

The bet

"I HATE MY GODDAMNED LIFE!" was what high school pupil Green Najotake would love to announce at the top of her voice in the overcrowded streets of Tokyo – but she refrained from doing so. After all, it would end up quite embarrassingly. Even though this did not seem so important to her at the moment... She had a different problem!

One, which was more important, one, which did not so often occur: Green slept in for not only five minutes but two hours. She was actually always punctual; after all, the girl paid the school fees herself, and therefore also wanted to get everything which she paid money for. But no, she had overslept.

Probably this would not have happened, if Green would not have had a strange dream... She usually never remembered a dream at all. But this time, she still knew everything up to the smallest detail.

Green ran up the stairs to the school's entrance, skipped a couple of steps and ran into the building. Her run only came to a halt again when she had arrived in front of her class door. The girl folded her hands, closed her eyes and breathed in deeply. With a friendly smile she stepped into the class and said: "Good morning, everyone!"

Her teacher turned his concentration with an annoyed expression from the blackboard to the girl and gave Green a hard and stern look, while she still looked at him with an innocent smile and big eyes anyway.

"Good Morning", you say? It is almost noon!" She simply bowed and answered: "I am sorry, sensei! I have overslept ...my stupid alarm clock..." Green just wanted to take a swing for further excuses (all of them lies, naturally), when the teacher interrupted her and asked her to sit down on her respective seat in class. Green was quite lucky under the circumstances: Since she was a first timer, she didn't have to stand in front of the door.

She sat down on her seat, not without exchanging quick looks with her best friend. That one's name was Shojoki Minazai, but most people called her Sho anyway. She had long red hair, which was always tied into a ponytail, and brown eyes. She was the leader of the school's magazine and well...the richest girl in school, since her parents conducted a software company.

But her vast amount of money was not the reason why Green befriended her. The two girls had lived under one roof for several years, they were like sisters. Eventually Green had

decided she had to stand on her own feet and therefore moved out, even if she did enjoy staying with them.

Why didn't Green live at her own parent's house? The answer was simple: Green was an orphan, and not even Japanese at that. The family Minazaii had taken her in, and even adopted her because their children got along so very well. Green had lived in an orphanage in Germany before that – which was 5 years ago.

Green tried to follow the lesson, but this proved to be more difficult than assumed. Like many others she loathed math. She could not work with all these numbers and rules, and particularly not with all these "logical" rules. The person who was sitting in the desk next to hers did not have the same problem. Green stole a glance out of the corner of her eye at him:

Gary Ookido. The classes' striver. He was quite tacit, and if he said something, it was most of the time a little bit offending. And this hair! A horror! He looked as if he had gotten under a lawn-mower, because his deep brown hair totally stuck out. Gary always had a very serious look on his features, not once had she seen a smile. But one thing Green had to admit - even if she did not like him that much - he had beautiful eyes. A deep green.

Gary noticed that she looked at him and pointed at the blackboard to tell her that she should rather follow the lesson instead of staring at him. Green did not react, but looked into the other direction stubbornly. She knew *exactly* why she did not like him.

When the bell finally rang to everyone's relief, Green immediately jumped up and went over to Sho. Said one just picked up her bento and asked Green whether she wanted to eat with her somewhere outside the school's building or not.

It was already the end of September; however, summery temperatures were still around - and therefore Green had nothing to object, even if she hadn't brought her own bento today. The two girls sat down under a tree in the schoolyard.

"What was the real reason you overslept, Green? It never happens to you, you know..."

"This was just what I wanted to talk about with you! I had a strange dream."

Sho looked up from her lunch.

"Dream? What kind? Did you dream your bank account would be empty?"

Green looked at her almost horrified.

"Do not paint the devil to the wall! I am already terrified of the next rent now ... I do not want to go into debt! That would be gruesome...! Awful!"

"You really don't worry about anything else...Everything is all right as long as you have some money, and it's the end of the world if you have none!"

"Money rules the world! That's just it. But even so, it's not the topic now!"

Sho nodded with an agreed expression and poked a little unenthusiastically at her bento.

"Yes, exactly, you were going to tell me about your dream. Did a handsome guy play the main role?" her friend asked with a grin. Typical for Sho: really, in her head she barely thought about anything else besides the opposite sex.

"No, Sho. It wasn't *your* dream."

"Naah. Don't put me on the rack like this - tell me~!" Green breathed in deeply and complied:

"Okay...I was in some black nothingness an-"

"Most dreams start like that", Sho interrupted Green.
But she did not pay attention to it and continued unflustered:

"...and while being lost and searching some way out of it, I listened to a conversation, but I was only able to make out the voices, I just couldn't see anybody. Then, there were two persons. A woman and a man. The woman was like the silence itself, contrary to him -- he was rather outraged. They talked about a "fault", a "fault" the woman committed apparently...I couldn't understand it all that well, you know? It was very chopped and disjointed, inaudible and severed...But the woman's voice felt familiar somehow! I cannot say why...or where I heard this voice before. However, it was so strangely familiar..."

"Did they mention any names?"

"Ahem...no. Not as far as I could understand. Only...well..."*Hikari*". But in that context it was not...a *name*...but rather a *term*, you know? What I heard was quite strange anyway. Some girl had survived against the will of the man ... and there was a spell circle mentioned ... something about demons and war ... something about *Wächter*..."

"Green, this surely sounds to me like an overdose of fantasy games!"

"I knew you'd say something like that. But I wasn't even finished! So...suddenly the voices were gone and I was alone, alone again in the void. But then I suddenly heard a noise ...oh Sho, I tell you, I've never heard anything that beautiful before! It was a little bell, the ring of a little bell! I am absolutely sure of that...and the tone was so dazzling, so calming...I just had the feeling the tone wanted to lead me to something. And I followed. I went on and on into the void until ..."

"-you woke up...?"

"I'd wish it would have been that way! But no...instead the darkness vanished, the tone disappeared...and ..." Green's voice trailed off.

"And ..?"

"Everything around me was suddenly consumed by fire, I heard cries, wailings and entreaties all around me...and I could see shapes in between the flames, engaged in a grim fight. Sho, it resembled a battlefield. But it got even stranger ... my hand was suddenly taken - and when I turned around I saw a young man. But I cannot remember his appearance any more. I tried to break free and yelled at him to let me go. I even know what I said back then, but I don't know what I *meant* by saying it: "Onii-chan, let go of me! They're still out there - something will happen to them! Let me go!" I dreamed I had an older brother!" Sho looked at her thoughtfully, but said nothing, and Green continued:

"He led me through the flames until somebody, no...there were *two* of them...hindered us. My "brother" stood protectively in front of me and talked insistently to them. One grinned nastily and the other one did not react ... I couldn't make out their features, I just couldn't recognize that much with all these burning flames and glimmering light around me. Even so...the one that didn't react...seemed also familiar to me. But I have no idea as to where I could have seen him before! I only know quite certainly that I *have* seen him before!"
"And what happened then?"

"Nothing...I woke up abruptly after that. But the dream still feels so real to me ... when I think of that battlefield, I can still hear the cries in my ears..."

Both girls were silent for a brief moment.

Sho folded her arms and some wrinkles appeared on her forehead:

"Strange dream, Green! You've surely watched too much anime, that's probably the reason you seemed to know that one guy! I bet he's in a series you've watched before."

The brown haired girl looked up.

"You think so?"

"Well, is there any other explanation?"

Green looked thoughtfully at the ground again, and before she could answer properly the bell rang and the two students got up to go to their next class.

"Don't think about it too much, Green. I am sure the dream didn't mean a thing, we all dream feeble-mindedness!" Sho said with a bright smile, but she knew that it wouldn't help her friend all that much. She had never heard her friend telling stories so enthusiastically. The dream had drawn her into its spell, Green's intonation made that quite obvious. But she had seen it particularly in her eyes - when she had talked about the sound of this little bell. She had been somewhere else...far away from Sho, on the other side, in another world...

Both girls didn't know that someone had observed them and listened to the conversation. This person knew more than Sho and Green indeed. He knew - or rather suspected - what this dream had meant, and it told him that it was about time to act. He'd waited for a long time, and a part of him had already believed that day would never come.

His eyes trailed after Green, they followed her delicate body and her waist-length nut brown hair. He looked at her big deep blue eyes for a long time. They radiated self-confidence and joy for life, but she had it hard nevertheless to find friends. The cause of that was due to her natural scepticism. Green did not trust anyone unconditionally. One had to earn that. Strictly speaking she only had Sho in her life - even when it came to her adoptive parents she was unwilling to trust them completely.

He turned away from Green's sight and came out of his hiding-place. After all, he did not want to miss the next class.

It started to rain when Green began to roller-skate her way back home. The weather caused her to get soaked to the bone when she finally arrived in front of the door to her flat. Before she got her key out she dried her hair and took off her roller skates to avoid the mud which would make her flat untidy.

When she finally put the key into the lock, Green noticed that the door was already unlocked. This could mean only one thing.

Someone was inside and they were after her money.

And this somebody would have to pay dearly for it!

Silent as a mouse, Green opened the door and sneaked in. The light was switched on and she heard someone's...eating noises?! Burglars made use of her refrigerator? That one was already poor enough anyway!

Green crept slowly around the corner and a girl's face popped up hardly a centimetre away from hers. Said girl was so startled about Green's sudden appearance that she staggered a couple of metres backwards and fell on the ground then.

"For devil's sake, who are you?! And even more importantly: What are you doing in my flat...and why are you eating my chocolate?!" Green asked filled with indignation, when she noticed that the girl held her complete stock of chocolate bars in her arms. The girl clung to

the chocolate as if it was her last anchor to keep her stable. The head of the household took some time to get a better look of the little burglar girl.

The burglar was younger than her, perhaps thirteen or fourteen, and had tied her blond hair into two long pigtails; there were even some pinkish ribbons weaved into them.

She had big blue eyes and wore a pink dress.

"...I couldn't help it! Chocolate-kun...he was so lonely! I couldn't let him stay here all alone!"

Green looked at the girl with an unconvinced look on her face accompanied by arched eyebrows and said: "Which lunatic asylum did you break out of, then?" Before the girl could even reply, Green pulled on the burglar's arms roughly and dragged her in the front door's direction.

"I have no idea how you came in, but I know how you'll get out! My flat is not a psych ward for crazy blond-haired girls!" Yet the girl clung to her arm tightly and began to sob:

"But Green-chan!"

"We don't know each other -- so do not call me by my first name! Let go of my arm and disappear!"

"You're crushing Chocolate-kun!"

"For all I care, you may take the chocolate with you - but disappear!" Green opened the door to the flat and finally managed to detangle herself from the girl's tight grip. A bit roughly Green pushed the burglar out into the stairwell. This action caused the girl to drop her bag; its contents diffused onto the tiles. Green wanted to apologize, but just then her gaze fell upon an object, and for a reason unknown to herself her heartbeat seemed to quicken.

It was a little bell.

It seemed to be made of gold and had little white wings. As if she'd been hypnotized, Green reached out to hold it, but the other girl was faster and clasped it.

"May I finally come in, Green-chan?" Green turned to the other girl, but did not look into the girl's face but onto the little bell, which was clasped in her hands. Stubbornly she shook her head and indicated that the burglar might as well come in again.

Said girl's sulking face was something Green overlooked gracefully.

The door fell into its hinges and the girl was all over her chocolate again, when Green asked: "Who are you? What do you want from me? And...what kind of thing...is this..." Green's voice trailed off when she said the last part. She could not understand why this little bell captured her attention so much. All her senses were fixated on it and Green knew that it would only stop if she held the little bell in her hands. Her soul seemed to cry out for it as if the little bell would be the salvation of death itself. She *wanted* to have it - no, she *had* to have it!

The younger girl sat down on Green's sofa in the meantime and responded to Green's question: "People call me Pink!" The older girl nodded only casually as if she would not hear it. Her thoughts revolved solely around the little bell. Pink seemed to notice that, because then she opened her hand and held out the little bell to Green invitingly.

"Take it~!" Green did not even hear it. She had already extended her hands towards it. But before she could reach it, she suddenly heard a voice speaking into her head:

"Do not take it! If you have touched the little bell once, there's no way back! Please, I beg you, don't do this to you! Don't yield to your destiny!"

It was the familiar woman's voice from Green's dream -- what the hell did this mean?! The little bell was only a few centimetres away from her now, her fingertips almost touched it and her whole body - and her soul yearned for this little object. She could not pull her hands back, it was impossible.

"I'll take my destiny into my own hands!" With those words she put both hands around it and it began to ring loudly. The same beautiful sound she had heard in her dream – yes, it was exactly the same...the little bell's ringing radiated a warm, soothing light. It felt as if it would embrace her. The light encompassed Green and engraved itself on her skin then, but strangely enough there was no pain. On the contrary: It was a lovely feeling of warmth and security. But the glistening light suddenly changed its colour. It was no longer white but black instead. For a brief moment the whole room was dipped in black, till the little bell sucked in the darkness and fell to the ground – the magic was over.

Green's breathing had accelerated and she did not find herself on the sofa any more but instead on the floor of her flat. She stared at the little bell which lay in front of her feet. It looked different from before; the white little wings were pitch black now.

"What...the hell..."

"Boah! That looked so cooooool! I've never seen such a light show before! Even if pinkish light would have been better..." Green looked up at Pink for brief moment, but said nothing. She extended her hand towards the little bell and looked at it once again.

"What kind of thing is this?"

"I forgot its exact name...it was too long and complicated..."

Green pulled her eyebrows up once again and tried to get some more information out of the girl: "Do you know what kind of light this was, then?"

"Well, magic, wasn't it?"

Green shook the head and slapped her flat hand to her forehead. She would most likely not get any useful information out of this girl. Not when Pink had no idea at all.

"Magic", Green repeated and thought back to her dream again. Everything she had experienced was too connected for this to be an illusion...this woman...the little bell... While Green was trying to understand the situation, Pink jumped up and opened a door to another room.

"This one room here's empty, may I keep it as my own?" The flat owner looked up.

"*Pardon?* Do you want to live here?"

"Why not?"

"Because this here *is my* flat and I live alone -- understood? Don't you have a home?"

The little girl shook the head and her pigtails swung to and fro.

"Do you have a family?" She shook the head once again.

"Why should I permit you to live with me? Can you pay a part of the rent?"

"Rent?" Pink blinked cutely.

"So much about that..." One thing was clear to Green now: Pink was thick.

"Well, you'll need my support in the upcoming fights!"

"Your support? In a fight against...*what?*" Pink breathed in deeply, raised her hand and then clenched her fist full of drive and drove it into the air. Her eyes shone with energy.

"In a fight against demons of course!"

Green looked at her now as if she was a raving lunatic. Then she laughed briefly.

"Yes, of course! Demons! I admit that this dream, the light show and the woman were all a bit weird - but demons? Look for a different person you can show your little bells off to and tell them about your demons!"

"B-but! What do you mean? *You* are the one that *has* to kill them..."

Green lifted up the forefinger and answered:

"I *have to do* nothing. What I mean by saying that? Simple Pinki: I'll go take a shower now. You may sleep here tonight – but tomorrow, when I get up and go to school, you'll be gone and disappear from my life along with your special effects and demons. Do I have to repeat myself or did you understand what I just said?"

Pink's eyes filled with tears, she pulled her lips tightly together and then cried

"HOW CAN YOU BE SO AWFUL TO MEEEEEE?"

With these words the blond-haired girl turned round and ran into the empty room.

The next morning she had actually disappeared. Green was quite surprised. She didn't think she'd get rid of the girl that easily. Nevertheless, a guilty conscience because of the girl remained. Because...if she had said the truth, she had no family and no home...and a girl like her? Alone in Tokyo?

Green shook her head, this was not her problem. She would try to erase yesterday's experiences from her memory. She did not want to think about the girl and everything she seemed to link to. But her plan seemed to be harder to achieve than she had imagined, because Pink had left something: the little bell. It lay on the coffee table and shone in the morning sun.

Green stared at the little piece of jewellery for a short moment and ignored the "pling" of the toaster. Without paying any attention to her breakfast, she returned into her bedroom and came out a few seconds later with a silver necklace. She could not explain what moved her to fasten the little bell onto the necklace and put it on afterwards. Green simply did it. It was almost as if she did it out of instinct...

With the little bell around her neck and a lubricated toast in her mouth, Green made her way to school. Since the building was not far away from her flat, she wore roller skates and buzzed over the pavement instead of taking public transportation – because that would mean wasting money. Before she reached school she finished her toast and calculated the monthly invoices silently. Yesterday was almost forgotten, only the new weight of the little bell reminded her of the changes yesterday had brought upon her.

There was not much going on in school yet, since it was still quite early. No one would get up this early voluntarily – Green was also not an early riser, but she always dressed quickly and reached her destinations in time. Her homeroom was also completely empty when she entered it. That was a little bit surprising, since Gary was always the first one at school. After all, he was legitimately the class striver.

Green had hardly put her bag down when the door opened and said striver stood in the doorway. His features looked eased for a short moment, until he saw Green in front of himself. His face twisted at a moment's notice and his eyes stared at Green as if she were an extraterrestrial one. Green did not understand the feelings shown on his face, because she did not only see surprise, but also some kind of hostility. Almost hate...okay, they weren't on best terms before, but he had never looked at her so negatively.

Just when the girl wanted to ask him whether she had something on the face or whether she had done something to him, he suddenly stood in front of her. Green was not even being able to *blink*. How could he be so fast...?!

Gary grabbed her wrist harshly and roughly turned her towards the window, where the morning sun entered the room. "Tell me, are you able to look straight into the sun?" Green finally galvanized her voice back to activity: "Excuse me?! Are you okay up there?!" "Just answer me!"

"Let go of me, Ookido!" When the words left her mouth, he let go of her. And at first she thought he would have done that because she told him to; but this had not been the reason. Gary had already released her in the middle of her sentence, but once again he stared at her, this time at nothing but the little jewellery which was fastened around her neck. The little bell had slipped from her top and this little thing seemed to capture his eyes.

Green did not have the faintest idea any more. Gary had always seemed a little suspicious to her, but he'd never behaved this strangely. "Ookido?" Her voice did not seem to reach him; but the opening of the classroom door did.

"Good morning, Green! The first lesson got cancelled...oh, did I interrupt something?"

A grin briefly covered Sho's face, which astonished Green. That was, until she noticed how close she and Gary stood. It was close enough to be misunderstood. For Sho it was certainly enough. She grinned more broadly than a Cheshire cat. Green immediately strode towards her friend. "Don't think what you just thought - because it was not like that!"

"I never have the wrong thoughts, Green, ou!" The brown-haired girl looked at Gary, waiting for some support, but he continued looking at her as if she were his enemy number one. When he noticed her pleading look, he turned around without saying a word and sat down in his seat. What was the matter?

Hardly seven hours later the same question occurred during the training for rhythmical gymnastics. Green had been on the rhythmical gymnastics team for long time and had joined after seeing a tournament on television when she was a child. She was mesmerized by the moment she laid eyes on gymnasts: The girls seemed to float over the ground easily and with carelessness she had rarely seen before...the ribbons around them circulated as if they were wings. No one is born a master and Green was no exception. One could not claim that she was a natural prodigy, and therefore she trained hard to someday be able to float over the ground just like those girls she admired.

However, today she just seemed to have these wings. It was suddenly easier for her to imitate the movements of the pre-gymnast and she did not once lose her balance. She just listened to the music, internalized its flow and adapted to it without any problems. Her feet and hands seemed to have lightened; they moved gently through the air and wielded the pink-coloured ribbon. Green had closed her eyes and moved only with the music, without taking note of her surroundings.

Only when the music came to a sudden halt, the given wings dissolved into thin air and Green came back to reality at once. Everyone's eyes lay on Green – without exception; they had stopped their own training when they noticed the unusual performance. Green didn't understand the sudden attention at all. The girls seemed to be impressed, some with a glint of envy in their young eyes; and the teacher's face was a teary mess. "Najotake-san!" she said in an intonation as if Green would be a salvation sent from God. Green only swallowed, and was absolutely speechless when her teacher took her hands and assured her that she would become a great gymnast with her support.

In that moment, she wondered for the second time that day about her life. And even half an hour later, refreshed and with a newly tied ponytail, the feeling that something was different hadn't disappeared; even so, she had to head home from the gymnasium first. Green bent over to tie her roller skates, and tried to find a reason behind the "weird feeling" ...it was, as if she had become a completely different person.

"Let us bet!" When that voice was heard on the empty school playground, Green had just finished tying her roller skates, and rose slowly to find out whether the person had spoken to her or to someone else. Just like Green had feared, its origin was the little girl she just wanted to forget about. Unfortunately, this didn't work as well as she desired, because Green immediately remembered her name. Out of pure reluctance Green had the desire to give Pink a rough answer, but her curiosity was aroused. Green had something for games of every kind; particularly if *money* was involved.

"What will you give me if I win?" Green asked the girl sceptically; after all, she stood there with legs apart in the sun just in front of her, and had a rather childish appearance. Pink rummaged in her bag and showed something – Green's jaw-bone dropped instantly. Pink had actually pulled a diamond bracelet out of that stupid bag of hers. As if stung by a bumble-bee, Green buzzed towards Pink and stood in front of her in a second. The expert had already taken the piece of jewellery and held it into the sun, before Pink could react. Her astonishment magnified when she noticed the diamonds of the bracelet were 30 carat. She had never held something that valuable in her hands and Green was quite sure she would never have this opportunity again. Did Pink have any idea of this jewellery's *value*?

"And...what are we betting about...?"

Green did *not* intend to explain Pink the value. *At all.*

"We are betting that there are demons out there!" Pink exclaimed.

For the first time since Green had seen the diamonds, she looked up and shot Pink a look.

There was a brief silence; even Pink seemed to be serious once.

"Are you serious about this?" The young girl nodded.

"And what do you want *me* to give *you*? Taken, that *you* win?"

Green had to suppress a grin.

The diamonds were already hers.

"I want you to kill the demon, and all demons that come after the first one."

This time Green couldn't suppress her grin.

"After the first one? Is there a nest?" Pink thought for a mere moment.

"Nyuuuu~ no! They're from the demon world!"

"Sure, Pink. Well, then convince me of your monsters." Pink nodded eagerly.

She didn't understand why Green did not take her seriously at all.

The girl took Green's hand, as if they were schoolmates since first grade, and walked into the open street. Green didn't protest one bit; after all, she had a diamond in view. How did Pink get it, anyway? She did not seem particularly prosperous. She did not even look as if she knew what money was used for. What did such a lone girl in the streets of Tokyo - with her demon-tour and all?

Without complaining she went on with Pink, still wearing her roller skates; but after some time, the sky started to darken. Green wondered how Pink wanted to prove the existence of demons...was it just like in the innumerable novels and movies? That they could only be seen during night-time? Pink's ways were totally incomprehensible. She selected to walk in Tokyo's little lanes, sometimes the main streets; then again lanes or the underground. Did this girl really have an idea?! Of something!?

"Pink..." Green started a conversation for the first time in three hours. This quest had gone too far. Her feet were aching and she regretted *deeply* that she hadn't already bought new roller skates. Her current ones were too small for her to wear for long periods of time.

"Are you sure that you know where---"

She did not succeed in finishing her sentence, because her words were suffocated with surprise when the little bell began to shine. Green fumbled with her shirt, and pulled the bell out; however, it did not only shine but also made noises. It rang in a shrill manner, almost in a yelling fashion. Green looked shocked from the bell to Pink; that was when she noticed that no one, not a single person in the human crowd, seemed to react to the rather loud racket.

"Does it ring?" Pink asked, just when Green wanted to voice her own question: *What the hell was going on?*

"Yes? Are you deaf or something? You can't possibly ignore this noise!"

The younger girl got even more serious; nevertheless, her childish face lessened that effect.

"I can only see its shine - no one but you can hear it!"

"What the--?!“ Once again, Green's hand was taken and this time the grip was rough.

"Tell me if it gets louder!" Green doubted Pink's words for a second, but then she actually noticed the sound of the little bell increased from time to time.

"We have to go in the other direction! The bell shines brightest when we face the west", Green stated. Pink stopped and looked over her shoulder back at Green.

"What does 'west' mean?" Green was too confused at the moment to get irritated about this statement. She simply showed her the direction and they changed roles. This time Pink did not drag her; everything seemed reversed.

Green, now the leader of the two, hardly paid attention to her environment; she was suddenly totally fixated on the little bell and its sound - and therefore not capable of concentrating on other things as well. She went on through the crowd, further and further, following the strange sound which would lead them to their destination...

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