

# Soft Whisperings

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*In a world of war between races, 12 year old Tomoki sets off on a journey to save his brother. Joining with many others of different kinds and with different aims, they must work with each other to try and achieve what they wish.*

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# 1 - In a lonely village...

In the lone world of Sphania, a place with no other worlds nearby to influence it, the beautiful land is seemingly split up between the different races. First with the creation of the earth came the spirits, immortal beings born from the earth and its elements. Next gradually grew the animals, some species with the ability to take a different appearance as well as their own. This appearance became known as 'human'. From these animals that could take on this appearance, evolved a new type of animal, and as it could only take on form, that of the human, that is what this species became known by.

From the humans' birth, things in this once peaceful world started to go wrong. At first, the humans kept in their own areas, the cities, towns and villages, keeping an agreement to leave the animals and spirits at peace. But then the machines, the robots were created. At first they were an advancement in technology. But soon, as they became more and more advanced, robots became their own race, with their own minds. They no longer needed humans to exist.

Taking many of the human cities for their own, they destroyed all life in their path. Although they were not alive, they could have almost real emotions, make decisions for themselves. They were the new, the most advanced race, creating any form of warrior to fight battles for them. Instead of joining forces, the spirits, animals and humans only grew more far apart. Feeling the humans had betrayed them by bringing evil to their world, some spirits formed a hatred for humans as well as the robots. Most species of animals tried to keep to themselves, hiding in the depths of the forests and seas, but many were captured or whole clans massacred. In this way, many species were wiped out totally. The only kind daring enough to fight the robots back was the great wolf pack, one of the few animal species who could take the human form also, but they were easily defeated and driven back into the forest.

The robots became more and more cruel in gaining their territory; they used brutal torture, and secretly placed robot genes inside some human children so that as they grew older they would slowly and unknowingly turn into robots, and after a year of becoming fully a robot they would not know their old self. Soon all but one of the cities had been taken over by the robots.

But the humans started to fight back. Somewhere near to the top of the top of the mountain, the humans had built an experimenting lab. A lab for the robots. Here, they would capture any humans that had just become robots, testing on them to see if they could be stopped. They would then destroy them before they forgot their old self, sometimes using cruel methods of torture, taking all their anger out on their situation on this earth.

An old fairy tale spoke of this mountain, how at the top lived something powerful enough to destroy all this hatred, or cause even more. But few believed this story. It was only told to children, to give them hope that a better world might be created for them. Still, the world could not stay like this and be peaceful. Their world would have to change drastically, or else be destroyed by war.

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The days were getting darker. Tomoki covered his eyes, the dust whirling in the sharp breeze, which brushed his hair and clothes gently. Climbing down the ladder quickly after saying a swift goodbye to his parents, he stumbled, barely seeing through his tears, which flowed down his red cheeks, flushed from the cold.

Tightening his hands around the straps of his bag, he continued his walk to school. It was an uneventful journey, as usual. The same as every day here. By no means could his life be considered unhappy. His family loved him. He lived in a comfortable house, in fact one of the most beautiful in the whole village, his family owned a large business based in the human city. There had been many reasons as to why they had moved from the city to this remote village before Tomoki had been born. There they had lived in a modern and spacious apartment, but had not felt contented, and so had moved to the small village of Vakeni. Surrounded by a forest of gentle spirits and animals, the humans built tree houses, sometimes a hundred feet in the treetops. They had here little contact with the outside world. Rich enough, the Sakeyri family had sold their business and moved. One reason they had moved though, was for the safety of their oldest son, the most loved in their whole world. His name was Echospheramay, a name used for only the most treasured of all.

He seemed perfect in almost every way. His parents poured gifts upon him, but he appeared not at all spoiled. He was the cleverest in his class, the most artistic, the best at sport and the best looking. Every girl in his class, and even some of the boys, were desperate to go out with him, but he coolly refused each. That was what was strange about him. He had no friends. He could have anyone he chose, but he preferred to be alone. His behaviour seemed so... cold. He was not unkind, but showed little to emotion to anyone. But the one person who adored him most in the world, more than his parents, his 'fan club', was Tomoki.

The one person Tomoki loved most in the world, like so many others, was Echospheramay. Always his idol, his most desperate wish was to be just like him. But how unlike he was. Echospheramay was beautiful, whereas Tomoki shared none of these looks, or his cleverness either. He had tried to grow his hair long like his brothers, but unlike the soft chocolate hair, which fell gracefully around his shoulders, Tomoki's black hair was rough, straggly, and messy looking. Despite being desperate to have a friend, Tomoki had none. No one seemed to want to get to know him, he was always referred to as "Echospheramay's brother" or "The other Sakeyri child". And how he longed for a friend, spent the hours alone in his room while everyone else was outside playing. But despite how much Tomoki adored him, Echospheramay would offer him no comfort. Tomoki would wonder if he even cared for him at all. But he never lost faith in him, stopped believing he could one day be just like him, be loved by everyone.

So, why was it that this boy was crying? The reason was his older brother. For a reason unknown only to himself, this morning Echospheramay had been rude and even colder towards Tomoki this morning. Each little mistake or blunder he criticised, and he left before Tomoki, strange as he usually walked with him to the school. Feeling utterly rejected, Tomoki's eyes faced the floor as he continued his journey. He looked up briefly, as he passed the group of six dead trees, branches waving miserably in the wind. They had been like this for as long as anyone could remember, and no one had ever made the effort to cut them down. People said that a tree spirit lived there, in the form of a young girl named Fawn. Abandoned there by her parents, the girl had caused the trees around her to die and they stayed there in her loneliness. But Tomoki rarely believed in such tales. Like his brother, he found things hard to believe unless he saw them with his own eyes. Averting his gaze back to the floor, he passed the trees, but suddenly stopped as he heard a loud piercing sound, coming from further down the path. The noise was unbearable; it felt like his head was going to split. High pitched, it sounded like someone screaming in pain... yet at the same time, it was beautiful, terrifyingly beautiful. His bag waving loosely

on his back, he sprinted ahead, trying to find the source of the sound; it seemed to be coming from everywhere.

Other people were running too, running with guns in their hands, loading them with bullets. After a minute or so, Tomoki reached a crowd of people, out of breath. A man was aiming a gun and as he fired, the noise stopped as suddenly as it had begun, as if its life had been sucked out of it. Silence fell over the crowd.

Tomoki pushed his way to the front; surprised people were letting him through without trouble, although many worried looks came in his direction.

"It's Tomoki. His brother." Someone said. Tomoki suddenly felt his feet slipping, and he looked down to find his shoes stained crimson, blood was trickling slowly through the crowd. Running faster and faster, it seemed like the sea of people would never end. But as he broke through, a horrifying sight met his eyes. It was the body of a 16-year-old boy, and he had been shot in several places around his neck. Blood had leaked out into the crowd, from his wounds, his mouth, but by now the flow had stopped, the boy lying in a glistening pool. His eyes were wide open, but staring at something unseen. Tomoki took a shaky step forward.

"Get away from him!" a man yelled, aiming his gun once more at the dead body. "I'll shoot!"

In a burst of tears Tomoki ran forward, throwing his arms around the body, shaking in his sobs. Burying his face into the soft hair of the older boy, his tears fell on the floor, mixing with the blood and dampening his blood stained shirt.

"Get out of the way! You'll be shot!" The man yelled again, the gun in his hand shaking with him.

"You can't..." Tomoki couldn't face him, his eyes closed tightly and holding the boy's body as best as he could in his arms. " Why?" He whispered.

"Why have you killed my brother?"

## 2 - Promises

A voice was calling, calling in Tomoki's head. He could hear nothing else, not the shouts of the people or the shots of the gun. It was a voice that he loved, treasured. It was the voice of his brother.

"Tomoki... I'm sorry. Your brother can no longer be with you... As he is not who you think he is anymore. Not the one you love. He is gone. I cannot be with you anymore. I'm sorry. Please forgive him." The voice whispered, fading away into the dark, and Tomoki was once more in the real world.

"No... Don't go... Big brother..." Tomoki's tears poured down his face as he held tightly onto the body. "Please don't be gone!" He whispered, eyes closed and breathing in the scent that was not his brother's anymore.

Suddenly shouts filled Tomoki's ears: "Get away!" "Run!" "Shoot it now!" And as the shots rung through his ears violently, it felt like someone was lifting Tomoki, cradling him in their arms. He would have covered his head, but he had to keep hold of his brother. Or he would lose him forever.

Echospheramay's body was cold... Dead. Blood flow had stopped. So had his heart. He could not be alive. But through all the chaos around him, Tomoki felt it move gently, to come to kneel as if sheltering him with its sleeved arms. As he felt his back be pushed backwards in an arc, he opened his eyes, and he thought that he saw Echospheramay gazing kindly down at him, holding the younger boy in his dead arms.

"Heh. Don't worry. I'll protect you." The elder smiled warmly and lovingly, but as a bullet brushed past his face, blood flickering across his cheek, he seemed to flinch and his strong expression weakened to look broken and dead once more.

He was going to die. Just like his brother. Tomoki could not help the rush of tears that fell from his eyes as he called out for help, anyone. A bullet cut deep past his arm, causing blood to flow. A few people gasped, but the gunfire did not cease. They did not care. But at this, Tomoki instantly felt Echospheramay's grip on him tighten, his body tense. How could it do so, how could he be alive when he was so clearly dead, the trail of blood from the side of his neck spilt on the floor? But then, he spoke once more.

"I'll protect you." He repeated quietly, but his voice rang above all others, his whisper blurring into the crowd. "I will save you." And as Tomoki gazed at him, he watched the elder's eyes close and he lifted his head, as if his whole body was being dragged to the sky. Then... There was the noise again, only louder this time, much louder. Tomoki could not pinpoint it, but it sounded like it was coming from his brother.

"Stop it... Stop it Echospheramay! What are you doing?" Tomoki grabbed onto his brother's shirt, to hold him tighter, although his grip was weak and his hand shaking. "Why are you doing this? Why are they killing you? Are you bad?" He looked up at the elder's face, which hung to face the floor, shadowed. "I don't want them to hurt you, so tell me! Are you bad?!"

"Yes..." A saddened smile passed over Echospheramay's face, and he averted his gaze to look away from Tomoki. "I am bad. That's why I can't be with you. But it doesn't mean I can't protect you." And as the screaming noise got louder and louder, Tomoki had to cover his ears, watching some of the people in the crowd run away into their houses.

"This is our last chance! Shoot!" A man yelled and aimed his gun at Echospheramay.

"Don't! You'll hit the boy!" A woman grabbed his arm to try and hold him back, but he tore away and pushed her aside.

"This thing has to be stopped! I don't care what happens, we have to destroy it! Destroy the boy with it if we have to, it'll save the whole village!" Aiming his heavy gun once more, he fired. The bullet flew right through Echospheramay's shoulder, creating a hole and seeming to push his body backwards. It had narrowly missed Tomoki's head.

"You were almost hurt..." Echospheramay whispered, looking sadly at Tomoki, as if he were about to cry. "It's my fault.. Because I'm not right... Not the same as you anymore." He cried out, and hugged Tomoki tightly.

Suddenly the deafening noise stopped, and there was a ripping sound, like a knife tearing through flesh. Wings of metal had burst from Echospheramay's back, unfolding to their full height, each as wide and twice as long as its owner. The gunshot rose, although most of the crowd had disappeared, running in terror. Crying harder still, Tomoki clung desperately to his brother, although he was terrified of him, now even more than of the guns. Was he still his brother? Aside from these wings, he looked exactly the same. No, he didn't. His face was not the same, his expression. The old Echospheramay had been cold and uncaring. The new brother was trying to protect Tomoki, it seemed even if it would cost him his life.

The gunfire did not cease, and Tomoki felt some near misses to them. Echospheramay's steel wings shielded Tomoki and himself, almost wrapping around them, but it could not guard them totally. Looking up through his tears, Tomoki thought he saw the elder crying with him, drops of blood and tears falling onto Tomoki, his head rested upon the younger's.

"These humans, they are evil, they are trying to hurt us..." The elder whispered, holding Tomoki tightly in an embrace. "Why can't we be together, even though we're different? His pained face looked down at Tomoki, as he tilted the boy's head up to face his. "Do you love me, Tomoki? Do you want to be with me, even though I'm different?"

Looking at the broken face of his brother, one that was so different from the one he had grown up with, made Tomoki cry harder still. He didn't know if he did love this new Echospheramay, he frightened him with his wings and the blood streaming down from his neck. But he was still his brother. He didn't look like him, smell like him, sound like him. But Tomoki could tell inside, that this really was him.

"Yes big brother... I love you more than anyone else! I want to be with you forever, no matter what!" He cried out shakily, his arms tightly around Echospheramay's waist, just below where the wings had sprouted. All he had was his brother, even if he was scared of him. "Please... Let it just be us together! I don't want this fighti-"

He was suddenly cut off; a man was pointing the gun at them as he yelled. "You freak, you're the ones that ripped this world apart! You and your kind! Because of things like you my family is dead!" His anger caused him to miss his shot; the bullet flew past his target. As he swore and loaded more bullets into his gun, Echospheramay turned his head from Tomoki, raising his hand in the direction of the now terrified looking man.

"Don't disturb us anymore. Don't come in between us. Or I will kill you." His voice was once again cold and dead, empty of life. But still the man aimed his gun again, shaking, but strong in his anger.

"I won't give in to you! All you stupid robots do is kill people! You're not good for ANYTHING! And that stupid boy even trusts you! You don't even deserve death! No one could love something like you!" He fired the gun, and this time his aim was dead on, shot right in the direction of Echospheramay's head. But it never reached him.

From Echospheramay's hand came a thin beam of light, blinding and bright red. It shot directly through the bullet, only an inch from the beam's source, causing it to shatter like glass. The beam flew directly onto the man, and as it hit him, it seemed as if it was absorbed, and then there was silence. And then a

scream.

The man fell and writhed on the floor, screaming in agony, clutching his head, his face twisted in pain. Although it seemed as if it were to last forever, he stopped all noise in a split second, and his skin seemed to be burning, splitting... He was boiling from the inside. As he lay there, the gun by his side, he seemed to rip apart in an instant, as if torn by an invisible force swelling inside of him.

The blood splattering everywhere, the look of horror on the peoples' faces, Echospheramay's calm, even sadistic smile in the midst of this horror. Everything was too much. Tomoki's own head felt like it was splitting inside, and he screamed, clutching it in his bloodstained hands, tearing away from his brother's grip. He ran a few metres away, when his cries ceased, and turned back to look at the scene through watery eyes. He could not love his brother anymore. Not after this. And he hated the villagers even more. He could see the ones who had run away hiding inside their houses, peering down out of the treetops through their glass windows. Tomoki took one last look at Echospheramay. He had turned away from the people, to gaze sadly at Tomoki. As if he had been betrayed, his eyes brimming with tears, his arms hanging loosely at his sides, his wings almost crumpled against the floor like a beautiful fallen bird. His face scrunched up in pain, Tomoki turned from the terrible scene, running, running as fast as he could, ignoring the yells, screams, the shots of the guns echoing behind him. He didn't want to be a part of this anymore. His feet stumbled a little on the cobbled street, through the rows of houses that had been built on the ground. He heard the whispers of others as he ran, but he didn't even turn his head. He had to get home. Going as quick as he could up the ladder, he reached the top and slammed the sliding wooden door behind him, his hands fumbling on the handle. He made to go to his room, but paused, there was talking in the kitchen. His parents often had business visitors over, to talk about the company and such things, but Tomoki recognised the woman through his tears, a small, simple-looking teacher from his school, whose face was usually pleasant, kind and caring. She got on well with Tomoki's mother, although she contrasted greatly in appearance with the tall, proud and seemingly immaculate lady. Tomoki could sense the terror in each woman's shaky voice, although they both seemed to be doing their best to try and conceal it. He jumped and stepped quickly away from the door as it slid wide open, and his teacher cast him a saddened look, her lips trembling, before she turned without a word, walking steadily down the hallway and out of the front door, closing it slowly behind her.

"Tomoki? Come here." A voice called instantly, and Tomoki stepped into the kitchen to face his mother. The make-up on her thin but beautiful face was smudged a little, but other than that she showed no signs of her emotions. Her long dark hair was curled up neatly on top her head, and her silken red dress, that tightly hugged her thin figure, had not a crease in sight. Her high-heeled shoes made a slight tapping on the wooden floor, which covered the whole of the downstairs.

"I suppose... You have heard the news of your... Brother, Tomoki." She said, her voice strong, although she wavered a little. After a pause of a few seconds, she broke the silence again. "He was a machine, Tomoki. You've been taught of how dangerous they are. He has been taken away. I don't suppose we will ever hear of him again." She sighed sadly, but kept her business-like manner. "The whole village will know of this now, but you aren't to speak a word to others of this incident, understand?! I don't want everyone thinking badly of us..." Pausing, she continued. "I don't understand why it had to be our beloved Echospheramay, but you have to know that he has been a robot all of life, it has been growing inside of him, so don't feel sorry for him! He was never even fully your brother, so we shall just continue life as usual, and pretend you never had a brother."

Tomoki could not believe his ears, how she was talking of the dreadful incident as if it were something to do with her business. "You mean.... You don't care that Echospheramay has become a robot?!" The

words seemed to choke him in his throat. "You don't care... That this is your own son?!" "Tomoki. You don't understand." His mother spoke calmly once more. "Echospheramay was never totally our son. He was a machine. Not one of our kind. We cannot grieve for him like this. We have to forget him. It's not like he was even alive. I would be upset that this had to happen to my own beloved son, but then I have to face that he was never properly a human. It's like he had two sets of parents, Tomoki, how would you feel if your son was not fully yours at all!?" She was shouting now, although she held her tears back. Tomoki just nodded. He knew that she did not want to show her pain, but her words were hurting him. Clutching his left upper arm, he felt a stinging, warm sensation and realised that his wound from the bullet was still bleeding, crimson fluid spreading across his hands and T-Shirt. He ignored this, turning to his mother, who had regained her calm. "Where have they taken Echospheramay?" He asked.

It seemed his mother had not noticed his pain. "To a laboratory somewhere. I honestly don't know where it is, but it's quite a long distance. I suppose they'll want to do experiments. Now lets say no more of this matter." She turned away, busying herself with some paperwork on the bench-top. Could she really just forget Echospheramay? Could everyone in this village just forget he ever existed, his fan club move on to someone else? Not everyone could forget him. Tomoki could never forget him. Without his older brother, Tomoki had no one to look up to, to love, to care for. He knew his parents had always favoured Echospheramay over himself. As he favoured his brother over them.

Turning, Tomoki ran out of the room, his mother barely noticing his departure. He climbed the two flights of stairs and ran down the hallway until he reached his room, closing the door behind him. He had to get out of here. Slumped against the wall, he remembered Echospheramay's pained face, the last one he had seen, the one he had betrayed. Wiping his tears with his stained sleeve, he pulled himself up. He had to be strong, if he wanted to get his brother back. Because he could not forget him. Because he still loved him. Quickly changing into clean and warm clothes, which consisted of a red jumper, several T-Shirts and some plain trousers, he searched his large and luxuriant room for things he could take. Money. Clothes. A small bottle and box in which he might store water and food, although he didn't have any at the moment. Only the necessities.

He found a pair of trainers in the rack in the hall downstairs, and shaking he slid them on. One hand tight around the strap of his packed bag, he pushed open the door to the kitchen once more.

"Mum... I'm going to find Echospheramay." At the sound of his voice, his mother turned her head sharply upwards.

"Don't be stupid, Tomoki. You can't." She said, her voice serious.

"I don't care, I don't know where he is but I'm still going! I'll find someone who'll help me!" Tomoki shouted out, clenching his fists. He made for the door, but his mother made no attempt to follow him. He turned back to look at her, a small hope that she would stop him, tell him that she loved him and to stay with her. But she didn't.

"Fine. If you want to go follow your brother then go! And you'll just end up like him! You're probably just a machine anyway! So go away, don't come back again! I don't want to see you anymore!" She was shaking too now, her tears freely falling down her cheeks. She didn't even love him. Echospheramay had always been the one she loved the most, and now he had been taken from her. Why couldn't it have been Tomoki? Why did it have to be Echospheramay? Why? Sad and angry eyes watched Tomoki's departure, as he climbed down the ladder and ran off in the direction of the school. He probably didn't know where he was going. No one would help him. Not now.

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Another pair of eyes had watched the scene, although from a distance. As crisp autumn leaves fell from the dead trees around her, dead trees that grew red leaves, but never budded, the girl supported by the branches of the trees, which lifted her arms so that her feet were a foot from the floor, awoke. No people here had seen her, not for the six years since she was born. The six dead trees around her had made her invisible from these human eyes, so that they could keep her to themselves in their loneliness. Suddenly she dropped to the floor, her bare feet landing silently and neatly on the soft grass. Her figure was humanoid, although she was far above it.

"You set me free? What for?" The young girl turned smiling to the trees, which surrounded her in a semicircle. Bowing her head in respect, the wind whispered the answer to her from her silent parents. "Hee hee..." She giggled, "Setting such an important task for your daughter? But thank you. I'm glad that you could grant me this. I will find the most wonderful for you. Anything for you, my parents, who granted me my life."

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The whispers of the village people followed Tomoki almost everywhere he went. As he passed the area where his brother had fallen, he looked for a brief second, and immediately wished he hadn't. Blood stained the stones of the road, and there was no trace of anyone nearby, all was deadly silent here. Quickening his pace and trying to hold back his tears, he passed into the quiet pathway that he always walked through on his way to school, the dead trees' road. He inspected the area for a brief second, then turned away sadly, No one to help him here.

"Hello." A voice made him jump, and he looked back quickly. "What are you searching for?"

"Who's there?" Tomoki called out, although he didn't feel scared or threatened. Not after today. And then he saw her, standing in the middle of the circle of trees, smiling at him peacefully. "Who are you?" he asked.

"Fawn. My name is Fawn." Was the reply, echoing through the silence.