

MAZEMONOGATARI
NISIOISIN

Kyouko Balance

Chapter Oblivion

Okitegami Kyouko

Boukyaku Tantei Series



ART: VOFAN

001

Okitegami Kyouko is a white-haired detective. Apparently she is renowned for being the fastest in the world. If we're talking about speed, Kanbaru is also one of the fastest people I know but she seems to be able to truly demonstrate her speed only when the circumstances ask for it. Furthermore, the reason the fastest detective is who she is lies somewhere else, somewhere that she can't avoid even if she tries to.

Rather than a reason, I should say that it's more like her foundation.

It looks like her memories reset every day, or to be more accurate, she loses her memories each time she goes to sleep.

That's why she is also called the *forgetful detective*.

She regularly has to handle confidential information, and as a detective, she is bound by law to protect it. Her condition makes her the most qualified for the job. However, she must also solve each case before the night comes, in other words she only has one day to find the truth. One can say that one of her abilities is to run against time, against fate.

If we look at it from another point of view, we can say that she developed an extraordinary sense of reasoning in order to keep being the fastest detective even with her condition.

Well, if we put away the professional aspect, I am kind of envious of her way of living since she is not bound by her past. For example, if I were able to lose all the memories of the hellish Spring Break I lived, I would do it without hesitation. It would be an enormous lie to say that I never thought about doing it.

But I can't forget it, and more than that, I should not forget about it. I decided that I wanted to see what I can do while keeping these memories.

This kind of thought is sinful. The things I would forget would include the series of incidents involving a certain vampire. It would be just like putting myself in front of the sun, but in the end my feelings would not disappear.

The forgetful detective also forgets the cases she admirably solved and even the cases that directly concerned her, like they didn't even exist in the first place.

Well, humans do not belong to the world of mystery novels that Ougi-chan loves. Among the *riddles* that a detective has to solve, there are surely tedious tragedies that you want to avert your eyes from. Forgetting how you unraveled such mysteries must be essential if you want to keep doing your job.

Nonetheless, she is able to forget the unhappy as well as the happy moments. "Happiness" and "unhappiness" are two sides of the same coin. It is impossible to forget only unhappy things. In my case, I have no choice but to remember the hellish Spring Break I lived, this ultimate "bad ending".

But, after having said this like I understand everything, the forgetful detective shared her quite different opinion.

"Do you think it is never good to forget unhappy memories? If unhappiness and happiness are two sides of the same coin, then the

unhappiness that is bound to the past as well as the happiness of the past are the same as of now, right?"

She pondered.

"Leaving behind the weight of the happiness of the past, you wouldn't be able to pursue today's happiness. This is what I believe."

I see, that's a valid opinion.

This is an opinion only the forgetful detective can have.

But, there are also people who unconsciously focus on past memories, forgetting to pursue "today's happiness".

If it were that easy to be happy, life would be much less trouble.

"What about it? Being happy is unexpectedly simple. You see, true happiness is when you're shopping and you end up having to pay exactly 777 yen."

Indeed, that is happiness, or rather it's the feeling of living such an exceptional event that makes you happy.

But, isn't happiness all about experiencing this kind of rare opportunities?

"I don't think so. It's better to buy things such that the total is 720 yen. Then, since the consumption tax is about 8%, the total would become 777 yen."

To be happy, you need to know how to do simple calculations.

She said that, but in reality it's not about the calculations but rather about being well prepared. The happiness of being well prepared.

Or rather, the resolution.

The resolution to be happy.

It was maybe that resolution that I lacked during spring break. Even now, I still haven't forgotten about it.

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I still don't know what's the correct way to read the name of that park, is it "Rouhaku" or "Namishiro"?¹ It's roughly at the same distance from three train stations: "Higashinao", "Nakanao" and "Minaminao".² It's like each train station is the closest one to the park, making this place extremely well located. But in reality, each station is also the furthest one, making it also very inconvenient.

Not far from the park, there is a peaceful residential area whose construction recently finished. It's a long walk from the train station but it's not like the park is famous.

It's also not the kind of park where there's only a swing and a slide, it's in fact a particularly spacious park. As a third-year high school student who's too old to use such equipments, all I can do is sit and relax on a bench. There is really nothing to do.

¹ The name of the park is written 浪白, which could be read either way. It turns out in *Owarimonogatari III* that it was actually supposed to be pronounced "Shirohebi", connecting it to the main plot.

² The station names contain 東 (*higashi*, "east"), 中 (*naka*, "center") and 南 (*minami*, "south").

But today, it seems it will be different.

Because there was someone on the bench. Not seated but lying down, sleeping soundly. I can distinguish what appears to be an adult silhouette.

My first reaction was “such a bothersome adult”, but then I noticed a very characteristic white hair. At first I thought it was an old person, but looking at it more closely, it was clearly not the case.

A female in her twenties I would say.

She was wearing a loose sweater and a long denim skirt. On the side of the bench were khaki boots that she probably took off before sleeping. They were put straight up just like they had a will of their own.

Close to her white hair that she used as a pillow were a pair of stylish glasses. She probably also removed them before going to sleep.

At any rate, seeing this kind of fashionable woman is a rare sight in this provincial city, and I was feeling kind of uncomfortable seeing her sleeping on that bench. She looks like she came from another world. It is also clear that she will have an important role to play in this story.

“...”

As for me, today I had things to do and there was no particular reason for me to come to Namishiro Park. I know that I should go back to my occupations but I simply couldn't.

She was not disturbing the public order, but I can't leave this defenseless young woman alone, and I don't intend to overlook the fact it's not a good thing for her to be sleeping in this kind of place.

There's a lot of strange people in this city.

Hanekawa would never overlook a situation like this. That's why I can't pretend I saw nothing.

I came closer to the bench she was resting on, extended my hand and combed her hair.

“Hya!”

She suddenly raised to her feet.

Like the spring in a clock.

She immediately put her glasses back on.

“Who dared to touch my hair without warning?”

She rolled up her sleeves, fixed her hair and looked around. And then she stared at me.

Although I only wanted to wake her up, I thought that touching her body would be awkward, so I went with her hair, but in the end her reaction is the same.

“It’s okay. I’m not suspicious.”

I may not be suspicious but I had to say something. I raised my hands showing that I don’t have any weapons and presented myself.

“I’m Araragi Koyomi, a third-year high school student at Naoetsu High School. It’s famous for being the best high school in the neighborhood since many famous people graduate from it every year.”

I said this very naturally, but just looking at the sign of the high school reminds me that, at this particular moment, I’m one of its worst students. Hearing that, the eyes of the white-haired girl lit up but she kept staring at me.

She just woke up but she seemed so energetic.

It’s not like she’s a detective and she found a criminal. Furthermore, the fact that I am a criminal is still to be confirmed.

“Sorry. Thank you for kindly waking me up.”

After having said that, she kept looking at me like she could see through me. She then gently smiled and bowed.

“Hello, my name is Okitegami Kyouko and I’m the head of a detective agency. People also call me the forgetful detective. By the way, what is this place?”

Okitegami Kyouko-san.

25 years old. Detective.

The head of a detective agency.

The forgetful and the fastest, whose memories reset every day.

She asked me what this place is even though I don't know how to read the name of it. For the time being, let's just say that there is only one possibility, that is "Namishiro Park". She seems to enjoy sleeping on benches. On her left arm was written some of her personal information, you can hardly see it.

Somehow, when she finished observing me, a not-suspicious guy, she lowered her head and woke up. She then rolled up her sleeves, took a memo from under the left sleeve of her sweater and started reading it. I happened to notice her really slender arms when she rolled up her sleeves. She was preparing to introduce herself.

She also keeps a memorandum in which she writes things in case she forgot something.

Like a middle schooler.

On her right arm was another message saying “You are in the middle of a case”.

She also had some messages on both her left and right hands.

It’s kind of attractive.

“I see. Anyway, I was visiting this city for a case and it seems I carelessly fell asleep during the investigation.”

Yes, she fell asleep in the middle of an investigation.

This also means that she forgot everything she had found.

“It’s a pretty beautiful city but I don’t know how I came here. Is there something interesting in the neighborhood, Araragi-kun?”

“Something interesting?”

“Yes, do you know of any strange things happening in this city recently?”

“...”

To be honest, I only know about strange things. It seems that only strange things are happening in this city. But there’s no way I can be honest and tell her the truth.

“No, there’s nothing that comes to my mind right now. There are no criminals nor lolicons in this city.”

“I didn’t ask about the latter though.”

By the way, touching the hair of a girl without her permission is not illegal, right?

She would reprove it if I told her that.

It must be some kind of cultural difference, something that depends on where you live.

“If there’s nothing in this town, maybe I should broaden my search.”

“Well, there aren’t a lot of cities close by. Are you looking for things like traffic accidents, robberies in museums or arsons? I have the feeling I saw something like that in a newspaper.”

“I see.”

She looked satisfied with my vague information. Kyouko-san then rolled up the cuff of her long skirt. I stared at her, unconsciously.

“Unconsciously? You’re supposed to avert your eyes in this situation.”

“Oops. I’m sorry. It’s a cultural difference.”

I looked at the sky.

The weather was starting to clear up.

It seems that Kyouko-san was looking for other hints and was searching for memos that she may have left on her body. Does she wear a long skirt to hide memos written on her legs?

When I was peeping under her skirt, I saw that she really had beautiful legs. And I mean it with the three meanings of beautiful.³

In the end, she didn’t find other memos. “Araragi-kun, can you come over here?”, she said, straightening up and putting back her skirt in its original state.

“Well, that’s a problem. What kind of investigation was I in the middle of? It’s impossible for me to be this negligent. I should have prepared something.”

She really is confident.

The kind of confidence that I didn’t have in my whole life.

“Maybe there is a clue in your cellphone?”

This is the kind of question the assistant of an amateur detective would ask. In reality, it’s more the kind of stupid question that even the most stupid person would not think about. The forgetful detective has a very strict confidentiality duty. That is why she doesn’t have any traces of job-related cases in her belongings.

Memos written on her body must be one of those rare cases of emergency. By the way, Kyouko-san doesn’t have a cellphone, not even a handbag.

In other words, she was completely at a loss.

“Araragi-kun. I know that it’s not the kind of thing I should ask someone I just recently met, but would you hear my request?”

³ In Japanese, 奇麗 (*kirei*, “beautiful”) can also mean “clean” or “pure”.

“As long as your request is not asking me to drink your blood, everything is OK.”

Kyouko-san did not flinch at my masochistic joke. Could it also be one of those cultural differences? I'll let it slide for now.

“Would you mind looking at my back?”

She then turned around to show me her back. She put her hands in the cuff of her skirt. I heard a sound coming from the middle of her sweater.

“OK, I took off my underwear so please roll up my sweater and T-shirt. You have no choice but to look at my back to find some clues since I can't do it by myself.”

“Eh? What did you just say? Please stop saying things like that. Removing the clothes of a woman I don't know and checking her back is something I can't do!”

A third-year high schooler touching the hair of a sleeping girl and staring at her bare legs really questions the ethics of the said high-schooler. And obviously we could add helping a girl remove her clothes.

I have two little sisters, so I am accustomed to this kind of thing. Well, if her body is as beautiful as the peek I had suggested, then I'd prefer writing something on her back rather than looking at it.

We would need the help of a third person.

Conversely, if something was indeed written on her back, then it must be something really confidential to be hidden this well.

Directly on her spine.

A spine that is so wonderful and smooth that you would like to touch it.

I didn't have the opportunity to touch the back of other people recently. The occasion of touching the back of such a beauty may be a once-in-a-lifetime thing.

Nevertheless, it was as you can expect.

On the third vertebra.

A message.

It was clearly written by someone else since the writing was more disordered compared to the previous messages. And also because it's impossible for her to write something in this particular location.

The steady memorandum of the forgetful detective.

But what was written here was not the kind of highly confidential information I was expecting.

“Milk chocolate coffee - 140 yen

Fruit Coke - 130 yen

Butter tea - 150 yen.”

Rather than a remembering trick a middle schooler would use, it was more like an unfinished shopping list. I didn't think that it was really important but after telling Kyouko-san about it, she moved.

The fastest detective.

After having acknowledged this mysterious hint, this uncertain clue, she didn't seem perplexed at all. On the contrary, just after she stood up, she suddenly stopped.

In order to be able to let me have a look at her back, she had to remove her underwear. She merely forgot to put it back on. She had to put it back, otherwise there might be misunderstandings.

"Araragi-kun, are there any convenience stores nearby? I would like to find the three types of drinks that were written on my back."

"No, I don't think so."

We were in the suburbs.

Finding convenience stores here is a rather far-fetched idea.

"I see. What about a snack bar?"

"Do you think we are that far from downtown?"

If she's talking about a small restaurant, then yes, there are some, but honestly I'm not sure you can find such drinks there. You might have a better chance looking for vending machines.

But rejoice! Among the three items, I happen to know about the unconventional beverage known as "fruit Coke". I already bought some at a vending machine one day on my way back from school.

It was half for fun and half for my personal interest, but in the end I was only rewarded with a bitter experience. Manufacturers of such machines must feel happy thinking about the "rewards" the clients get.

"I think that you can buy this one only from vending machines."

Of course, you can't find it in small shops, but you may find it at convenience stores.

It also goes without saying that it's impossible to find some at snack bars.

"I see. In this case, let us go to this place. Can you tell me the way, Araragi-kun?"

"It might be difficult if I just told you, it might be better to go with you. It's easy to get lost around here."

"My goodness. Thank you for your kindness. I feel so spoiled."

Kyouko-san said this in a very friendly way.

She's unexpectedly a very nice and gentle person.

Showing her the way might not be sufficient to repay her for showing me her splendid back. Anyway, we left Namishiro Park.

I came to this park with my bike, but I guess I can take it back later. It's not like I'm thinking of all the things I could do if we decided to ride it together.

"Was buying drinks your job, Kyouko-san?"

"I am certainly a detective with many skills and duties, but it's difficult for me to think that shopping is one of them."

"Then, maybe you just wanted to have a drink?"

“If that’s true, then why did I bother to write some memo on my back? I can’t drink three bottles by myself. From both a quantity and nutritional point of view.”

True.

I didn’t think a woman without an inch of excessive flesh like Kyouko-san would be able to drink such a sweet beverage.

I see.

As I thought, this was not a personal memo, those few lines must be related to work. Indeed, if it wasn’t the case, why would she look for such a rare “fruit Coke” that you can only find in special vending machines? If you look at it from this perspective, both the “milk chocolate coffee” and the “butter tea” are not popular beverages too.

If you knew about a vending machine selling these three beverages, then you may be able to find very special documents hidden inside...

“Or there could be some bombs planted in it, right?”

“...”

She presented this possibility with a big smile. Even me, a person who was gifted the pleasure to contemplate her back, would not want to participate in a bomb disposal squad...

But.

“It’s not true. Even considering that, Araragi-kun, you saved me. Thanks to you, I will be able to quickly return to my job.”

After hearing such cheerful thoughts, I had to keep guiding her.

I was trying to hide my embarrassment when I truly wanted to answer “You know, people have to save themselves on their own, Kyouko-san”.

“Oh, what a pessimistic thing to say for a high schooler.”

“It’s the latest hot thing.”

“From what I remember, this ‘hot thing’ ended a long time ago, right?”

“Time periods repeat themselves.”

“I see...”

She said playing dumb, tilting her head.

“In my opinion, it is better if you are saved by everyone. Oh, is it this one?”

Kyouko-san was the first to notice: we successfully found the vending machine.

That’s great, we didn’t lose our way.

Although I wasn’t really familiar with this place...

Checking the vending machine, the “fruit Coke” was indeed, as I recalled, present in the showcase. There was also the “milk chocolate coffee” as well as the “butter tea”.

There were also various lined up drinks.

I probably bought one without paying attention.

Even though I knew that there were better drinks elsewhere.

This is the kind of line-up you can only find in such a provincial city. Is there a chance that a stranger like Kyouko-san found this so rare that before losing her memories, she wrote a memo about it?

“Humm... I’m having some trouble thinking. Araragi-kun, for a start, let us try buying some?”

“Eh?”

“You might think it’s useless but it might explain the shopping list. If we try to buy the three drinks, then maybe we can break the deadlock.”

No, that’s not possible.

I don’t know what to do, does this mean that I should be the one to buy the drinks? Or should I let Kyouko-san do it?

No, I should be the one.

As a high school student, I should do it.

“It appears that I lost my wallet with all my personal information.”

Saying it like that, it looked like she was a spy infiltrated in an enemy country. But even if she doesn’t have anything, there is no reason for me to buy the drinks.

“I see.”

Kyouko-san seems disappointed.

“In this case, I have no choice but to discuss with your parents, Araragi-kun. Yes, I should tell them about how their son removed my underwear and looked at my back.”

“Uh-oh. I understand, here is my wallet, or should I say your wallet. It’s filled with small change.”

Without any hesitation, I took some money and bought the three drinks. I didn’t do it to feel grown up but rather to clear up a misunderstanding.

I’m not talking about the thing about her back, but rather the one when I touched her hair without her consent.

In order to not clog the vending machine, I took out the can each time one fell down. I then handed them to Kyouko-san.

Two hot beverages and an iced one. Just looking at the label of the “fruit Coke”, bad memories came back to my mind.

“I see. Bad memories you say. Being able to retain memories means you have to remember bad ones too.”

Kyouko-san took a good look at each one. She inspected them from A to Z. She’s really a professional detective.

After having looked really carefully at all the details of the nutritional aspects of the drinks, she looks disappointed as if she didn’t learn something new. She then handed me the cans. But why did she do that if she found nothing?

“Can you drink all of the cans?”

“...”

“It might help with my current situation.”

“In this case, if it is to help you...”

After hearing this request from an unusually commanding Kyouko-san, I had to give up. Drinking three bottles resembles water torture but I had to do it.

I had to drink around one liter of liquid.

Drinking this amount of liquid obviously intensifies the flavor of the beverage. The flavor of the “fruit Coke” was better than what I

remembered, but the other two, the “milk chocolate coffee” and the “butter tea”, were really too sweet.

Nevertheless, I drank the three of them.

Kyouko-san nodded, confirming the fact that she didn’t want to drink any of it.

“How was it, Araragi-kun? Did anything flash in your mind?”

“My eyes are blinking but that’s the extent of it.”

I am not that kind of unpleasant character.

I am far from that. I am not planning to become the assistant of a detective. Not even like Dr. Watson.

“So, it seems we reached a stalemate, nothing we can do about it. With our current investigation, we can only conclude that there are no bombs hidden in this vending machine.”

We should take this into consideration.

While I was undertaking the eat-three-bottles-challenge, Kyouko-san was investigating the surroundings of the vending machine, trying to see if we missed something. But even for the fastest detective, it was a dead-end. Indeed, there were no important documents hidden inside the vending machine.

It’s hard to think that there are other vending machines with such an eccentric line-up in town. If there was some clue around this vending machine, no need to be a detective to find it.

It’s a dead-end.

If we stay in this situation, I might need to call Hanekawa.

The honor student among the honor students, the class president among the class presidents. She should be able to understand why we didn’t find any clues. She’s the kind of person that, even without any information, can solve this type of case.

I am not the forgetful detective but simply a normal high school student. I have a mobile phone. If I want to ask for help, I should do it as early as possib—

Just as I was looking for my phone in my pocket, I realized something.

“Kyouko-san, what is that?”

“What is what?”

“Your pocket, the pocket on your skirt, isn’t there something inside?”

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I noticed it quite late but it wasn't time to concede defeat yet. Although it was an unexpected development, I felt ashamed for being that careless.

That's how I felt.

When I looked at the pocket of her skirt, something seemed unnatural. Indeed, to preserve her identity, the forgetful detective should travel lightly, with no wallet or mobile phone. I should have noticed it way earlier.

"There is only one really small card inside my pocket. By the way, my skirt is made with thick denim, how did you notice it while *I* didn't?"

Kyouko-san looked amazed.

She asked me how.

This is also one of these cultural differences that are hard to explain.

I have a deep knowledge about women's backs. Regarding my noticing of the unevenness of her body line, there is only one explanation, that is a private opinion. I'm having scruples.

Nonetheless, after having told Kyouko-san about it, she noticed something inside her pocket and what she took out was not particularly unexpected. The fact that it was a clue was not obvious.

A small card.

Or more straightforwardly, it was an IC card,⁴ used for transportation.

The kind of thing that beeps when you want to ride a train.

“Well, you don’t have your wallet and you’re completely broke, making you unable to travel around town. So, it seems natural to at least have an IC card, I guess.”

No wonder high school students can’t afford to go wherever they want. I said, with a bit of deception (and cynicism) in my voice.

Kyouko-san gazed at the IC card for a long time.

Like it was a miracle to find such an object.

“...?”

Wait, a miracle? Is it possible that Kyouko-san doesn’t know about IC cards? Did she forget about it?

“That’s not true. At the time my memories started to reset, this type of card already existed. I know about it. What I’m having difficulty understanding is why I was using it.”

“What do you mean by ‘having difficulty’?”

“Well, I was outside, completely broke, which was kind of reckless of me. And when I showed you my back, I found some money that I kept for important occasions, hidden inside my underwear.”

What?

As I thought, pros are on a different level from amateurs.

“Noticing the card inside my pocket makes you quite the professional, Araragi-kun. But I don’t know what kind of professional... Let us set that aside for now. The IC card is an item that

⁴ An IC card is a rechargeable card you can use to pay transportation fares and many other things.

I don't think a person like me, the forgetful detective, would find a real use for."

Ah, that's what she meant.

Maybe this card contains records about her movements.

Extremely precise data about the activity of a detective.

As a detective with very strict compliance to the duty of confidentiality, as much as possible, you would like to avoid using such objects. When you use transportation facilities, you would want to pay by cash if possible.

Finding an IC card inside the pocket of a detective is the same kind of uncomfortable feeling as if someone found a tissue inside my pocket.

That's why.

We must see it as a clue for the case we're interested in.

The card inside Kyouko san's pocket, maybe it's hers. Or maybe she faced some unavoidable situation. Or maybe it's a card she was compelled to use during one of her investigations...

"Araragi-kun, is there a train station around here?"

"A train station? Let me see, there are three stations nearby. Higashinao Station, Nakanao Station and Minaminao Station... But taking into account our current location, the closest one would be..."

I would think it's Minaminao Station, but since I'm not really familiar with this place, I'm not quite sure. Compared to just using a navigation application on a mobile phone, this is much more difficult.

"I see. Any train station is good I guess, can you guide me? I want to try to check the records of this card. We should be able to do it at a ticket machine, right?"

She's really quick at making decisions.

If it were me, I would be much more cautious after finding a new piece of information. But as I thought, Kyouko-san is not the kind of person to hesitate a lot. It's quite different from the "moving before thinking" behaviour.

Moving while thinking, thinking while moving.

After finding this clue and while we were moving towards Minaminao Station, Kyouko-san stopped me and said “Just one more thing, Araragi-kun”.

“There’s something bothering me. When we were investigating the vending machine, what was this ‘thing’?”

Looking at what Kyouko-san was pointing at with her index finger, she was probably talking about *this* thing, it can only be *that*.

The IC card reader on the vending machine.

She was right.

Nowadays, IC cards were not limited to transportation facilities. You can use them at vending machines or in shopping centers. Very useful cards.

That's why, if you put aside the eventual problems with the information contained in it, and considering the fact that the forgetful detective doesn't want to carry useless stuff, it's the perfect item.

"I see. It is possible to use an IC card even at vending machines. That is quite the future."

Kyouko-san said this very seriously.

Kyouko-san's memories go back up to the creation of IC cards. Now, you can even use them to do your shopping. But her memories were completely reset.

What she knows today, she will forget it by tomorrow.

It's not the future, just the present. Maybe, for her, the present and the future are the same thing. That's what a carefree high school student like me happens to think, but the way of thinking of Kyouko-san is probably completely different.

“You mean that it’s possible to buy drinks using this IC card?”

It was quite a strange question but the answer was obvious.

“Of course. You can even recharge it. If I remember correctly, you can also check the balance of your card.”

At a ticket machine, it’s of course impossible to check all of the history of the card, but if you put the card in front of a card reader at a vending machine, it should be possible to check its current balance.

“If you want, we can try checking the balance of the card, Kyouko-sa—”

But just before I actually said it, Kyouko-san already put her hand on the card reader, pushing it onto the vending machine.

One would expect Kyouko-san to not be really accustomed to doing this (or maybe she did do it in the past but forgot about it), but she appeared to know that you don’t need to put it exactly on the card reader, it suffices to place the card approximately on top of it. On the digital screen of the vending machine was displayed the current balance of the IC card: “2890”.

Two thousand eight hundred and ninety yen. Well, with only this amount of money, you can’t go very far. Nowadays, you don’t even pay attention to the amount you charge the card with and there’s no reason to remember all of your expenses.

If you have a balance of ten or twenty thousand yen, then this is probably too much. At least, that’s what I think. The average balance must be around three thousand yen I guess.

We differed from our original plan, and instead of going to the station, we decided to go to a ticket machine in order to check the logs of the card. It seemed like a good plan. I looked at Kyouko-san.

“Congratulations, Araragi-kun. This could be our key.”

She then held out the IC card towards me.

What am I supposed to do?

“Would you be so kind as to buy the same drinks as before? But this time, can you use this IC card? I don’t know how to do it myself.”

“OK, I guess.”

I didn't see any reason to refuse.

But what would be the point of buying the same beverages again? No matter if you pay by cash or use an IC card, you will be getting the same ones, right?

I truly don't understand how the mind of a detective works.

Anyhow, I proceeded as told, buying the "chocolate milk coffee", "fruit Coke" and "butter tea" with the IC card.

As expected, the cans fell the same way. This time, I tried to inspect them in more detail, but as I thought, there were no differences. That's the way it is I guess.

It was a perfectly futile action.

What would the manufacturer of the machine think about what we did to his most famous products?

"You're wrong, it was not futile, Araragi-kun. I understood something."

So she said.

"We must change plans. We are not heading to Minaminao Station but Nishinao Station."

"Eh?"

What? How could she arrive to this conclusion?

Or rather, we were heading to Minaminao Station because I mentioned that it was the closest one, but I didn't even pronounce the name "Nishinao" until now, right?

"Oh? Since there is a Higashinao and Minaminao Station, then there is surely a Nishinao Station."⁵

"Well, humm, you're indeed correct. Nishinao Station is over there but it's quite far."

"It's OK."

She said plainly.

⁵ This station name contains 西 (*nishi*, "west"), which goes with the other two that contained "east" and "south" respectively.

I haven't even mentioned this train station and she still managed to guess it. I was very impressed and was wondering how she found out. Looking at the logs of the IC card shouldn't have been sufficient.

“The logs were sufficient. Rather than the past logs, its current state was the most important.”

She said.

Kyouko-san again pointed at the vending machine. But this time, what she pointed at was not the card reader but the digital screen.

On it was displayed the current amount of money, which decreased after I bought the drinks.

2470.

Indeed, Nishinao.⁶

⁶ Here, “Nishinao” is written in kana as にしなお, where each character can be interpreted as the pronunciation of a number. In this case, に = 2, し = 4, な(な) = 7 and お = 0.

007

“You were the one to buy the drinks, so you should be the one to drink them, Araragi-kun. You must not waste food or drinks. Only after you drink all of it, we will go.”

For the second time, hearing Kyouko-san’s suspicious way of speaking, I was forced to drink and undergo once again this “water torture”. Once I finished, we moved towards Nishinao Station.

Nishinao Station is not very close from Namishiro Park but is not that far if you choose to go by foot. But after having no choice but to drink six bottles along with the corresponding calories, I thought that we should take a taxi.

But the forgetful detective, as part of her policy, wants to avoid taking a taxi as much as possible. Being a high school student, it’s not like I already rode a taxi before. Furthermore, lately, taxis are starting to be equipped with recording devices for preventing crimes. For someone like Kyouko-san, who wants to avoid leaving tracks, no matter how you think, riding a taxi was not a good idea.

There is no doubt that Kyouko-san is thinking about the unnaturalness of why she was carrying an IC card, but no matter the

job you consider, one can wonder if it's truly necessary to be that thorough.

No matter what Kyouko-san believes in, she's truly a detective.

"Belief? If there was one, I probably already forgot about it."

"Indeed. But I think that's great. For me, the things I say and the things I do are always imprecise and constantly changing."

"Really? Is that true?"

"There are some times where I stop in the middle of things. Or moments where I suddenly do things that I said I didn't want to do. That's one of my most precious skills. Some kind of unspoken rule."

I don't need friends. They would lower my intensity as a human.

I'm still wondering today, and I probably still wonder in the future, whether this statement was really correct or not. But, if I didn't have this belief, I might not have experienced the hellish Spring Break I have.

"Between having regrets and not having regrets, I guess that it's better to have regrets. But stopping in the middle of doing something, that would be the ultimate regret. The second worst thing would be to do something you stopped doing. At least, that's what I think."

"Personally, I don't think that changing opinions or beliefs is a good thing to do."

"..."

"Stopping in the middle of doing something you said, it's better to start from where you stopped. I also think it's better to have regrets. The fact that having regrets is a bad thing is questionable. It's only scratching the surface of the problem, I think."

"Scratching the surface of the problem..."

"Yes, like scratching your legs. Araragi-kun, you seem to envy me, a person whose belief does not change, but I would say that this is precisely why I envy you. I'm jealous of you being able of having regrets. In the end, everyone wants to have the things they don't have."

While we were having this discussion, me and Kyouko-san arrived at Nishinao Station. But after we arrived there, we had no idea where to go next.

Should we check the logs of the IC card at a ticket machine? She seemed to say that it was pointless, but...

“Wow. We arrived at the station. Let’s use the card that comes from the future. Not at a ticket machine but let’s go towards a ticket gate. Araragi-kun, do you happen to have your own IC card?”

“Humm? Yes, I do.”

I rarely use it but it should be in my wallet. I’m not sure about the amount of money that I have but there should be enough for taking the train or a bus.

“So, *let’s go!*”⁷

Kyouko-san hurried towards a ticket gate.

I followed her.

Knowing that the base fare is 150 yen, I could end up with only 30 yen left on my card, which is really not enough for anything.

It seems I would need to recharge it when leaving. Whatever.

The problem is with Kyouko-san’s card.

When we used the card to buy drinks, the amount left on the card that was displayed on the screen guided us towards Nishinao Station. So, if we’re following the same reasoning, after paying the fare for the train, the amount displayed on the screen should also give us a hint for our next destination, right?

When the amount of money left on my IC card appeared on the screen, the one left on Kyouko-san’s card disappeared. But one can deduce it with just a simple subtraction since we knew the previous one.

Nishinao, i.e. two thousand three hundred and seventy yen. If we subtract the fare, that is one hundred and fifty yen, we end up with two thousand three hundred and twenty yen, i.e. “2320”.

⁷ Written in katakana.

2320!

Humm? Is there a joke?

Nisanire? Nisanio? Tsusufumaru?⁸

Because we're looking for a pun based on the pronunciation of the digits, it's subject to interpretation. Of course, you can think about it for as long as you like and still be unable to find it.

I was certain that we would find our next destination by looking at the digits, in the same way we found an indication for coming here. Was I mistaken?

But if I was wrong, then maybe we were wrong from the start. For instance, we might consider the reasoning we used for finding the relation between "2470" and Nishinao Station suspicious. Could it have been just a coincidence and the shopping list written on her back was a completely different clue?

If it's the case, then it was really pointless to come here (or more precisely, to walk twelve thousand steps). This also makes all of my expenses pointless (or more precisely, the five hundred and forty yen I used). Speaking of my expenses, I think I won't be able to recover them for a long time.

On the other hand, for the forgetful detective, whose memories reset every day, she would not consider the time we wasted as something that could not be recovered.

Even though she must go back to her job after solving this case.

As her comrade, I feel that I am a little responsible.

"Damn. If I weren't that shy and if I had scrutinized your back more thoroughly, maybe I would have found other clues..."

"Ah ah ah. You have a strange way of having regrets, Araragi-kun."

Kyouko-san said, trying to elude my joke.

⁸ Three different readings of the number 2320. Each digit can be associated with multiple sounds: 2 = ni/fu/tsuu, 3 = sa/san, 0 = re/o/maru.

“It’s alright. You didn’t overlook something, Araragi-kun. I know that you are the kind of man who put away his shyness and who looked at every scrap of my back.”

She approved of my behaviour.

Like she gave me a stamp.

“Is that so? My power just reached its full potential I guess. But if we didn’t overlook anything, what should we do? What do you think is the meaning of ‘2320’?”

Is it something other than just a pun?

Not that I have the slightest idea.

“No, it is not necessary to look for a pun. It’s sufficient to look at the digits. As a combination for something.”

Please, look over there.

Kyouko-san then guided me to the location she was pointing at. It was a different direction from the train platform, she was pointing at coin lockers.

Coin lockers.

A locker where you can put your luggage and keep it safe by protecting it with a code. The kind of system where you can use a 100-yen coin to lock and release it.

No.

This is the old one. Nowadays, you can lock it using not only coins.

Kyouko-san extended her finger and said.

“One can use this IC card for many different things. I think that we could also use it as a key to lock and unlock these, don’t you think?”

And now for the epilogue, or rather, the punchline of this story.

After Kyouko-san learned that you can use IC cards on vending machines, she mentioned that the card was “the key”. You might be wondering what kind of events unfolded after and what kind of things I witnessed.

After I informed her of the contents of the shopping list written on her back, Kyouko-san made several assumptions. Among all of them was one saying that the truth was maybe hidden in that list. At the same time, it’s not good to make too many assumptions.

What happened in reality is that the coin locker n°2320 was in use, meaning that the lock was activated. Kyouko-san unlocked it using the IC card she had in her pocket.

Just like it was the most natural thing to do.

And then, unexpectedly, inside the coin locker was a copy of a business card addressed to the “Head of the Okitegami Detective Agency, Okitegami Kyouko” along with a bronze statue that was stolen from the museum in a neighboring town the other day. No, in truth, I only heard about this robbery, without any details.

“I see. So this time, the job I accepted was to get this bronze statue back. Seeing the statue here, this means that I already fulfilled the request. I must have felt relieved and fell asleep on the bench where you found me.”

“Relieved... That’s why you decided to leave a note to yourself, because your memories were going to be reset.”

Hearing this, I wanted to ask myself some questions. This is the humor I’m inclined to use now, the kind that makes you feel depressed.⁹ Rereading the memo she left, I really don’t understand what it means and I still have a lot of questions. At the same time, this is one of those cases where your only goal was to challenge the mystery and decipher the code. Regarding the coin lockers and the vending machines, it was an idea that only the “Kyouko-san of yesterday” could have. She had to think really fast to come up with a way of making herself find the codes. This was really well done. On top of that, the truth was also not that simple.

It was really a work of art. It wasn’t the kind of standard job where you just need to find a stolen object and get it back to its owner. On the contrary, it’s easy to imagine that once you located the criminal, you would need to have a pragmatic and very strict negotiation with him. A necessary condition to get back the stolen object is to try not to prosecute the criminal. Because if you do, then you will have to forget it, like Kyouko-san.

If I try to remember and think back about the bench Kyouko-san was sleeping on, in Namishiro Park, her glasses were put alongside her hair. This means that before going to sleep, she naturally removed them. When she showed me her back, she naturally removed her underwear. If we consider these two occurrences, we can conclude that she didn’t carelessly fall asleep on this bench but rather did it on purpose.

⁹ There is a similarity in the pronunciation of ややもする (*yayamosuru*, “to be inclined”) and もやもやする (*moyamoyasuru*, “to feel depressed”).

She intentionally decided to forget what she had found.

By forgetting, she could regain the stolen goods.

A job only the forgetful detective could accomplish.

At least that's the way I think.

However, if it were the case, Kyouko-san would forget everything including her transactions with the criminal. She would not be able to use her imagination.

In the end, we will never know why she felt relieved and decided to have a nap. That is the conclusion I reached, not as a high schooler, but as an adult.

“Thank you very much, Araragi-kun. You've been a great help. Well then, I will now go back to my place.”

The business card that was put inside the coin locker along with the bronze statue was Kyouko-san's. Since the location of the Okitegami Detective Agency was written on it, she decided to go back over there.

Now, the fact that the business card was also in the coin locker along with the bronze statue indicates that this was a navigation help for her return trip. If by any chance she didn't solve the code by herself, she probably would have handed one of her business cards to the station attendant. What a contrived way of doing things. She also thought of the case where she missed the coin locker, or made a mistake on the code, or decided to ride the train at 23:20, or the event she didn't notice the coin locker until late at night. She really thought about every possibility.

She was very thorough in her preparations.

She is really confident in her work.

“Sorry for bothering you for so long.”

“It's nothing. It was like solving a game, the kind where you need to solve riddles. It was very interesting.”

“Thank you, I really appreciate it. Please tell me how I can thank you, to keep a memory of that day.”

“Can you show me your back one more time?”

“Ah ah ah, not this kind of request.”

While laughing, Kyouko-san took the bronze statue as well as her business card, and instead of putting them in the pocket of her denim skirt, she held them out in my direction.

“As far as I saw, you must have experienced many ups and downs in your life, Araragi-kun. Whenever you need, please don’t hesitate to call me, the forgetful detective. For anything really, since I will forget all about it afterwards.”

“Right. I’ll keep that in mind, in case of an emergency.”

Now that it’s done, I need to go back home. I’ll take the train. I went to Minaminao Station, from there I walked towards Namishiro Park, took my bike and rode it until I was back.

Since the line I had to take was different from the one Kyouko-san took, we branched off at the stairs.

I didn’t meet her again since that day.

No, even if I had met her, she would have completely forgotten about it.

Precisely because we parted in very good terms, I thought that we would naturally meet again someday, but perhaps my reading of the atmosphere was off.

Of course, since then I wouldn’t say that I didn’t encounter any “emergency” in my life. A lot of things happened and a lot of things disappeared.

Nevertheless, the first reason why I didn’t ask for Kyouko-san’s help is because I was so focused on repaying the debts I had with my little sisters that I didn’t have enough money to ask for a professional detective. The second reason is that I lost the business card that Kyouko-san obtained after a lot of trouble.

Losing her business card is one of the most non-polite things I have ever done. Even now, I don’t remember where I lost it. It was like I wasn’t worthy of possessing such a card from the beginning. Like the memories of the moments I shared with Kyouko-san were wrong.

Like my meeting with Kyouko-san was the work of an oddity.

Well, I wouldn't say that I have a good memory.

Maybe I put it inside one of my drawers. I still remember what we talked about, with Kyouko-san, the fact you need to cherish your past while not losing sight of the present. I should probably also try to keep a memorandum. Maybe later.

It seems that I still retain some memories of these events, or at least some feelings. Indeed, on my way back from school, when buying something from a vending machine, it happens that I buy the new special drink without paying attention, even today.

Just like I was remembering.



M A Z E M O N O G A T A R I

KYOUKO BALANCE — CHAPTER OBLIVION

TRANSLATION: NYOREM

DESIGN: BLUEX

MADE IT HAPPEN: MAXDEFOLSCH