there was some way for everyone to come to a mutual agreement that everyone was satisfied with...

"Nii-sama... I won't lose."

"...Yeah," I replied with a nod as the elevator arrived on the top floor. The doors opened with a **ding**.

I had heard that the Tower of Culture was a tourist attraction, but what greeted my eyes was a bleak view. There was nothing here, just a fence to prevent people from falling off.

There was a strong wind blowing, rustling my hair. I scanned around, looking for the others.

There they are.

Everyone was there in the center of the open space. There was Odaira-sensei, in the form of a girl, Kuroha, Miru, Yuzu-san, and for some reason I could see Professor Choumabayashi there as well. They noticed us and headed our way.

I looked at each one of them in turn. Odaira-sensei was the same as always, the professor was waving both hands nonchalantly, Miru was expressionless, and Yuzu-san had a smile on her face, but for some reason she didn't seem her

usual energetic self.

And then there was Kuroha...

As the wind whipped her black hair, she had her mouth tightly closed. It wasn't like she was angry exactly... Her face was stiff like a mask.

I had been quite worried after what Miru had said, but she looked more normal than I had expected. *That's a relief.*

Before I had a chance to call out to Kuroha, Odaira-sensei spoke up.

"So you must be Amaneko-kun, yes? How do you do? I am Gai Odaira," he said to her, walking straight up in front of us.

Amaneko-chan didn't say anything, and instead grabbed onto my arm in shock.

"Now, now... it doesn't look like you think too fondly on me," said Odaira-sensei. "In that case, let us cut straight to the chase. Gin-kun, do you have something you want to say?"

"Of course I do. Please stop pressuring the publisher," I said.

"Telling me that isn't going to get you anywhere. Try telling that to Miru-chan."

I switched my gaze to Miru, who was silently glaring at me. "Miru, I doubt you think this is funny, but it's far too cruel. I'll buy you some marshmallows, so make him stop this."

"No way," she answered curtly. "Now, I have a question for you, Nii."

"What is it?"

"Did you and the weirdo do it?"

What's with that question? The answer is obvious.

"Yes, we did," I replied matter-of-factly.

Kuroha and Yuzu-san both looked flabbergasted and Miru made a sullen expression. Amaneko-chan next to me also looked taken aback. FYI, the professor and Odaira-sensei both went, "Ooh..." and seemed highly curious.

“We did the meeting, yes,” I added.

Huh? Why does it look like everyone just deflated?

“Let me rephrase. Did you get down-and-dirty?” Miru continued.

“Down-and... what? I don’t mean to be rude, but I don’t know what you mean.”

“I’m asking if you’re still *clean*, Nii,” she clarified.

“I took a bath last night, sure. By myself.”

Miru said, “Looks like he’s just as pure as ever...” seemingly satisfied about something, and went silent again.

But this time, it was Yuzu-san who yelled out something she couldn’t keep quiet about any longer. “Is it true that you ran away from home?!”

“What?!” I exclaimed. *What story did she hear?!*

“Gin-san, are you okay?! Did she take anything from you?!” she added, worried.

“Take something from me? Amaneko-chan wouldn’t take anything from me... Right, Amaneko-chan?”

“Actually, I got his bellybutton-nodesu,” said Amaneko-chan, facing Yuzu-san and puffing out her chest with pride.

“Oh, my... stealing his bellybutton?” Yuzu-san asked. “That’s like Mr. Lightning. My brother loved Mr. Lightning.”

“Mr. Lightning? What is that?” asked Amaneko-chan.

“It’s a game we played.”

“A game?”

“When my brother would insist, I would tie him up, dunk him into the bathtub, and electrify the water. While he was getting all sparky, he would quiz me: ‘You have electric shocks and electric leaks, so what do you have when you leak due to a shock?’ And when I couldn’t answer, he’d say, ‘Me, right about now,’ with a very cold expression and crash out.”

“Whoa... That’s heartwarming, if not somewhat overly stimulating,” I replied.

“Gin-san, have you crashed?” asked Yuzu-san.

“Um... Amaneko-chan, what do you think?” I asked.

“You didn’t allow yourself to fall-nodesu,” she said. “But I’ll take you down as soon as I can-nodesu.”

“You heard her!” I told Yuzu-san.

“Oh, my... I can’t allow that to happen. The first one to bring him down will be me,” said Yuzu-san, placing her feet apart in a firm stance, and twisting her arms in a gesture like she was tying up a rope.

A dry wind whipped across me.

“Nii-sama... Miss Boobs here is a little...” cautioned Amaneko-chan.

“Ahaha! Looks like *Jitsumai*-chan’s been overwhelmed by Yuzu-cchi’s character-noda!” laughed the professor, like she didn’t have a care in the world.

Must be nice not having a stake in the issue this time and being able to have fun like her.

“Nii-sama, we don’t have time to do these little comedy bits-nodesu,” said Amaneko-chan.

“I don’t know what’s so comedic about them, but you’re right that we’ve gotten off track,” I said. “Miru, please. Stop pressuring the publisher.”

Miru looked up beside her to Kuroha and asked, “Nee, what should we do?”

As I was talking with everyone, I noticed something. Kuroha had been looking at me the entire time. At first glance she looked like she usually did — but the usual sparkle in her eyes was gone. She looked at me with a stare somehow lonely, cold, and empty, despite it being summertime.

When I looked back at Kuroha, she kind of half-closed her eyes, sighed, and said, “Enough, Miru. Onii-chan isn’t our personal object. He has his own goals. Right now, we’re causing him harm and pain. I... don’t want that.”

“...But aren’t you hurting?” Miru asked.

Kuroha bit her lips strongly.

“Well, I’m hurting,” Miru declared. “I noticed how amazing Nii was myself. But Miss Weirdo here took him away.”

“.....Miru, if you don’t act on what’s in your heart, in the end, it’ll end up no different than if you didn’t feel it in the first place,” replied Kuroha, shaking her head no sadly. “It pains me to say it, but I have to admire her ability to act. She gave him an opportunity to debut his novel just like it was nothing, and we didn’t do anything. In the end, we weren’t there for him.” Kuroha was acting completely pitifully.

“Kuroha, what are you saying?” I asked. “Not there for me? You and Miru have always, always been there for me.”

“Sensei, Miru and I have a request,” said Kuroha to Odaira-sensei, turning her face away from me like a rejection. “Please stop putting pressure on the publisher. Allow Onii-chan’s book to be published.”

Ah, I see.

Maybe this is what Kuroha is thinking: “—Please, don’t bother me any more.”

I was left without anything to say.

Odaira-sensei nodded in agreement, saying a noncommittal, “Well, I suppose I could, if it’s what you want...” and took out his cellphone, probably to contact people in the industry to call off his pressure.

“Nii-sama, it looks like that’s that!” said a grinning Amaneko-chan. “I was prepared for a tougher battle, but I’m glad that everything got settled so easily-nodesu!” She stuck up one hand while still grabbing onto my arm with the other. “Victory goes to the *real* little sister-nodesu!”

Kuroha glared at Amaneko-chan for just a moment, but quickly turned away.

You’re just going to let that go?

Kuroha was clearly not acting like her usual self. It was worrying to me, but the problem had already been resolved.

I’d rather not say it was a piece of cake, but...

When we'd first met up with Odaira-sensei and the others, the atmosphere had been really charged, but after we finished talking, things got quite a bit more relaxed. It was all thanks to the professor.

Amaneko-chan was wary of everyone except for the professor, who she seemed to look at as a peer, and they quickly broke the ice with one another. The two of them were now sitting on a bench talking about Mr. Bedhead.

"My brother actually moved to the Special Cultural District-noda! He's such an eccentric-noda!" the professor exclaimed.

"Someone from Outer Japan moving to the Special Cultural District?" Amaneko-chan cried. "What a shame-nodesu!"

The professor was in high school, but she looked so young, it was impossible to see anything other than two middle schoolers chatting at each other. Odaira-sensei, Miru, and Yuzu-san had gone back down the elevator to look around inside the tower.

Kuroha was... looking down at TOKYO through the fence. The others had invited her to go down into the tower with them, but she'd turned them down.

I sighed... Why does she have such a dejected look on her face?

Nope. I can't just sit here when I see her like this and do nothing.

I stiffened my courage, and went over to stand next to her.

Kuroha's shoulders quivered for just an instant, but she didn't move to look at me.

"Is this the first time we've been to a tall lookout since that time in elementary school when we went with our parents to 'TOKYO TOWER NEXIA'?" I asked.

"Yeah..." said Kuroha, the strong wind blowing her hair.

"So... Your translation going well?" I asked.

"...Yeah."

"..."

"..."

Our conversation was going nowhere.

“Did you need something?” Kuroha said in a strict voice, but when I shied away a bit, her expression changed. “...Sorry. I’m making you uncomfortable, aren’t I?”

“No... I just wanted to say again... I’m sorry for causing you so much trouble.”

Kuroha looked really sad when I said that. “You said that when you got in the car yesterday too, didn’t you?”

“Yeah,” I answered.

“I was thinking about it all day yesterday. Why in the world would you be apologizing so seriously like that?”

Why? Because it seems I’ve been causing you trouble, that’s why. It’s what your classmate said.

“Maybe... Maybe I’ve been a real burden to you, Onii-chan...”

What?! How’d she get that? It’s the complete opposite!

“So...” Kuroha continued.

“Wait, Kuroha, that’s not it. I’m the one that’s a burden on you,” I said in a hurry, trying to correct her, but then...

“Stop! Stop right now-nodesu! Why are the two of you together all serious-like all of a sudden-nodesu?!” yelled Amaneko-chan, jumping right in between us. She had both her hands out like she was trying to direct traffic. The professor then came trotting up from a distance.

“Hey, *Jitsumai*-chan, wait up! Kuro-chan and Imose-kun are having some brother-sister time right now. Don’t get in their way-noda!”

“I’m his little shishter toooo!” roared Amaneko-chan, looking up at Kuroha. “Kuroha-san, Nii-sama is already mine-nodesu. You *old* little sisters can get out of the picture now-nodesu.”

I thought that Kuroha would back off and not put up a fight now, but...

“...Stay out of this,” she snapped. “Onii-chan and I are talking right now, got it?”

“Seems like you’ve got some fight in you, Kuroha-san,” Amaneko-chan sneered. “I guess I need to completely crush you-nodesu.”

The veins in Kuroha’s temples were throbbing, and Amaneko-chan’s eyebrows were asking for trouble. I had hoped to avoid a situation like this, but it had happened just like that...

I was in a pickle, but the professor laughed like she was enjoying herself.

“That’s my Gin Imose for you-noda! He’s got girls throwing fireworks fighting over him, but he still has that cool look on his face-noda!”

“Um, I was actually thinking, ‘Well, now I’m in a pickle,’” I said. “And it’s less fighting over me than fighting each other, I think.”

“Well, you haven’t decided on someone yet, but eventually one of them is going to break out as the one you love-noda,” said the professor in a surprisingly serious tone. “And that love of yours will even become famous in future generations.”

“It sounds like you know my future,” I said.

“Oops, I have no idea what I was just saying,” the professor said quickly, waving her hands in the air with palms up. “Please, just forget all that.”

Well, I’m used to the professor’s little jokes and pranks.

“Now I predicted this turn of events, so I prepared a little something that’ll do just the trick,” said the professor, who was starting to fish around in the pouch she wore on her front.

Is she gonna take out some item to resolve the situation? I wanted to believe that, but I felt it would be pretty tricky to stop the two of them now.

Kuroha was standing there with her feet spread out and her arms crossed, with an aura of violence emanating at full power from her back. Amaneko-chan had both her hands balled into fists, and looked like a wild dog ready to strike at any time. Maybe it was because of her facing down Amaneko-chan, but the once-down-in-the-dumps Kuroha was now fully back to life.

“Nii-sama, Kuroha and I are two people who can’t stand beside one another-nodesu,” Amaneko-chan declared. “Just as there cannot be two suns in the sky,

there cannot be two little sisters-nodesu.”

“Um, you know that I’ve had two little sisters for a while now, right?” I asked.

“What she means is that you can only have one partner, Onii-chan,” said Kuroha. “In fact, a long time ago, the kanji for ‘little sister’ could also mean ‘wife’ or ‘lover.’ Of course I have n-no intention of being your l-lover, but bring it on!”

“Well I *do* have the intention of being his lover-nodesu!” replied Amaneko-chan.

“Um, are we sure that we all just can’t get along?” I asked. “I really think that’d be for the best...”

But Kuroha ignored me.

“When it comes to me and Onii-chan and our future, well... I’ll admit that you were the reason I started thinking about that...”

“Oh, what an honor-nodesu,” scoffed Amaneko-chan.

Are they even listening to me anymore?

“At first I thought I would just be good and back out of the picture, but now I see clearly,” declared Kuroha. “My pride will not allow me to give him to the likes of you!”

“That’s exactly what I’d like to hear-nodesu! Kuroha-san, let us battle, with Nii-sama on the line!” Amaneko-chan exclaimed.

Nope. They’re just firing missiles that are flying right past me. Nothing is going to make them back down now...

I was at my wits’ end when the professor spoke up.

“Imose-kun, use this-noda,” she said, holding a yellow helmet.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Put it on and you’ll see-noda. It’s an item for having a fair battle-noda.”

I didn’t really understand, but I took the helmet and put it on my head. Immediately a holographic screen appeared in the air surrounding us. There was a picture of what seemed to be the inside of my brain, and there were

words floating inside of it.

Kuroha Kuroha Kuroha Kuroha Kuroha Amaneko Amaneko Amaneko
Amaneko Amaneko

Kuroha and Amaneko-chan's names were shown, and they appeared exactly the same number of times as each other.

"Professor, what is this?" asked Kuroha. "Is it showing which one of us is taking up the most space in Onii-chan's head?"

"That's right-noda," said the professor. "This way Imose-kun can't avoid the question and try not to hurt people's feelings-noda."

"What occupies my brain?" I asked. "But if that's what it shows, why doesn't Odaira-sensei's name show up? I'm pretty sure I'm thinking about him the most sometimes. I love literature, after all!"

Kuroha glared at me and Amaneko-chan shot me a look that showed her displeasure after I said that.

"I've adjusted the settings so it only shows the two of your names-noda," explained the professor. "But be careful! If it sustains too strong a shock, the settings might change-noda."

"So it's a one-on-one duel, leaving out the cat-eared sister and Miss Boobs. Sounds like fun-nodesu," said Amaneko-chan, pointing her finger straight at Kuroha and challenging her. "Now, Kuroha-san, it's time to settle who has rights to Nii-sama once and for all-nodesu. The prize for winning: Nii-sama-nodesu!"

"Ah! You just said something about a prize, right? I have just the thing for that-noda!" exclaimed the professor. She rummaged around in her pouch and took out another new item. "The 'Meguri Present Box'!"

The professor was holding a red box in her hand which was wrapped in a gold ribbon. When we all looked a little confused, she then chucked it right at me!

In an instant I was blinded by a flash of light...

"Uwah!" I cried, instinctively shutting my eyes. After a few seconds, I ever so slowly opened them back up...

Nothing in particular had changed.

Wait, something is strange. My arms and legs feel oddly constricted...

I looked down...

“Wh-What the hell is this?!”

I couldn't believe my eyes. From my neck down I was stuck in a box. The box that the professor had showed us before had grown in size and wrapped me up. I was like some Christmas present with only my head sticking out.

Kuroha and Amaneko-chan were also dumbstruck at first, but Amaneko-chan seemed to understand and nodded her approval.

“Nii-sama is a beautiful prize indeed-nodesu.”

“Even better than those ‘Lolicon Playing Cards’?” asked the professor.

“You have a lot more free time than I expected, Professor,” sighed Kuroha.

“Nii-sama, you look so cute like that-nodesu. I'm gonna make you mine for sure-nodesu!” said Amaneko-chan, trying to look as adorable as possible. She walked up and kissed the box.

I remembered the time she kissed my bellybutton, and my heart skipped a beat.

At that moment, the holographic display changed. One of the “Kuroha”s disappeared and a new “Amaneko” appeared in its place.

“Fufufu... A preemptive strike-nodesu.”

“S-Sheesh, Onii-chan! Keep your head on straight!” yelled Kuroha.

That's easy for you to say... I can't exactly control my heartbeat, you know!

“Nii-sama, Kuroha isn't able to have the kind of *skinship* we do-nodesu,” Amaneko-chan said smugly. “She's a failure as a little sister-nodesu.”

“Normal brothers and sisters don't do those sorts of embarrassing things!” retorted Kuroha.

“No, that's not true,” I said. “In orthodox literature kissing is pretty much a given, and they usually go way beyond that, you know.”

“Th-That's why you're called such a literary geek!” said Kuroha.

Hey now, that's not a nice way of putting it!

Another “Kuroha” disappeared from the display and was replaced with a new “Amaneko.”

“Kuroha-san, you're naive, and in a bad way-nodesu,” said my *jitsumai*. “You really need to learn more about the world-nodesu. A proper brother and sister should each be after each other's chastity... It's eat or be eaten-nodesu.”

Chasing... city? After each other? Eat or be eaten? The vision of Amaneko-chan and I dressed up as ninjas chasing each other from nook to nook came to mind...

“H-How uncouth...” said Kuroha.

“Ahahaha, let's get this started already-noda!” laughed the professor. “We're all set, so go ahead and fight over Imose-kun all you want!”

“...Professor, are you sure you're not egging the two of them on just for laughs?” I asked. But the professor's look got suddenly quite serious.

“Look, Imose-kun. When things get like this, what's best is for everyone to just say what they want to say and get it out there-noda. As long as the kindling is still smoldering, the hostility will never end-noda.”

“You have a point there. Then, is me being in a present box important somehow?”

“Ahaha, that's just for fun-noda!” laughed the professor. “Now then, Imose-kun... choose wisely-noda.”

And then she disappeared.

She's a hard one to get a read on, that's for sure.

After that, the two girls crossed swords on a bunch of topics like, “Which one is my type?” and “What kind of fashion suits me?” and “What is a proper little sister?”, but the display didn't end up changing at all.

Well, duh. Because I want to get along with both of them.

But then Amaneko-chan made her pleading eyes even more pleading-y, and complained, “If we fight on these topics, this will never end-nodesu.”

Something about her attitude had changed. “Kuroha-san, let’s fight seriously.”

If I had to make a comparison... it was like she had an intent to kill.

“Nii-sama and I are going to make the future together,” said Amaneko-chan. “That’s why we’ll publish books. Kuroha-san, you’re going to translate and publish books from the past-nodesu. That’s the easiest difference to understand between us-nodesu. Nii-sama, please look at this.” Amaneko-chan took out two pieces of paper from the pocket in her pleated skirt. “The first page is written in modern Japanese. The other one is... your writing, except with the hiragana and katakana taken out. It’s what I envision writing from the future to be like-nodesu.”

It said:

Amaneko-chan, you’re so cute. I want to kiss you. I want to hug you. I don’t need Kuroha.

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“Nii-sama. Do you really have to think about which one is more important?” Amaneko-chan asked. “Something ‘borrowed from the past’ or an ‘original future’?”

The past or the future...

Comparing the two, the future definitely had a more forward-thinking connotation. If one were to just consider my tastes, clearly the future would be the winner.

A “Kuroha” disappeared from the display and was replaced with an “Amaneko.”

Amaneko-chan saw this happen and chuckled a little, while Kuroha started to look panicked.

“W-Wait a second!” she exclaimed. “You’re saying it’s original, but just using symbols itself doesn’t make it original, no?”

Now that she mentions it, that's totally right. An "Amaneko" disappeared and changed into a "Kuroha."

"Shut up-nodesu! It has plenty of originality-nodesu!" Amaneko-chan spat.

"And besides, the things you say are just way too out there," continued Kuroha. "I understand you want to do something new and different, but don't you also have to think about matching the tastes of the time?"

"Matching the tastes of the time...?" Amaneko-chan asked. "I have a question then for you, Kuroha-san. Did you read what other people wrote about Nii-sama's novel-nodesu?"

"Yeah..."

I remembered the horrible reception the novel I had uploaded to the website had gotten. With the exception of Amaneko-chan, it had been a complete disaster.

"After I read those comments, I realized just how idiotic the masses are, and just how little vision they have for great literature-nodesu," said Amaneko-chan. "Half the world is just people standing there with their mouths open, waiting for someone to feed them their favorite food-nodesu. But Nii-sama doesn't care about the world, and is trying to create something new. He's carving open the future... He's like a god-nodesu!"

"But you can't call it a success if most people reject it," said Kuroha. "I don't want to see him go out foolishly into the wild and be beaten down by the vicious winds of criticism! I want my Onii-chan to smile!"

"Even if it can't be understood today, you need the courage to never bend your will-nodesu," answered Amaneko-chan. "As an example, Kurona Gura was a relatively successful author while he was alive, but it was only after his death that he was truly valued as he should have been and that Japanese culture changed because of it-nodesu. Nii-sama will be the same way-nodesu!"

"Being popular posthumously isn't going to help Onii-chan be happy!" Kuroha cried.

Ah, I see now. After listening to their conversation, I now had a good idea of their difference in opinion.

Amaneko-chan didn't care whether I was accepted into the world today; rather, she was focused on carving a path to the future, which was why she sounded so radical. She believed that having a strong will was key.

On the other hand, Kuroha was more realistic, and she thought first about how I could be a success in the current-day. She believed that it was important so that I could look back at my life when I died and be happy about what I'd accomplished.

The scale of what Amaneko-chan's goals were really made me excited, but the care Kuroha showed really twanged at my heartstrings. Each of their perspectives were different, and I wasn't able to decide which one of them was right. How could I?! But I had to choose, or I would never be able to get them to back down...

Damn it... Which should I choose?

The holographic display was deadlocked, showing my own mental state.

Amaneko-chan glanced at the display. "Kuroha-san, you might pretend to care about Nii-sama, but you cannot fight for him. In the end, you are a person of the past-nodesu. And the proof is that you can read kanji, which was borrowed from that other country. The old should be destroyed-nodesu!" Amaneko-chan walked up in front of me and yelled, her face crimson, "Nii-sama! No matter what Kuroha-san says, she cannot create anything new. Do not choose her! Choose me instead!" She gestured with her hands, sweeping them aside.

So cool! That gesture is so cool!

But I calmed back down. That strange feeling I'd gotten before was back, welling up inside me. *What could it be? This feeling that something is... off...*

In response to the overly-excited Amaneko-chan, Kuroha replied calmly, "I'm not rejecting the future at all. But even if you are creating the future, you can't ignore the past and the present. The future is created by connecting and evolving the things from before, yes? If you try and create something new without building upon the existing foundation, you're bound to fail."

"Foundation... You mean your foundation with Nii-sama?" asked Amaneko-

chan.

“I wasn’t talking about Onii-chan. That’s not what I was trying to say.”

“You’re trying to hold your history with Nii-sama against me-nodesu! Well, I’m not going to lose to history! Nii-sama and I are gonna create the future!” Amaneko-chan shouted.

Foundation... History with Nii-sama...

Amaneko-chan’s word rang a bell in my head and I remembered a number of things from my past.

For example, the time when I had been in shock after learning that I was adopted. Kuroha had been there, silently reading a book next to me. She hadn’t been any different than she usually was.

I had always wondered why she’d never said anything. Recently, I’d asked Yuzu-san what she thought, and she replied, smiling, “Gin-san, Kuroha-san was trying to show you by acting like she usually did, ‘Even if we’re not related by blood, nothing will change between us.’”

I felt my love for Kuroha well up in my heart once again.

I had many more memories of Kuroha. Like when I would console her when she locked herself in the basement library, or when we’d play write-on-the-body in the bath together... It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that my past had been spent together with Kuroha.

“Ah...”

I finally realized.

That’s it... Kuroha has always been there by my side. I felt I had an answer to the decision I had to make between Amaneko-chan and Kuroha.

...I couldn’t allow myself to be trouble for Kuroha any longer, could I? I still couldn’t get the words of those girls at school the other day out of my head. I didn’t want to be a bother to Kuroha.

Amaneko-chan wants to create the future together with me, but in the end, I think it’s more about me not wanting to be a bother to Kuroha.

The “Kuroha”s on the display disappeared one after another and were replaced with “Amaneko” “Amaneko” “Amaneko”... Amaneko-chan’s face lit up like a star.

“Onii-chan, you can’t be... Why...?” said Kuroha in shock, backing away.

Kuroha, you’re going to be a translator, right? Well, I’m going to be a writer. Let’s both chase our dreams together.

Almost as if the game had been won, the box in which I was wrapped destroyed itself with a pop. At the same time, paper confetti came fluttering down.

“Nii-sama...” said Amaneko-chan, reaching out her hand to mine. I went to grab it with my newly-freed arm. “Nii-sama, you see the future, too. In the end, the past will always be the past-nodesu.”

“...No...” Kuroha was not able to form words properly, and Amaneko-chan faced her with confidence and stuck in the dagger.

“Kuroha-san, Nii-sama is nothing more to you than a ‘borrowed item.’ He should go on together with his *original* little sister-nodesu.”

Kuroha didn’t saying anything in response.

“What’s new is what’s right-nodesu,” Amaneko-chan went on.

I stopped my outstretched arm. Something made me pause.

When I listened to Amaneko-chan speak, there was always this strange feeling. I couldn’t really put it into words properly, but I finally had a clearer picture.

“What’s the matter, Nii-sama?” said Amaneko-chan, making puppy-dog eyes and tilting her neck at me.

Amaneko-chan had decided that new things were right, and old things were wrong. Those words reminded me of some things that had happened a little while ago, when I had argued with Mr. Bedhead and the president of the literature club. Both of them had been people who supported things from the past and rejected new things.

Back then, I had been the one on the side supporting new things. Amaneko-

chan was trying to create new things. Her stance and mine were basically similar. So then, why?

Why can't I see things the way she does?

"Nii-sama?" Amaneko-chan's expression darkened as she noticed the change in me.

Amaneko-chan's words just don't resonate in my heart. What is that?

As I asked myself that, I finally understood. The reason I couldn't sympathize with Amaneko-chan fully was that she completely rejected the things from the past. Because she was intolerant and didn't make an effort to understand.

She's... a lot like I was back then.

I had thought that orthodox style literature was the pinnacle of perfection and hadn't been willing to recognize anything else. The same as her. Like I had been back when Odaira-sensei and I had complained about how *Usubi*, a book without any moe, had been nominated for the Homyura Prize.

After I'd gone back to the 21st century, seen all kinds of things, and had been admonished by Odaira-sensei, I'd changed a little bit. That was why I couldn't get used to Amaneko-chan's narrow view of the world.

Amaneko-chan hated the Special Cultural District and her grandfather. She hated them so much she wanted revenge on them.

But, Amaneko-chan... Without the Special Cultural District, you wouldn't have even been born. It's because the Special Cultural District accepts and protects old things, even in a world that rejects them, that you were able to be given life.

I turned from Amaneko-chan to Kuroha.

Kuroha, you can be stubborn about some things, too... But you've somehow found a balance.

The display began to change again. "Amaneko"s were being replaced by "Kuroha"s.

"...Enough of this already!" I cried.

Professor, I'm sorry about doing this to your invention! I took off the helmet

and threw it on the ground. It rolled to a stop and the holographic display disappeared.

“Nii-sama... Did you... change your mind? Did you choose the past over the future-nodesu?!” Amaneko-chan exclaimed.

This was my answer.

I took Amaneko-chan’s hand.

Then I took Kuroha’s hand.

I forced their hands together, while they were still in shock.

“The past... The future... Both are important.”

The two of them stared at me from my left and right. For a time, there was silence. Then, Amaneko-chan spoke as if squeezing out the words.

“Nii-sama, I hate things that are left ambiguous and change in the wind-nodesu...”

“Amaneko-chan, the enemy I should be fighting is narrow-mindedness and intolerance,” I said.

“...I don’t... really understand-nodesu.”

“You’re too narrow-minded right now, Amaneko-chan,” I said, and Amaneko-chan recoiled back in silence. “I was like that too in the past. But then I met new people who changed my mind. So that’s why...” I looked down at the three of our hands all together. “I think we can change the way we think if we expand our horizons.”

I wonder if Amaneko-chan will understand my feelings?

“I think that the past is something that gets in the way of the future-nodesu,” Amaneko-chan shot back. “I think that if you’re too self-conscious about the past, it will prevent you from creating the future-nodesu.”

I guess it will take more than that to change the way she thinks.

I couldn’t force her to think the way I did. And it wasn’t like I was the last word on it, either. But I would still tell her what I wanted to say.

“You told me that my novels are part of the future, right? Well, the origin of

my novels is none other than *Oniaka*. What I usually read is orthodox style literature. I don't create anything from nothing. I'm influenced by everything I've touched up until now."



“Nii-sama, what are you trying to say?” she asked.

“I’m saying that creating something is a lot like this tower.”

Painted on the outside of the *Tower of Culture* were illustrations from throughout Japan’s cultural history. From the lowest levels to the highest, new eras built upon the old. The ancient stonework, the middle-ages samurai, the modern tentacles, the current-day panty-flash girls...

“I think that you connect to the future by building on a foundation of the past,” I said.

And the tower slowly gets taller.

“I treasure my past, my foundation with Kuroha, but I think the future you strive for, Amaneko-chan, is important as well. What do you two think?”

“What do I think? Sheesh...” said Kuroha...

“Nii-sama, you’re making too much sense-nodesu...”

I chuckled.

“I can’t agree with everything you said just like that-nodesu,” Amaneko-chan continued. “But I’ll take it all to heart.”

Amaneko-chan looked just a tad bit less hard-edged than she did before.

“Hey, Kuroha, don’t you think with all the cool things I’ve said today, I’ve taken one step closer to becoming a wise sage like Odaira-sensei?” I asked hopefully.

“Putting aside the question of whether to call Sensei a ‘sage,’ you really got way too into this,” Kuroha said tartly. “And if we’re talking about the metaphor you just made, your novels wouldn’t be at the top of the tower, they’d be somewhere up in the sky. They have barely any foundation underneath.”

“Uh...” I guessed that was what I got for just writing whatever I felt like.

“But, just perhaps...” continued Kuroha. “Maybe something will happen up there in the heavens and the tower will suddenly grow very quickly.”

“You mean, the times will catch up-nodesu?” asked Amaneko-chan.

“Right.”

Oh! This is the first time Kuroha and Amaneko-chan have agreed on something!

“Kuroha-san, let’s call it, unfortunately, a draw for today,” said Amaneko-chan. “If we keep going like this, Nii-sama will be upset-nodesu.”

Kuroha nodded in agreement, and said, “Please help Onii-chan with his debut as an author,” as if they were trying to put everything behind them.

The wind blew. Strangely, it felt gentle upon my face.

Phew... Finally, things have been settled.

I let go of their hands, and we all were about to head down from the roof.

Wait, hold on a second. I still had something I needed to tell Kuroha.

“Kuroha, I’m so sorry for causing you all this trouble. I’ll try my best not to any more.”

“Onii-chan...” she said.

“If you have trouble reading my novels, you don’t have to force yourself to read them, and if I’m in trouble somehow, you can just ignore me.”

“Tell me, Onii-chan...” she said slowly. “Why do you keep saying that you’re troubling me? Sometimes I think I’m a bother for you, but... you’re going way overboard.”

“I overheard some girls in your class talking,” I said. “I heard that they thought I was bothering you and that you were ‘troubled’ by me.”

As soon as I said that, Kuroha raised her eyebrows with a, “Huh?”

“B-Because of that?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

She continued in stunned silence for a moment and then started yelling like something just burst.

“You idiot! You giant idiot!” she cried, her voice echoing across the roof. It probably rode the wind to a land far away. “Me... you think *you’re* troubling

me?! Me?! Give me a break! Do you have any idea just how much I...!"

Something got caught in her throat.

"But they said you were troubled," I pried.

"I was... uh..."

"Nii-sama, Kuroha is a *tsundere*," stated Amaneko-chan. "On the surface she hides her true feelings and is all like, "I'm so troubled," but on the inside she..."

"S-Shut up!" shouted Kuroha.

Um, huh? So in conclusion, Kuroha hadn't thought I was bothering her? This was all just... a misunderstanding?

Hahahaha..... Haha.....

All the strength left my body.

"I thought that I was going to lose you, Onii-chan," Kuroha said, looking grief-stricken.

"Why would you think that?" I asked. "I'll be counting on you still from now on!"

"...How can you be so flippant about all this! Think about other people's feelings!" cried Kuroha, looking off to the side muttering, "What an idiot," and "I can't believe you," and "You're a real piece of work..."

She even said, "I wish I could knock you straight off this tower."

As I looked at her, I felt warmth grow in my heart. *Even though she's complaining, why do I get those feelings?*

The human heart was a mystery.

Maybe it was because when I saw Kuroha acting childish like this, it made me love her more, or want to protect her, or maybe it tickled my heart as her brother...

We waited for Kuroha to calm down, and then decided to go down the tower, in order to meet back up with everyone.

We had worked out all our problems. I would accept Amaneko-chan's support and debut as an author, and Kuroha would debut as a translator.

All's well that ends well.

Except that was not what happened.

"Amaneko," spoke a harsh, male voice from behind us. We all immediately turned to where the voice came from.

An old man in Japanese-style clothing stepped out of the elevator and began walking toward us.

Hmm, who is that? His head was bald and smooth, and he had a long beard growing from his chin. He had a stern look on his face and a proud stature, giving off a very powerful impression. The second Amaneko-chan laid eyes on him she began shaking.

"O-Ojii-sama....."

Her grandfather?! You mean the grandfather that has come up in conversation here and there quite a bit before this, but who hasn't appeared yet?!

He made confident strides right up to Amaneko-chan and asked, "What do you think you've been doing, leaving home and not contacting us?"

Amaneko-chan couldn't look him in the eye and got a guilty expression on her face.

What did he mean, "didn't contact us"? I thought you said that you told him you were staying over at a friend's house! Don't tell me that was a lie and you stayed out overnight without permission...?

Amaneko-chan, what have you done?!

"H-How did you y-you know where I was?" Amaneko-chan stuttered.

"Hmph. Sometimes the technology of Outer Japan can be useful," he said, glancing at Amaneko-chan's head.

".....Ah." Amaneko-chan realized something, and put her hand on the bell that she wore on her head. Was it possible that bell was some kind of tracking

device? Yesterday we had been in a fancy apartment building which must have had shielding, I guessed.

“Amaneko,” the stern man said, “you are forbidden from leaving the house for a little while. Reflect on your actions.”

“Awww... I am totally against this-nodesu!”

He ignored Amaneko-chan’s rejection and turned to look at me.

“So you are Gin Imose.”

“That’s correct.”

His face ever-so-slightly got more tense. “I know about you. I know that you aren’t a *proper* person,” he said, coldly.

Not a proper person? He must be referring to the fact that I am a 2.5D kid.

No matter how I looked at it, he clearly was not fond of me. He looked off to the side.

“Kuroha Imose-san. I know you, as well.”

Kuroha didn’t answer him. When I heard that unexpected statement, my body stiffened.

“Even I was not prepared for such a coincidence,” the man added. “It is true that Imose is a fairly rare name. I should have researched further.”

What? What coincidence?

“I bet on your genius, but...”

...?!

It dawned on me.

“So the patron that put forward the budget to publish Kuroha’s translation is...” I started.

“Myself,” he said.

I looked right at Kuroha. She shook her head no, that she had no idea her patron was Amaneko-chan’s grandfather. I then looked at Amaneko-chan. She looked apologetic, with her eyebrows sloped downward.

That expression... You knew, Amaneko-chan?!

Ah, I see!

Everything finally clicked. The reason why Amaneko-chan was so antagonistic to Kuroha was also because Kuroha had already been recognized by her grandfather. She must have combined the “past” that Kuroha translated together with the things that her grandfather respected in her mind.

I moved closer to the man. He didn’t seem to have a good impression of me, but as Kuroha’s brother, I had a duty...

“Let me thank you in place of my sister. Thank you so much for betting on her genius.”

“I see,” the man said. “But, I have changed my mind.”

I felt foreboding wash over my body.

“So Kuroha Imose is the sister of Gin Imose... I don’t like it. I’m stopping the publication,” he said.

Kuroha and I couldn’t say a thing.

“If you want to curse someone, curse your brother,” he said. “It’s because of him there that you have lost your chance.”

I couldn’t believe it. Could someone with the right... Could a person just do whatever they wanted like that? Could he chose who lived, who died, who was set free, and who was forever trapped?!

“Ojii-sama!” cried Amaneko-chan, pleading with him. “This incident is entirely my fault-nodesu! It’s not right that you punish Kuroha-san or Nii-sama for it-nodesu. Please, just punish me!”

“You are not a child who would do this kind of thing, Amaneko,” the man said coldly. “You must have been influenced by that improper person over there after you met him, yes? 2.5D people... They make me sick.”

These days people with such narrow-minded opinions about 2.5D kids were very rare. Maybe people in the Special Cultural District were different?

“Onii-chan makes you sick, you say...?!” growled Kuroha from beside me.

Oh crap, Kuroha's gonna say something back to him!

I cut in front of Kuroha, and said my piece. "Please, Kuroha has nothing to do with this. Allow her translation to be published just as you planned to!"

"I refuse. Thanks to you, I feel very uncomfortable about this. One Imose's problem is a problem for every Imose. I won't allow it."

"No matter what?" I asked.

"No matter what."

"Even if I send you panties as a thank-you gift?"

Nope, doesn't seem like that'll work.

The man had his arms crossed and was staring right back at me. He seemed to me like a ball of narrow-mindedness and intolerance.

How could I fight an enemy this strong? What should I do? Whatever should I do?

Ah!

I dropped down to my knees immediately, and lowered my head down as far as it would go.

The *dogeza*. The ultimate form of Japanese apology.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asked.

My sisters cried out, "Nii-sama!" and "Onii-chan!" one after another. I kind of wanted to tell them to back off, but...

I lowered my face onto the ground. I wanted to allow Kuroha to debut as a translator.

"Please, listen to what I have to say," I pleaded.

"And if I refuse?"

"Even so, I will speak."

"You're not giving me much of a choice."

I paid him no heed, and went right into what I wanted to say.

“My little sister can read kanji.”

“Yes, I know that.”

If I could somehow convince him logically, that would be for the best, but I didn't have the brain for that. So all I could do was throw whatever I was thinking at him all I could!

I talked about Kuroha. About how she could understand kanji, and how she loved modern literature. I also talked about how she would fight against her surroundings and not fit in with groups.

“Why do I have to hear about your little sister?” the man asked. “I no longer have anything to do with her.”

I had no idea what Kuroha was thinking herself. But from my perspective, the facts that she could “read kanji” and “liked modern literature” were not things that were positive influences on her life. I continued.

“But when it was decided that she would debut as a translator, the way people around her looked at her changed. It was the first time that Kuroha's ability to understand old writing became a plus in her life.”

“Let me say it again, then. What does this have to do with me?”

“Ojii-san, I've heard you want to bring kanji back to Japan, yes? Then you should want Kuroha, who can read kanji, to believe that is a positive in her life.”

Once Kuroha's debut as a translator had been decided, the people around her had finally actually understood her. It had made me extremely happy. After all, it was really sad when something you love causes the people around you to distance themselves from you. Happiness surely came from liking things that make other people get closer to you!



So please... I'm begging you...

"Please, don't bury Kuroha's happiness!" My forehead brushed the ground. I could feel it scraping across the floor.

"Onii-chan... You don't have to exaggerate like that..." said Kuroha.

"I'm not exaggerating."

"Don't just say things like that. The people around me changed the way they see me? What do you take them for?"

"Can you really just say it didn't matter?" I pried.

"It didn't... really..."

See, you couldn't say it. I saw you smiling, talking with your classmates. As your brother, I wanted to see your unguarded, smiling face like that again.

"So... will you still not change your mind?" I asked.

"I will not."

"Kuroha has always been there by my side," I said. "I'm proud of her. Her marks in school are top class, and she's got super good looks. I really think there's no one else as amazing as her. Maybe this is self-serving, but I finally felt like Kuroha has gained the one thing she's always lacked."

"Onii-chan..."

"Kuroha should be able to smile."

"..."

"So, lowering my head alone is not enough? In that case..." I put on the helmet that was near my feet. After it was on, I slammed my head into the ground.

"N-Nii-sama, what are you doing?" Amaneko-chan burst out. "Please stop doing that! It's ridiculous-nodesu."

I realized that this wasn't a very elegant method, but all I wanted to do was to somehow get my feelings across to him. This was the only thing that I could think of in that moment.

I brought my head down, again, and again, and again.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

As the helmet bashed into the ground, my head started to get a little woozy, and stars started to appear in front of my eyes. But I didn't think of stopping even for a second. How long did I do it for? I wasn't sure, but then finally Amaneko-chan's grandfather spoke to me, in a displeased tone.

"Fine. Enough already."

I looked up with my face full of anticipation. *If he said that, then he must mean he'll publish Kuroha's book as planned, right?*

But my luck would not be so kind to me.

"All I care about is that you stay away from Amaneko. But I hear that you're going to publish a book thanks to her recommendation? If that's true, then you will probably come in contact with her again."

"Ojii-sama, what are you saying?" asked Amaneko-chan.

"We'll do a trade. If you give up on publishing his book, I'll publish his sister's."

Wha...?

"Nii-sama, don't listen to him-nodesu!" cried Amaneko-chan. "There's no reason to go along with a bad deal like that-nodesu!"

"Amaneko, that's enough from you! Silence!" scolded her grandfather.

I glanced over to Kuroha beside me. She shook her head no. "Don't worry about me, go on and make your debut, Onii-chan," she was trying to tell me. I could tell just by looking at her.

Amaneko-chan was right: There was no reason to go along with what her grandfather was proposing. Everyone was against it, it seemed. And yet...

"I understand. I'll stop the publication of my book," I said.

"Onii-chan!"

"Nii-sama!"

My little sisters both shouted at me as I lifted up my head.

“It’s not that I’m giving up,” I said. “One day I will win a Newcomer’s Prize fair and square, and people will recognize my talent, and I’ll make my debut as an author then.”

“Onii-chan...” Kuroha said in a choked voice.

“You can go ahead first, Kuroha. Don’t worry, I’ll catch up to you, I promise.”

“But...!” protested Kuroha, in vain.

“Are you some kind of guy who gets off on self-sacrifice, then?” asked Amaneko-chan’s grandfather with a bitter tone.

“No,” I answered. “What Kuroha said was right. Right now, the people of the world aren’t ready to understand my works. Things like having a pair of pantyhose as the main character are too avant-garde. And if people can’t understand my novels, then I can’t save anyone with them.”

“Save people?” he asked.

“Yes...”

He looked me deeply in the eyes as if trying to find something within me. After a moment, he huffed at me and continued: “Guess there ain’t much difference between you 2.5-dimensional people and *real* folk, after all.”

It seemed to me like his attitude had changed. He then looked over at Kuroha, and said, ever so slightly kindly, “Kuroha Imose-san, forget everything that I have said here today. I will publish your translated work, just as I promised. You possess an incredible genius, and I wish to borrow upon it.”

“...!”

I did it! My feelings must have made it through to him!

As I was feeling almost weightless with glee, he continued to say something that surprised me yet again.

“And you, Gin Imose. You may do as you please. I will not interfere. However, do not see Amaneko again.”

“Wha...?!”

Something didn't connect about that second statement. Kuroha and Amaneko-chan were also at a loss for words and exchanged a glance.

So then... you mean I can publish my book, after all?!

"Amaneko, I'll give you 15 minutes. Say your goodbyes and then come downstairs. Do not be late," he said, and then disappeared into the elevator.

The rest of us were left in a state of shock. *So I guess this means that Kuroha and I can both debut like we planned before?*

"Amaneko-chan, your grandfather seemed to change his attitude there all of a sudden. Why was it, do you think?" I asked.

"I don't really understand myself-nodesu," answered Amaneko-chan. "Maybe him saying all that was just because he wanted to tease you a little, Nii-sama."

I think that went a little beyond teasing, if you ask me!

"Or maybe he was serious about it but he changed his mind after seeing you-nodesu," added Amaneko-chan.

"Guess there ain't much difference between you 2.5-dimensional people and *real* folk, after all."

That's what he'd said back then. Maybe he'd understood me a little. In any case, it was a happily ever after end to our problems.

Oh, wait a sec. There's still a problem...

"He said not to see you anymore, didn't he?" I asked Amaneko-chan. He now knew that we'd met before, and it was clearly a big deal. But Amaneko-chan pulled down her eye with one finger and stuck out her tongue.

"Heh, as if-nodesu! We'll see each other again, Nii-sama, I've got my ways! The higher the wall between us, the hotter my passion will burn-nodesu!"

Hahaha! She really is quite the handful.

As I laughed together with Amaneko-chan, Kuroha spoke from beside me.

"Onii-chan, thank you..."

"No prob."

“I was thinking to myself, if I had to rely on someone like that to become a translator, maybe it was better if I didn’t...” she said.

“That would be such a waste, though,” I said. “You’ve gotta grab on to every chance you get.” It was just a feeling, but I didn’t think that Amaneko-chan’s grandfather was really such a bad person.

“Yeah...” replied Kuroha, tears starting to well up in her eyes.

“Hey, don’t cry,” I said. “You’re not a crybaby like this, come on.”

“Yeah... but...” Kuroha wiped the corner of her eyes. For some reason she was staring off into the sky. Amaneko-chan noticed this as well and also started looking up into the sky.

“Ahh!”

What? I followed their gaze and there I saw it — the holographic display was back.

The settings must have changed after the strong shock I’d given it. A whole bunch of words began to appear on it.

Novel titles like *I Want to Have Onii-chan’s Baby* and *KIRARIN! PANTYS SKYBLUE*... Miru, Yuzu-san, Amaneko-chan, Odaira-sensei, Professor Choumabayashi, Dad, Mom, Mr. Bedhead, Sugawara-kun... Their names were there, too. Even the “Meguro Tentacle Museum” that I hadn’t been to yet was there.

But among those countless words was one that far outnumbered the others... 90% of the words displayed were one name...

Kuroha.

Man, this is kinda embarrassing...

“...I know it’s just a snapshot in time, but...” said Kuroha, her voice quivering. “Onii-chan, I thought you were just a lit-geek, that you had nothing in your head except literature. But you do think of me, even if it’s just a little...”

“Of course I do,” I said. “I’m your big brother, after all!”

Kuroha looked me in the face, and said almost in a whisper, “I’m glad...”

“That’s nice.”

Kuroha looked at me as if in a dream. “Onii-chan, I understand perfectly now. I can’t keep it in any longer...”

You understand perfectly? Can’t keep it in? There was only one thing she could be talking about.

“Number One?” I inquired.

“Idiot,” she snapped.

“Oh, so Number Two, huh?”

“Big idiot.”

Seems I’ve had my idiot upgraded.

Kuroha started to chuckle despite herself. She was crying and laughing at the same time.

“...I... ...have to say it... ...or he’ll never...” she muttered in a whisper, but I didn’t understand what she was talking about.

Amaneko-chan strolled up to the laughing Kuroha. “Kuroha-san! What you see on the display is just a moment in time-nodesu. We haven’t settled this yet, and don’t you forget it-nodesu!”

Kuroha was still on cloud nine, and didn’t respond. Amaneko-chan let out a frustrated groan and spun around to face me.

“Nii-sama, I apologize for all of this-nodesu. Maybe it’s because of me being like this that you don’t think of me as seriously as you do Kuroha-san here, but my feelings for you, Nii-sama, are...” Amaneko-chan spoke as if proclaiming to the gods. “...*very real*-nodesu.”

She seemed so earnest, I wasn’t able to respond right away. I felt like I had a responsibility to say something appropriate. I ended up just nodding with a, “Yeah...” and Amaneko-chan broke out into a large smile.

And then once again, a gust of wind blew. Both Kuroha and Amaneko-chan’s hair were flowing in the wind. I lifted up my head and gazed up at the blue summer sky and pure white clouds.

I took off the helmet, and said to myself once again...

This time... everything is finally settled.

*

One day in the 23rd century, Kuroha's room.

"Kuroha, Yuzu-san, Odaira-sensei has started a column in *Literary Gal* introducing vocabulary from modern Japanese!" I yelled excitedly.

"Oh, that sounds interesting," said Yuzu-san.

"...I hope he actually defines the meanings properly for the readers..." said Kuroha, suspiciously.

Special Feature *Literary Gal* August 2202

"Gai Odaira's Modern Japanese Vocabulary Lessons"

[高校生] (*koukousei* - High School Student)

That which has strayed far from one's personal taste.

Example Sentence: "At my age, greasy foods are high school students to me."

[ランドセル] (*randoseru*)

Something very precious.

Example Sentence: "They used to call black truffles 'black diamonds' back in the day. But in Japan they call them 'black *randoseru*.'"

[処女] (*shojo* - Virgin)

That which is a given. That which must be.

Example Sentence: "If you are Japanese, then the fact you follow the laws of Japan is a virgin."

[子ども会] (*kodomokai* - Children's Group)

Something you can't help but join in with.

Example Sentence: “I had no plans to show up at the party put on by the publisher, but it ended up a children’s group.”

[小学校] (*shougakkou* - Elementary School)

Paradise.

Example Sentence: “They call Guam the elementary school of the south seas.”

[パンツ] (*pantsu* - panties)

The soul.

Example Sentence: “The Father, the Son, and the Holy Panties.”

[ロリコン] (*lolicon*)

Life. Gai Odaira.

Example Sentence: “As we are elderly, so are we lolicons. Lolicons *Banzai!*

Chapter 7 - ♥

—Everything was not finally settled.

What follows is a description of what happened over the next few days.

It turned out that the reason Odaira-sensei had stopped the publication of my book by the Future Creation Company was not just because Miru had asked him to. The Future Creation Company was a publisher that defrauded hopeful authors.

That person who called himself Takahashi was planning to take advantage of Amaneko-chan's wish to get my book published and get me to pay a lot of money. I didn't have much, just being a high schooler, but he'd planned on me begging my parents for the money, I suspected.

The Future Creation Company case was handed over to the police, and they were shut down. And of course, there wasn't any other publisher which would be interested in publishing my book. In other words, after all that trouble and excitement... *Man, it's embarrassing just thinking about it...*

...I was not able to debut as an author.

Of course, I was totally down in the dumps. I was in such a state of shock that I slept in my room for an entire day.

Man, what a terrible ending! Things just never go my way...

Unlike me, Kuroha was scheduled to make her worldwide debut as a translator just as planned.

"Looks like you've got a lead on me," I told her.

"You'll catch up, right? I'm waiting for you," replied Kuroha. I was happy that she didn't try to awkwardly console me.

By the way, Amaneko-chan apologized to me so many times that I started to feel bad for her, proclaiming, "Do with me what you want for the rest of my life-nodesu!" and "I belong to you completely, Nii-sama!"

I decided to accept her sentiment, but nothing else. Let's talk more about Amaneko-chan...

Amaneko-chan had been forbidden from seeing me again by her grandfather, but she would often send me emails or call me on the phone, and she said that she was always looking out for a chance to slip away and meet again. It seemed like she was as hyped as ever to "create new words" with me.

"Your novels are the future itself-nodesu. That is what I feel, and that will never change as long as I live-nodesu," she would say each time we talked. Her future forward self was unshakable.

I had thought that her attitude stemmed from rebelling against the Special Cultural District and her grandfather. I was not wrong, exactly, but there was another reason for it. When we parted ways, Amaneko-chan had said something that none of us expected...

.....— —

We had all descended from the *Tower of Culture* and were saying our goodbyes to Amaneko-chan. We surrounded her in a circle.

"I hate to say this, but... Nii-sama, I will be returning home now," she said.

I could see a car with her grandfather in it, awaiting her in the distance.

"Oh, yes... Is it okay if I tell Mother and Father about you, Nii-sama?" she asked.

"Sure. Give them my best regards," I said.

My birth parents... I wonder what they're like?

"Maybe they told you about me, Amaneko-chan, because they hoped that something like this could happen."

It would only be natural for them to want their daughter to meet their son. But then Amaneko-chan said something surprising.

"No, I didn't learn about your existence from Mother and Father."

"Huh? Then was it your grandfather?" I asked.

"Of course not. There's no way that he would have ever spoken about you-

nodesu.”

“Then... who was it?”

“Let’s see...” Amaneko-chan made a face like she was lost in memories for a moment. “It was the ‘messenger of God.’”

I went silent.

“I— received a revelation from the ‘messenger of God,’” she went on.

She said that a number of years ago she had encountered this messenger of God in her backyard. It was from that messenger that she had learned, “You have a long-lost older brother.” In shock, she had confronted her parents, and they had admitted to my existence. That was how she had learned about me.

“Then, if this messenger of God or whoever hadn’t shown up...” I said slowly.

“I do not think I would ever have known about you,” she said.

“What was this messenger of God like? A person?”

“No, it was a black cloth,” she said.

“Cloth?”

“That’s right! A black cloth with a golden glow.”

What the hell? I didn’t know what to make of this at all. Everyone else was reacting in pretty much the same way, except for the professor, who seemed quite shaken up.

“*Jitsumai*-chan...” started the professor. “Did you really see such a thing? It wasn’t just a dream?”

“It was not a dream! It was real!” she cried.

This messenger of God had taught her other things, as well.

That Japanese was a language borrowed from other countries.

That for Japanese independence, it should create its own, new words.

That these new words should recreate the world.

It seemed that her divine revelation had been what had really influenced her desires. When she had told Kuroha and me that “pretty soon we will even be

able to travel through time,” it had been because the messenger of God had informed her of this.

When I heard all this, finally everything made sense to me. That off feeling I’d had when talking with Amaneko-chan hadn’t just been because of her narrow-mindedness. And this explained why Amaneko-chan had had such a strange dream of trying to create new words. It hadn’t just been rebelling against her grandfather or the Special Cultural District. Perhaps this would be putting it a little harshly, but...

Amaneko-chan was prone to having delusions of things that weren’t real.

That was what I decided on.

After she left, we were all still talking about what we’d just heard. Miru said, “See, I told you she was a weirdo,” and Yuzu-san laughed, saying “If cloth could talk, I kind of wish that rope could talk, too...”

None of us took Amaneko-chan’s story seriously, except for the professor.

“So they actually came to this time period, the bastards... I hope they aren’t controlling her mind...” muttered the professor, her face deadly serious.

“They came?” I asked. “Who came?”

“Oh, never mind,” brushed off the professor hastily.

“Maybe it was a member of the Pantyhose Party?” asked Odaira-sensei, teasingly.

“!”

Odaira-sensei went on to show off his creative talents and told a crazy story that would rival even Amaneko-chan’s delusions...

The black cloth with a golden glow was none other than a member of the Pantyhose Party from the 38th century that the professor had once mentioned. A member of the Pantyhose Party wasn’t someone who loved pantyhose, mind you, it was a pair of pantyhose itself.

“Is it really so strange to think that someone from the 38th century might come back to this time, just as we went back to the 21st century to correct history?” Odaira-sensei asked. “Take this, for example. What if you and

Jitsumai-kun meeting each other was a key turning point of history, so then the Pantyhose Party Member came to the present time and led her down that path...?”

I see... When I thought about it, that also made the tradition of the Imose family to have all girls aged 15 years or older always wear black stockings or pantyhose seem quite suspicious. Those future Pantyhose Party Members must have traveled far back in time and planted that tradition. Why? Because in a household with a lot of black pantyhose, it would be easy for them to infiltrate...

The Pantyhose Party Member would blend in to our daily lives, and silently observe us....

“If you’re plotting something, then show yourself already!” I couldn’t stand it anymore and bellowed at the black stockings Kuroha was wearing. “We won’t become your pawns to do with as you please!”

“What do you mean, I’m plotting something?” asked Kuroha.

“Not you, Kuroha, those!” I said, pointing at her thighs, but I overshot and poked right into them.

“Kyah!” she screamed, much more cutely than I had expected.

Kuroha turned bright red after that, and the conversation took a different turn. “Pantyhose Party Member? Give me a break! Are you completely brain dead?!”

“Hahaha, I was just joking,” I said.

I obviously didn’t believe the story that Odaira-sensei had told us. I’d just been going along with the story and adding to the sci-fi mood. None of us really believed that Pantyhose Party Members from the 38th century really existed.

Only the professor seemed to be deep in thought.

She’s probably pondering tentacles again, I bet.

.....—

“Everyone sure was shocked when they heard what Amaneko-chan said, you know?” I said.

“Yeah...” said Kuroha.

“You didn’t believe it either, right, Kuroha?” I asked.

“No...”

It was currently 1 A.M. and I was with Kuroha in her room. She was intently focusing on her translation. Even when I talked to her, she would barely answer.

I guess I shouldn’t bother her.

I decided to read the *Literary Gal* I had in my hand. This issue had a special about little sister lit. There was an interview with Odaira-sensei and Haruka-sensei. In the article, Haruka-sensei said that in little sister literature, “In the middle of the night, after their parents are asleep, the main character and his little sister are in one of their rooms totally making out. That’s the best scene, always.”

In the middle of the night.

After our parents had gone to sleep.

In one of our rooms.

Together alone with my little sister.

So far, the situation matched completely. The only thing missing was...

“Totally making out...” I murmured.

“What are you talking about?” Maybe my voice was too loud, because Kuroha immediately turned around to look at me.

“Oh, it’s about this article. Read it.”

She had come up alongside me, so I showed her the article from *Literary Gal*.

“I was just thinking about how our situation is basically exactly like what they describe here.”

“Alone together with your little sister...” Kuroha then went quiet for a little bit and started to fidget with her long, black hair. That was a habit of hers when she was embarrassed.

“...Hey... Hey, Onii-chan.”

“Yeah?”

“When you spent the night together with her... did... anything happen?” she asked, not seeming to be able to stop fidgeting.

“Her”? She must mean Amaneko-chan...

It had been about a week ago, so it was strange that she'd ask me that now.

“Nothing happened,” I said.

“Really?” Kuroha seemed suspicious. “Um, you see, it's not like it really bothers *me* or anything. It's Miru and Yuzu-san, see. You know? They're really concerned but they can't ask you directly, so that's why...”

Kuroha's hair twirling got ever more fierce.

“So... You see... I want you to tell me everything that happened,” she said. “Just put it all out there. Then I'll tell Miru and Yuzu-san. I mean, I'd rather not, but I kind of have to, you know?” added Kuroha all in one breath, then reaching for the glass of water on the table.

Oh! Well in that case, I should tell her everything honestly.

“We slept together,” I said.

Kuroha spat out all the water in her mouth. “Wh-What did you just say?!”

“After she basically confessed her love to me, she kissed me.”

“Th-Th-Then what the hell was that ‘nothing’ supposed to mean?! That's most definitely ‘something,’ if I ever heard it!”

“Well, that was about it.”

“‘That was about it,’ you say? Just like that? You kissed her!”

“She kissed *me*,” I said. “On the bellybutton.”

“...Bellybutton?”

“Yeah.”

Kuroha sat there, stunned.

“She's... got weird tastes. Well, if that's all it was, then I guess...”

“She might have a bellybutton fetish,” I said.

“So then what do you think about her, Onii-chan?” Kuroha asked.

“What do I think? Well, she’s my blood-related little sister.”

“Did she make you feel, you know... excited at all?”

“...N-No.” I hesitated. I couldn’t help it.

“Sheesh. You’re like an open book, Onii-chan,” said Kuroha, looking at me angrily, but then she seemed to think of something, nodded to herself, and said in a whisper, “I knew it... I have to say it...”

“Huh?” I asked. “Anyway, I was happier about how we made up symbols together and talked about novels. That was a lot of fun.”

“You made symbols together? Don’t tell me you played write-on-the-body?”

“Well, she played it on me, I guess.”

Maybe it was something I’d said, but Kuroha seemed hung up on my words. “Listen, Onii-chan. She said that your prose would carve open the door to the future, right? I don’t reject the future, either.”

“I know.”

“Okay then... Come over here and face your back to me.”

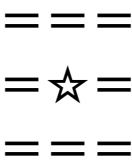
“Huh?” I tilted my head in confusion.

Kuroha paused just a moment, and replied, “I’m going to play write-on-the-body with you.”

“S-Sure...”

I turned around, facing my back to her and sitting on the floor.

“I hope that your novels can create this,” she said as she drew this on my back.



“...It’s something shining. Um... a ‘bright future,’ maybe?” I guessed.

“Bingo.” Kuroha laughed happily. “See, how about that? I can talk with you about symbols too, you know.”

Kuroha spoke like a little child trying to get their parents to praise them. I couldn't help but want to go, “There there, that's a good girl” and pat her on the head, but I realized I'd be in for a world of hurt if I tried that. Instead...

“Then, can I play write-on-the-body with you?” I asked. It'd been a while, but I was feeling the urge to write letters on Kuroha's back. I was beginning to wonder what response she would give, when she replied...

“...Okay.” She didn't seem against it, and nodded earnestly.

“Well, I guess writing directly on your skin is not in the cards, though...”

“H-Huh?!” she asked.

Of course I'd never expected her to say yes. I'd been half-expecting a whack from her dictionary. I'd been all prepared to get slugged, but...

“...I-If you insist...” she said.

“What?”

Kuroha averted her eyes, embarrassed. “I'm just letting you do this to me so you don't cause any trouble doing it to other girls,” she said, then turned away from me and lifted up her pajama top.

I couldn't believe what was happening.

“O-Onii-chan, hurry up and write something...” she said.

“F-Fine, I know...”

My heart nearly skipping a beat, I placed my finger on her back. Since she'd already taken a bath, there wasn't anything in the way like a bra. Half her pure white back was exposed, shining brightly in my eyes...

“Nnn...”

Whoa there! Stop letting out that kind of moan, will you? I told myself.



I drew a single symbol.



“...!”

“Do you know what it means?” I asked.

“Um... well...” Kuroha put her pajama top back down and turned to face me.

“Are you serious?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re kidding me.”

“Of course I’m not kidding you.”

Kuroha’s face had gone crazy red.

“Onii-chan, um... You see, I...”

“It means ‘thank you,’” I said.

“.....?”

“I tried to express all my feelings of thanks into one symbol. Thank you so much for everything you always do for me, Kuroha.”

For a moment, Kuroha looked confused, but then she burst out in a laugh.

“Sheesh... That’s so like you, Onii-chan.”

“Is it?”

We laughed together. We were a brother and sister that really got along. That was something I was completely sure about. I felt like we could continue on now without any more unfortunate misunderstandings.

And with that, the story of my meeting with Amaneko-chan was complete. There were sure to be more stories to come, however.

I should make sure to write down everything that’s happened in my personal experience diary.

I decided to go back to my room and start writing immediately. But then...

Life is a mystery, they say. It’s full full of surprises, they say. Just meeting

Amaneko-chan had been a huge event in my life, after all. But things I could never have imagined kept continuing to occur.

Things were not finally settled. Rather, something even bigger was in store for me.

“Wait.”

Just as I was about to get up, I felt someone tugging on my clothes. I turned and saw that it was Kuroha who had grabbed them.

“Huh? What is it?” I asked.

“O-Onii-chan, c-can I ask you something?”

“Sure...”

Kuroha looked up at me, like she’d made up her mind about something.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” I asked.

“After all that happened this time, see, I finally understood.”

“Understood?” I asked.

“If you just stay quiet and don’t act decisively, one day, eventually, the things that are precious to you will slip out of your hands. If you only cherish them, they can be taken from you just like that.”

“Don’t act decisively?” I asked, confused. “Are you worried about something?”

“...Yeah,” she said. “But I have the answer. If it’s something you want, you have to take the initiative and grab it.”

“Something you want?” I asked. “Hurry and grab it? So like an in-shop exclusive that comes with an anime or video game? Each shop’s is different, so you almost start wanting to buy multiple copies just to get them all... I know...”

“You idiot.”

“Well, it’s true you should make sure to get the things you want,” I said. “That I agree with.”

“.....Yeah,” said Kuroha, her voice dialed back. “...I never want to feel that

way again...”

“Huh? Did you just say something?”

“A-Anyway! I’ve made made decision!” said Kuroha, almost yelling. She closed her eyes and looked up at the ceiling. “Miru, I’m sorry. Yuzu-san, I’m sorry.”

“Huh?” I asked.

“Yuzu-san... you even came here to the 23rd century... I’m so sorry. But I know you can find your own happiness, I just do.” She seemed to me making excuses to herself. “Dad... Mom... I’m sorry. I’m sorry this is the way it is.”

Sorry this, sorry that... What is this, the Sorry Olympics? What does she mean, “this is the way it is”? I shook my head in disbelieve, and Kuroha started muttering to herself...

“Yeah... I’m pretty sure telling Mom and Dad all of a sudden would be too big a shock. It’s probably best if they sort of realize, gradually. Yeah, gradually... First, after we’ve both gone off to college, we’ll live together. We’ll say it’s because we get along so well and won’t have to search for other roommates. Then after we graduate, we’ll keep living together... Slowly, slowly, they’ll start to think there’s something fishy about us. That’ll go on for a few years. Then... maybe when we’re in our early 30s... Yeah, that sounds about right. When we’re on a visit with the parents, we’ll just, you know, totally casually...”

“Totally casually...?” I asked.

Kuroha looked at me, and said, “And say, ‘Well, this is how it turned out. Surprised?’” She put her hand to her head in a comical, “oops” gesture.

“Uh. This is so unlike you, I don’t even know what to say. Hello? Kuroha?”

“D-Don’t say that... I’m pretty stressed here, okay...” Kuroha looked completely embarrassed.

“So, what was that all-too-realistic sounding story about?” I asked. “I kind of get the idea, but...” I decided to just say what I thought. “It sounded to me like a brother and sister engaging in a secret tryst without their parents noticing.” That was a plot line that was not uncommon in orthodox little sister literature.

Wait, orthodox little sister literature?

“Ahh.” I realized something incredible. I looked Kuroha squarely in the face. She got flustered, and averted her eyes, but I moved my body to face her again. “Kuroha, you... You actually...”

“O-Onii-chan...”

“You’ve actually awakened your inner author! So you’ve tired of just translating things! This calls for a celebration! I should give you some advice for reading material. First there’s *Oniaka*, of course. Then there are all of Odaira-sensei’s books. And then there are ones like *DRINK PEEBATH OF LILSIS*, or the book where little sisters pop up like mushrooms, *LILSIS FUNGUS*...”

“I have no intention of becoming a mushroom,” said Kuroha, dismissively. “Ha... I shouldn’t have gotten my hopes up. I have to say it clearly, so that even an idiot can understand...”

“It’s true,” I said, nodding. “Idiots have a hard time understanding other people. ...Wait, are you talking about me?”

Ouch.

As I pouted, Kuroha exhaled a deep breath, and looked straight into my eyes. She looked like a person who was ready to accept the consequences for what she was about to do.

Kathump!

My heart beat loudly as this abnormal tension spread.

“Onii-chan.”

“Wh-What?” I couldn’t help but get caught up in the tension and was suddenly unsure of myself.

To say it completely honestly, it was like Kuroha was trying to say something really, really decisively. I couldn’t help but stare at her lips. Those thin lips of hers were trying to open and say something.

It was at that moment that I had another realization. Something completely shocking.

Kuroha... Don’t tell me... You...

“I love you, Onii-chan.”

Afterword

How have you been? This is Kajii.

Can you believe it? This series is already on its third volume!

Yippee! *Banzai!*

...Well, it's not really that many volumes yet, but it was my goal to have my debut work go at least three volumes, so I guess that's one goal accomplished.

So, in order to celebrate the achievement, I figured I would write something interesting, and I tried to come up with something about the number "3." Nope. All I could think of were jokes about three-year-old girls! I figured that three-year-old jokes would probably land me in trouble, so I gave up on that idea.

And if we're talking about three-year-olds, the fact is I don't remember much from when I was three. Too bad. So that story ended quickly, but I *do* remember clearly the time when I was five, so I figured I would write something about that time. I was a completely uncute, irredeemable brat!

When my parents would suggest giving me some present or maybe going on a vacation somewhere, I would always cut them off with the line, "Who cares about that? Please give me cash." Lol. It seems like I thought that getting money was more practical back then. But looking back, just straight out asking for cash with no consideration is actually *more* childish, don't you think? Hmm, maybe not.

...Uh, sorry for that story that had no direction and no punchline. I'll move on to the thank-you section now.

To my editor, H-san, and to the illustrator Minamura-sensei, and to my friend Y-san, and to everyone else who had anything to do with this book, and to the readers... I give you my thanks.

Finally, let me give you just a little bit of a preview of the next volume. In volume 4, the nature of Gin and Kuroha's relationship changes. But you'll have to read it to find out exactly how.

And with that, it would be my pleasure if we meet again in the next volume.

January 2012 - Takashi Kajii

Notes from the English Translator: An Over-Analysis

Part 3

Another volume of *SisKan* down, and what have we learned? Well, perhaps that whole thing about pantyhose from the 38th century wasn't just a bad pun, and Gin has just maybe started to get an inkling about Kuroha's true feelings. This entire book is really just a setup for the next one, providing a stimulus to push Gin's and Kuroha's relationship beyond the status quo it had been for the first two novels, but as usual, it tries to make a much larger and deeper point in an incredibly awkward way.

This time the author presents an extended metaphor for the classical conservative/progressive political argument masquerading as a debate over the benefits of blood-related little sisters versus non blood-related little sisters. What? You didn't interpret the book's narrative that way? You're clearly not overanalyzing it enough. Again and again, Amaneko makes the point that she represents "change" and "the future", while Kuroha represents "the past" and "stability". The basic setup of her rebelling against her dictionary-definition conservative Special Cultural District upbringing further emphasizes the argument. The author almost makes a salient point about progress always being built on the traditions of the past, but he proceeds to completely undercut any point he made with the revelation about Amaneko's true motives near the end.

In my opinion, this volume ends not with a bang, but with a pretty serious cop-out. Amaneko's grandfather serves as a catalyst to force Gin into trying to make a decision, but he backs off before there is any true resolution, as does the novel itself. Unlike the end of volume 2, volume 3 merely sets up Gin and Kuroha for upcoming character development.

We do, however, get some very interesting world building and back story about Gin himself, with the story of his birth as a 2D kid, the fate of his birth parents, and his own ideas about family. Whereas volume 2 fleshed out the foundation of Gin and Kuroha's relationship, in this volume we understand a lot

better how Gin views the state of the world and the nature of family.

Of course, we have to talk a bit about the ending, where Kuroha finally, actually, for real, confesses to Gin. You probably are thinking to yourself, “Yeah right, Gin will just think she’s talking about familial love or something like that and it’ll be like nothing ever happened again.” Suffice it to say, just as Kanjii-sensei said in his Afterword, Gin and Kuroha’s relationship will change in the next volume in a significant way.

Now, if I may discuss some of the translation challenges present in this volume. First and foremost, we have yet another character with an anime-style vocal tic, Amaneko. Her -nodesu style is similar to the professor’s -noda style but more formal. She is “confident and polite”, basically. Unlike the professor, her character seems fully genuine, and it is somewhat of a mystery why she actually speaks that way, as I would have expected her to learn proper Japanese in the Special Cultural District.

The crucial conflict in the novel stems from a misunderstanding which is extremely delicate to translate. The line that Gin overhears from Kuroha’s glasses wearing “out-of-it” new friend uses the verb *komaru*, which can mean “troubled” or “bothered” but also “worried”. Gin interprets it that Kuroha is troubled or bothered by him, but in reality Kuroha is “troubled” over Gin because of her feelings for him and her worrying about him. I hope I made the nuance in meaning clear enough in the translation to get that across.

The passage in which Yuzu-san talks about *doujinshi* where the girls have the kanji 正 written all over their thighs I did not attempt to explain within the text. The kanji 正 is 5 strokes, and is used in Japan much like how in the west we write 4 vertical lines and then a diagonal line through them to count to 5. I will leave it to your imagination to guess what those kanji were counting on those girls...

Finally, the “game” (if you can call it that) which Gin and Kuroha used to play in the bath together, write-on-the-body, I translated in that manner in order to evoke other children’s games like hide-and-go-seek. It is never explicitly explained, but I am pretty sure that this is a game which Gin invented and named himself after being inspired by that anime. I’m sure we all have little games we would make up for ourselves when we were little kids, and that is

kind of what this is supposed to represent. However this children's game will take on far more meaning in the last two volumes of the series.

In the next volume, we will get introduced to two more characters, so I hope you look forward to it!

Sam Pinansky



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My Little Sister Can Read Kanji: Volume 3

by Takashi Kajii

Translated by Samuel Pinansky Edited by Emily Sorensen

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