

Jottings from Kids in Tokyo

A collection of stories by

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PREFACE

For the past several years, I have been teaching a small creative writing collective in Tokyo. It has always been, above all, a way for the members to be social and to learn English through something that they enjoy.

Over the years, many pieces have been started, with loads never reaching completion. To set a realistic completion goal (and a way to show off some very fun works to the outside world), we decided to set a goal to publish our stories together as a collection.

Other than myself, none of the writers uses English as their first language. In fact, outside of our workshop, many rarely use the language. I helped to polish things by providing advice on wording and some checks, but we wanted the writers' own words to live on in the final products. As such, there may be some wording, grammar, or even punctuation that differs from what is commonly found in published pieces. I hope that the reader will understand.

Those with such understanding and open minds will find a diverse collection of stories. There are parodies of existing books, tales of romance, adventure stories, and just plain off-the-wall writings. The amount of creativity in our collective always surprises me. I wish I had started publishing them earlier.

Jason Pratt

Tokyo, 2020.

FOR WORLD PEAS?

by Ruka Gotoh and

Natsumi Tateno

Tasty City wasn't the most dangerous place in the world, but, like anywhere, it had its problems now and then. Luckily, everyone knew they could count on their two heroes, Komugi Man and Mr. Genmai, to help them whenever they needed.

Komugi Man and Mr. Genmai were out on patrol on a night like any other. All seemed fine and there was a feeling of relaxation in the air.

"You know, Komugi Man, I like when we can just enjoy walking around our city and not have to worry about restoring world peace again."

Just then, some young boys ran up, snapping photos with their heroes. "Komugi Man! You're my hero! I love how you threw flour in the aliens' eyes! I saw it on TV," said one boy. "I think Mr. Genmai is the best," said another. "Teach me to do the Genmai Beam!"

The heroes were happy to pose for selfies with the boys and to share tips on how to get out of trouble.



"This just in, vegetable sales continue to decrease due to the popularity of gluten. Vegetable farmers and vegetarians around the world have started protesting," said the television report. Every channel that Komugi Man changed to was the same. The protests by vegetarians and vegetable farmers were starting to get violent.

"We have to do something," thought Komugi Man. He jumped in the gluten-copter, picked up Mr. Genmai, and flew to one of the protests.



"Veggie lovers, put down your weapons," said Komugi Man. "Let's talk and we can find a solution."

"There's no solution except to destroy you, gluten idiots," yelled

one protestor.

“Because of gluten, everyone hates vegetables. No one is buying from us farmers. I’m going poor,” yelled a farmer.

“And poor farmers are stopping growing my favorite things, like carrots and cucumbers. They have to grow grains to produce gluten if they want to live. Now I have nothing to eat,” screamed a vegetarian.

The anger from the crowd kept coming and no matter what Komugi Man and Mr. Genmai said, they got angrier and angrier.

Suddenly, one of the protestors yelled, “Get them! We will stop gluten by beating the heroes of gluten!”

The crowd moved in with their weapons. Komugi Man and Mr. Genmai didn’t want to fight, but they had to. Komugi Man threw flour into the eyes of the people who were getting close. They couldn’t see. Then a Genmai beam hit their weapons one by one, destroying them all.

Without the weapons, the protestors started punching the air wildly. They couldn’t see where the heroes were, so they punched anything they could find. Protesters were hitting other protesters by mistake and they were knocking each other out.

At the end, only one protestor was left standing. He wiped the flour from his eyes and looked at Komugi Man and Mr. Genmai. “You won today, but next time we’ll win,” he said.

Mr. Genmai punched the protestor in the mouth as hard as he could. Some teeth fell out of the man’s mouth. The teeth, as yellow as corn, flew in the air while the man fell down.

The heroes left a note on the protestor’s body that read, “Next time, let’s talk and find a solution.” They got into the gluten-copter and returned home.



It was patrol night again and the heroes were on the street. Tonight, the feeling was different. Something felt strange.

“Help me! Komugi Man! Mr. Genmai! Help meeeeeeeeeee!” The voice of a young boy came from around the corner.

The heroes ran as fast as they could. On the ground were the boys from the other day, but one was missing. They had bloody noses and it looked like someone had hurt them.

“What happened here?” asked a panicked Komugi Man.

“Our friend - the vegetarians took him...”

“Where?!”

“To the vegetable factory. They told me to give you this note.”

The boy handed the note to Mr. Genmai. It was the same note they had left with the protestors. It was changed. This time it read

No The is you die
“Next time, let’s talk and find a solution.”

The child said, “It’s a challenge from the vegetarians. Be careful.”



Mr. Genmai and Komugi Man arrived at the factory expecting a huge fight. They were surprised to see that it was quiet. Too quiet. They knew something was wrong, so they entered cautiously.

Inside it was also quiet, but they heard a sound in the distance.

“Are we walking into a trap?” asked Komugi Man.

“It seems like it,” replied Mr. Genmai, “but we have no other choice if we want to save the boy. Throw out some flour. If there are lasers, we will see them.”

Komugi Man did as he was told and threw flour all around. There were no lasers at all. Mr. Genmai then shot a Genmai Beam out in front to be sure no one was waiting around a corner. It still seemed safe.

The two heroes began walking forward.

Suddenly, a trap in the floor opened and they fell in.

Vegetarians walked in looking down at them and laughing. One had a button in his hand. “You idiots. Your weakness is so obvious. All we have to do is get you wet!”

The leader of the vegetarians pressed the button and the sprinklers turned on. “We, on the other hand, grow stronger from water. Suffer and die!” He smiled with his remaining yellow teeth.

The water was working as the vegetarians had hoped. Mr. Genmai started to get softer and softer and Komugi Man started to become sticky and unable to move. It was quite the predicament.

The children, still in pain, came in. They saw the heroes and worried. One intelligent kid reached into his pocket, though. He pulled out a packet of yeast and threw it in.

The yeast reacted quickly and the heroes started to grow and merge. In the end, an unexpected evolution had joined Mr. Genmai and Komugi Man into a new hero who called himself Genmaipanman.

Genmaipanman was large enough to reach out of the trap and pull himself up. He thanked the children and ran quickly after the villains. Once he caught up to them, he said nothing. In a single blow, his Genmai Punch knocked down all the vegetarians. They lay tattered on the ground, too hurt to move. The battle was over.



Komugi Man and Mr. Genmai sat back to watch the evening news. It was nice not having to be on patrol anymore – especially since separating back into two heroes had weakened them both.

“The Gluten Squad today was honored by the mayor of Tasty City. Together with their retired trainers, Komugi Man and Mr. Genmai, they were awarded the key to the city. It’s been ten years since the vegetarians revolted and ever since, thanks to the heroes and their new team, there have been no incidences. Our newest reporter, Kelly Kinkade, caught up with one of the new lads on the team, Yeast Pockets.”

“Actually, we’ve been training for about ten years together. Komugi Man and Mr. Genmai saved my friends and me. Now we want to help the city.”

“I’m sure you’ll do a great job. I’m Kelly Kinkade and this was your Tasty News.”

GEARMO

by Chinami Kojima and

Nichika Nakazato

“**W**here’s mom?” Takashi asked his little brother, Hiroshi.

“At work.”

“It’s late, though.”

“She always works late,” replied Hiroshi mater-of-factly.

“I know, but I was just hoping she would be here tonight.”

At that moment, mom walked in the door. “Happy birthday, Takashi!” She set a cake down on the table and the candles were already lit. How did she light them outside the house? She was always thoughtful and always took care of the boys. “Sorry I’m late. I had to work a couple of extra hours of overtime so I could have enough money to buy you this cake – and this.”

She smiled as she handed Takashi the newest earbuds. Takashi loved everything electronic. In fact, he studied robotics at university. Still, the family didn’t have much money, so he didn’t usually have nice things like this, but his mother always put her kids first and any money she ever had went towards making them happy.

“I also got you a present,” said Hiroshi. He handed his brother a comic about a family and its fantastic robot. It looked like Hiroshi had already read it and there was a chocolate stain on page one.

“Thanks, Hiroshi. It looks like a great story.”



It was a Tuesday, and, as was the case every Tuesday, Takashi was working in the robotics lab. His new project was going really well. He had just completed his first walking, talking robot.

“Great work, Takashi. This is a wonderful robot. You learn things

so quickly,” said the robotics teacher.

“Thank you, Mr. Wada. It can't do much, though. I still have a lot to learn from you.”

“We'll learn from each other, I'm sure,” replied Mr. Wada.

It was a good robot. It could ask Hiroshi what kind of drink he wanted, go to the vending machine, and buy him one. It would help when he was too busy to take a break. Speaking of breaks, it was time for one.

Takashi sat down and took out his phone. There was a message from Hiroshi. He opened it and dropped his phone immediately.

“What's wrong?” asked Mr. Wada.

“My mom... she's sick. Really sick.”



When Takashi got home, Hiroshi was crying, but his mother was on the sofa and she smiled at Takashi.

“Mom, what's wrong?!” said a panicked Takashi.

“Oh, it's just a little problem.”

“It's not little,” said Hiroshi. “She has a tumor in her brain.”

“A tumor? When will the doctors remove it?” asked Takashi.

“They can't. It's connected to her brain. If they try, she will die,” explained Hiroshi. “The doctors said that little by little, she is going to lose her ability to move her body.”

“I can move for now. We'll just make adjustments as we need to.”



All night Takashi had been thinking about the problem. How soon would his mom start suffering more? When would she have to quit working? Takashi thought that supporting his family would be his responsibility.

“Mr. Wada ... it's difficult to say this, but, you remember on Tuesday when I found out my mother was sick?”

“Yes, Takashi, I remember.”

“Well, it's really bad. She won't be able to work anymore soon. I've decided to quit school and get a job.”

“That's a big decision. How long will it be until she has to stop working?”

“I'm not sure yet.” “OK, let's make a deal. I will try to help you find a

job if you have to quit school. But please don't quit until you have to – I mean until your mother can't work anymore and until medical insurance is not enough to help your family. You are such a talented student. Why don't we try together to make a robot that can support your mother first – and maybe one that can help do some work instead of you?"

Takashi's heart warmed and he promised. He didn't know if they had enough time, but he was determined to try his best.



Over the next few weeks, Takashi and Mr. Wada worked hard on the robot together, staying late and coming in on weekends. At the same time, Takashi's mom got sicker and working was harder for her. It seemed like there wasn't much time.

On this particular day, they were putting the finishing touches on the robot.

"Mr. Wada," said Takashi, "I think he's ready."

It was a wonderful robot. It was about 2 meters tall, had hands that could hold things and legs that moved like a human. It could go down on its stomach and wheels would come out, turning it into a car that people could ride on. It was very interesting in that you could see all of the gears and circuits. Mr. Wada said that it would make the robot easy to repair if anything went wrong.

Takashi turned the robot on.

"Hello. I am ready to help. What are your names? What is my name?"

"I'm Mr. Wada, and this is Takashi. He is your creator." "

And you are Gearmo," said Takashi.

"Hello Mr. Wada, hello Takashi. I'm pleased to meet you. I'm Gearmo."

After that day, they spent time teaching Gearmo how to do many jobs that would help Takashi's mother.

One day, it became time to test Gearmo. They took him to a hospital where Mr. Wada's friend worked. They agreed to let Gearmo try to help the people there to see if he was ready to care for Takashi's mom.

The reaction was the same with everyone: the giant machine looked too mechanical, like a robotic Frankenstein's monster. The patients were scared and wouldn't go near it.

Takashi and Mr. Wada left disappointed.



Back in the lab, Takashi and Mr. Wada thought what to do. Takashi's mother was too sick and had just quit her job. Takashi would have to leave school soon. He looked out the window sadly.

Outside there was a young child hugging a doll.

"That's it," yelled Takashi, "let's put something on the robot to give it a soft, round shape! Then people will like it."

After adding the new layer of softness, Gearmo looked so friendly. They even taught him to hug.



Takashi showed Gearmo the key. "We use this to open the door. Without this you can't open it." He put it inside and turned it.

When they walked in, Hiroshi let out a large scream. "Oh my god! Mom, you have to see this."

Mom walked in. Her body was weak and she started to fall. Just then Gearmo slid under and caught her. "I'm Gearmo. Let me help you."

Their mother would need to be checked into the hospital. Gearmo went with her and took care of all of her needs.

Takashi dropped out of university and began working to support the family. Mr. Wada would visit at times to make sure everything was ok.

At the hospital, Gearmo became very popular with everyone. He helped the doctors and nurses and he was great company for Takashi and Hiroshi's mother. The robot reminded her of Takashi.

All of the families of patients began to ask how they could get their own Gearmos.



Takashi walked to his home. He took off his suit jacket and tie. The robot grabbed it. “Thanks, Gearmo 2.”

“My pleasure. Would you follow me? I’ve got a special dinner planned for you.”

“What? Why special?”

“Well, it is your birthday, Takashi.”

“That’s right! I forgot.”

Takashi walked into the kitchen and Gearmo 2 turned on the lights. “Surprise!” Hiroshi, Gearmo 1, and mom all yelled it out at the same time.

The table was covered with Takashi’s favorite foods and at the center was an amazing cake.

“I told Gearmo 2 how to make your favorites,” said the original Gearmo.

“I hope I did well, boss,” Gearmo 2 said to Gearmo 1.

It had been about 2 years since Takashi had made his own robotics company, selling Gearmos. They were so popular and successful that he gave the original Gearmo his own Gearmo assistant. Gearmo 1 seemed very happy.

“How’s everything going, mom? Feeling OK?”

Since becoming rich, Hiroshi funded research aimed at curing her.

“Well that’s my birthday present for you. They removed the tumor completely. Or maybe that’s a present for me. Gearmo and I’ll go to the store and buy you a real present now.”

“Sit. Eat. That really is the greatest present.”

And they all ate, except for Gearmo 1, who charged himself happily.

GALAXY WARS: AN ODE TO JACK AND DARUKE

by Kerori and Chicken Man

Training was always difficult, but it was also always rewarding. Today was hand-to-hand combat. That was a relief for Jack. He was tired of using weapons. Weapons were nice, but then it was the machine doing the work. He liked to feel in control. He liked to feel useful.

“Hey, Daruke! Over here!” yelled Jack to his best friend.

Daruke had just arrived. He wasn’t late, but Jack had arrived early because he was so excited to be there.

They were in a country you probably haven’t heard of. Since the war, everything had changed. Once aliens from outer space came, countries had started to merge or tear apart, and new countries were formed that could best protect themselves from the aliens. Nonetheless, most things did not change locally. This was Jack’s hometown and it still felt the same. Most people training there that day were people he had known – or seen around – his whole life. Daruke, on the other hand, had moved here to train. Luckily, he found Jack and become fast friends.

“Have you already started wrestling?” asked Daruke. “I’m ready to take you on, hometown hero!”

The two stared off at each other. Jack grabbed Daruke’s leg and pulled him to the ground. Daruke made a shocked sound, but moved and got on top of Jack. Jack grabbed Daruke’s arm next. This wrestling went back and forth for a long time as the two laughed and enjoyed the training, though neither were strong enough to beat the other.

Just then, Lotto, a commander, came up. “Hey guys, there has

just been an alien attack. We have to go!”

They grabbed their gear and jumped into a carrier vehicle. As they went, Jack waived to a young blonde woman in the distance. “

Who’s that?” asked Daruke.

“Arina. She’s a nurse.”

“You know her?”

“Not well, but I’ll get to know her better when we get back.”

“Well, if you get even the slightest idea that she isn’t into you, let me know because I get the next chance at her,” joked Daruke.



Alien lasers were flying over their heads, but they had to move. The city was in danger. It was a key location and if the aliens took it over, it might make it easier for them to take even more cities.

“We’re losing as it is,” shouted Jack.

“I hate these stupid aliens! What should we do, commander?”

“I don’t know. This is the first time I’ve been in this situation. Look, I’ll stop them here. You guys go support the unit behind us.”

Jack and Daruke ran to the other unit while the fighting continued. Everything was going well and the aliens were being beat back. “Daruke, you stay here. I think this area will be ok with you and the others here. I’m going to go back to Lotto. Catch up with us when everything is ready.”

When Jack got back to his old position, he saw Lotto. An alien was strangling him with its tentacles. Jack jumped to the alien and grabbed one of its suction cup-covered legs. He tried to take it down like he did Daruke, but the leg wrapped around him and the suction cups held on to him. It started to smother Jack. He tried to get his gun out, but the alien spit acid on it and it melted. As Jack was worrying what would happen, the alien broke Lotto’s neck, killing him. Jack tried to scream, but the suction cups were covering his mouth and nose.

A shot from Daruke’s gun hit the alien in the head and shots from the other soldiers followed. The alien fell and Jack was able to breathe again. They helped him out.



Three years had passed. Jack and Daruke were famous as the soldiers who had won stars for bravery in the great battle for the city.

Daruke had adjusted well, but Jack hadn't. Jack was quieter and more intense than before. He kept wrestling with the others, but now he wasn't laughing like he used to. In fact, the others were scared.

Arina pulled Jack aside at the end of the day. She was special to Jack. During the war she helped those who were injured, enemy and ally alike, and she counseled Jack to help him with his nightmares and regret. The two had become more than doctor and patient, they had become lovers. Jack would only listen to Arina. "We need to talk," she told him.

"There's nothing to talk about," Jack replied.

"I know you really like training, but you are going to hurt someone or get yourself hurt. You have to control yourself."

"Look, I was too weak. I couldn't save Lotto. He died because my wrestling wasn't good enough – because I wasn't strong enough. I don't want that to happen again. I need to protect everyone. I need to protect you. So, if I scare people, that's too bad, but it's the only way to make up for Lotto."

"Fine, Jack. I'm going home. Come back when you are human again or don't come back at all," she said.



It was a calm night in a calm period when the lasers started lighting up the sky. Soon, the base was being hit. The aliens had changed their strategy over the years. At first, they had tried to exterminate all of the people. Now, they fought to enslave. They particularly took women to breed new workers. Their attacks now focused on military targets to break the resistance.

Jack and Daruke ran outside and saw each other. Daruke looked calm, but Jack looked like he was excited to fight. He had a wild look in his eyes.

They ran quickly to the equipment storage, dodging the attacks. Inside were a group of other soldiers.

The highest-ranked of them was Daruke.

"Look everyone," I'm not sure where they are, but we can see that the lasers are coming from the north. Let's break into three groups and

go in different areas. I'll lead one group towards the water tower. Jack will lead another towards the town. Cooper," he said to a young boy who had shown a lot of promise," you take a group and head towards the gas tanks. Be careful, though."



Jack's group slid into the bunkers near the town. Jack had a 2-step system he always used. First, he activated hologram heads to emerge. If no lasers were shot, he would then raise a device to look over the horizon. If he saw something, they opened fire. If he saw nothing, they moved forward and repeated the process.

The ground was scorched. Grass had been burnt and there were remains of animals. Still, they saw nothing.

They reached the town after some time. The locals were locked in their homes. Those who had the resources had created underground shelters and hid there. An old man walked out and explained that they hid when they saw the lasers, but that none had come this way and there were no aliens.

"Let's head back and support the others," Jack yelled out.



When they got back to the base, it was a mess. Most of the buildings were broken. The weapons were all gone. Aliens had them surrounded. Jack could only think of Arina and he ran back to her.

Just as Jack opened the door, he saw Daruke hit Arina in the head and knock her out.

"What are you doing?!" he yelled.

Daruke had tears in his eyes. "The aliens... they won today. They said they'd let us live if we handed over the women in the base."

"What?! You can't do that! She's my everything!"

"If we give her to them, we live and we can fight again. If we don't, they will kill us all. Their lasers will kill Arina, too. There's no way to save her, but we can save us! We can get revenge if we live."

Jack jumped at Daruke. Daruke went for Jack's leg, but Jack pulled it back and Daruke with it. He rammed his elbow into Daruke's head. Daruke then went for Jack's arm. This time Jack kneed him under

the jaw. Daruke laid on the ground.

“Daruke, stop this or I’ll have no choice but to kill you,” Jack pleaded.

“Don’t you see, Jack, you kill me or the leader of the aliens will kill us. I lose either way.”

As Daruke jumped at Jack again, Jack pulled out his gun and shot him dead.



Jack emerged from the house holding a body with long blonde hair. Those who could see would notice Arina laying on the ground, her hair all cut off. Jack had fixed her hair onto Daruke’s head.

He walked towards the alien’s leader with the body. The aliens welcomed the gift.

Just then, Jack set off a grenade. Jack and the aliens all died in the explosion.



After the aliens had left, some things had gone back to the way they were before and somethings had stayed the same.

Arina always missed some things. She missed Jack - especially how he was before he began to change. She thought about this a lot, but today she quickly lost focus as she watched the high school wrestling match.

“Come on, junior! Take out his leg!” she yelled, thinking how proud his father would have been.

A RECIPE FOR FORGIVENESS

by N.M. and R.S.

Hana, her classmates, and their teacher waited nervously. The judges were comparing notes.

Every year, their cooking school held a contest to see who could make the best dish. The previous years had been dominated by their teacher, Miku. She wasn't much older than them, so they called her by her first name. Her success led the school to offer her a teaching position and now she was motivated to teach the others what she knew. All of the students had tried so hard, hoping to be the first champion since Miku.

The chairperson walked to the stage and the lights focused on him. "The winner," he announced, "is Hana!"

The spotlight moved to Hana and grand music started to playing. Hana, however, didn't look as happy as everyone thought she should have.



Hana rode the train home with her friend, Saki. After some uncomfortable silence, Hana said, "I just don't have any confidence in myself."

"What?" said Saki, surprised, "You won the contest today! You should be more confident. Your cooking skill is definitely improving."

"Well, I just used the teacher's recipe. All of the others made something original. Maybe my food was the best, but it wasn't original. I shouldn't have won."

"Come on. You're being too hard on yourself. It still took skill. You had the best skill today. They even said it was better than Miku's last year!"

"Maybe. Yeah. I should be more confident," Hana admitted. "But I'm also going to try to be more original with what I cook from now on. Anyway, did you see Miku's face? She didn't look so happy."

"She was proud of you, I'm sure!"



The following Saturday, Hana walked back into the cooking class. As she opened the door, her classmates and teacher began cheering for her.

“Hana, you were awesome!”

“I have so much respect for your skills!”

“You did it!”

Her face turned red as she thanked everyone and promised to keep doing her best to learn with them.

Saki walked over. “Hana, before you arrived, we all talked. We decided to ask you to be in charge of cooking for our Christmas party. We’ll help out.”

Everyone cheered again.

Hana’s face showed how nervous she was. Could she really be entrusted with such a big role? Still, she made up her mind. “I’ll do it! And I’ll try to make some original ideas if you’ll all support me.”



In the days leading up to the event, Hana spent so much time working on the menu. She tried many different foods and combinations at her home and had her family and friends try what she made. Saki gave her great advice. In the end, she decided on six unique dishes and a cake. The cake would be the real star of the party. It had 7 layers and each layer was based on the personality of one of her classmates; the top one based on her teacher’s personality. Her teacher was always so lively and loved to dress in really flashy colors, so it was to be made with white chocolate and pineapples, with a touch of spiciness.

On the day of the party, Hana arrived early to start preparing in the school’s home economics room. One by one, her classmates arrived and started to help.

Hana’s skill showed so well that day and she finished each dish one after another. She finally looked confident.

“Thanks for all of your support, everyone. I couldn’t have prepared in time without you! Now we just have to wait for the cake to finish.”

Her classmates were all smiling and commenting on the wonderful aroma that was spreading through the school.

“This smells so good!”

“It all looks so delicious – well, as we knew it would!”

Hana blushed with happiness and Saki looked so relieved to see things had worked out. The two decided to take a walk and relax. It would be an hour before the cake would be ready.



As they entered, the two friends were laughing about how well things had gone and how nervous Hana had been before. The laughter stopped suddenly as soon as they saw what happened. The cake was damaged. It looked like someone had hit it with some object.

“Who could have done such a terrible thing?” cried Hana.

They decided to figure out what had happened.

They started by talking to their classmates to see if they had seen anything strange. All of the classmates said the same thing: the door was locked while they were out. No one could have got in.

While they were talking to the final classmate, they saw the school janitor outside.

“Excuse me, Mr. Tanaka,” said Saki.

“Yes?”

“Who holds the keys for this room?”

“Me and the building manager.”

“Did the building manager enter the room while we were out,” she asked.

“Not a chance. He isn’t here today. I did lend your teacher the key, though. She said she had to get something.”

The girls rushed back into the room. They looked at the cake and sure enough they found a hair that had to belong to Miku in it.



When all of the people had gathered for the party, they ate the dishes one by one. Miku looked nervous, but also excited.

When it came time for the cake, Hana rolled it out. It was broken.

“I would like to serve you a piece of the cake, but I’m sad to say

that it is broken. Therefore I would like to give you each a snippet of this.” She held some scissors.

“What is that?” asked a classmate.

“It’s a hair from the person who broke the cake,” replied Hana.

“Give it to us! Maybe we can figure it out!”

The students looked at it and then all together looked at Miku.

“Impossible! I wasn’t around,” she said in panic.

Just then, the janitor walked in and Saki handed him a piece of the cake. “Oh, is this why you asked for my key?”

Miku fell to the ground bawling. “I... I was jealous of you, Hana. I don’t want to lose my job. But at the cooking contest you made my recipe better than me. I know that if the principle saw a picture of your cake and everyone told him how delicious it is, they’d ask you to be the new teacher.”

“I don’t want to be a teacher, Miku. I want to open a café. And there is still so much I can learn from you.”

“In fact,” said Saki, “if you showed the principle the picture of her cake, they’d really see what a good teacher you are.”

“That’s right. I could only make it because of what you taught me.”

Miku cried even harder. “I’m so sorry. I know you will never forgive me.”

“Of course I’ll forgive you - if you’ll help me fix it. Everyone, do you have time to wait for the cake to be finished?”

Everyone agreed and teacher and student worked together on the cake. Saki got drunk and they all made the most wonderful memories that night.

RIVAL GIRLS

by S. T.

“**T**hanks for today’s lesson, Ms. Sawada. I always feel like I learn a lot.”

“Thanks, Suzuka! You always say the kindest things.”

Suzuka didn’t really have any friends at school. It was kind of mysterious as to why. She always said such kind things to everyone and she was beautiful. Still, Suzuka seemed to like being alone.

Suzuka walked towards the door, forgetting her pencil case. Her classmate, Yuka, picked it up with her perfectly manicured nails. Yuka walked over to the trashcan and daintily tossed the case in. She was so different to Suzuka. Yuka was cute – the cutest in school everyone said – and she seemed really nice, too, but she was always doing mean things when others weren’t watching.

As everyone was leaving, the other classes were letting out, too. At that moment, Suzuka and Yuka both stopped and stared. Kenshi was walking by, talking with his classmates. Every time he passed, both girls noticed, but he didn’t really seem to notice them.



Suzuka returned home and just thought about Kenshi for maybe an hour. He was so cool. She hadn’t ever talked to him, but she always thought about what she would say. “Hi, Kenshi. I heard you are good at basketball. Can you help me improve my shot?” or “Hi, Kenshi. Your class has a math test next week, right? I’m really good at math. Maybe we could study together?” or “Kenshi, where do you get your hair cut? It’s always so cool. I am looking for a new place to get mine cut.” She had so many ideas about how to talk to him, but she never did.

Anyway, she could think about him more later. Now, it was time for her homework. Suzuka opened her bag. She kept everything in there, from her phone to her favorite photos to all of her makeup. She decorated

it with a hedgehog doll she had won from a crane game at the arcade. It was a special bag to her. Suzuka took out her books. One thing was missing, though – her pencase. She must have forgotten it at school, she thought. She'd check in the morning.

Suzuka went downstairs and got another pen.



School wouldn't start for another hour, but Suzuka arrived early to look for her pencase.

Just then she heard a voice behind her. "Wow. You're early." It was Kenshi. He was holding a basketball. He must have arrived early to practice. "I never see other students here at this time – only me."

Suzuka was so nervous. She couldn't believe that he was talking to her. She tried to remember some of the things she prepared to say. "Uh... your class has a basketball? I am looking for a new place to get mine cut," she said.

"A place to cut your basketball? They work better when they aren't cut."

She had mixed up her words. Her face turned red. She was so embarrassed.

"Anyway, we've never talked. I'm Kenshi."

"I'm – I'm Suzuka."

"What are you doing here so early?"

"I lost my pencase yesterday," she said, "I came to look for it. I can't find it anywhere."

As they were talking, Yuka walked in. "Hi Kenshi," she said.

"Oh. Good morning, Yuka."

"You know each other?" asked Suzuka, a little disappointed.

"Sure," Kenshi said. My cousin lives near her. I used to see her outside when we were in elementary school. I kind of had a crush on her."

Suzuka felt like her heart was dying.

"But I didn't realize she was the same girl until just the other day. Anyway, Yuka, Suzuka is looking for her pencase. Have you seen it?"

"What? A pencase? I have no idea. She is so forgetful - not the smartest girl. I'm sure she lost it," said Yuka.

“Ok, well good luck finding it, Suzuka. I’ll ask some friends if anyone saw one. See you later. Bye, Yuka.”

Kenshi left and Yuka gave Suzuka an evil look. “Don’t get any ideas about Kenshi. He’ll be my boyfriend. If you try anything, you’ll lose more than just your stupid pencease.”

“What? You took my pencease?!” said Suzuka in disbelief.

“Well, I didn’t take it. The garbage man took it. I just threw it away,” she replied laughing.

“Why would you do that?!” Suzuka was always so calm and quiet, but now she was yelling.

“I see you looking at Kenshi all the time. You aren’t suitable for him. Anyway, I don’t like your attitude.”

“But...,” stammered the angry Suzuka, “he’s not yours! Anyway, until today I hadn’t even talked to him!”

“You looked. You try to take something from me and I’ll take something from you. Stay out of my way!”



As the days passed, Kenshi continued to grow closer and closer to both girls. Yuka was aggressive and she would throw her arms around Kenshi and hug him or grab his hand. It was almost like they were a couple. Suzuka, on the other hand, was shy. Still, even though Yuka had warned her, Suzuka was still so happy to see Kenshi. She would blush and say hello. They were becoming friends it seemed, though Suzuka wished it could be more.

Throughout all of this time, more and more of Suzuka’s things were disappearing. Her hairclip was gone, her textbook went missing, and so on.

Kenshi heard someone crying in the stairwell. There, on the steps, was Suzuka.

“What’s the matter?” he asked her.

“It’s my bag. It’s gone.”

“Your bag? Did you lose it somewhere?”

“I think it was stolen...,” she said.

“Well, maybe. But maybe it was just lost. It’s the one with the hedgehog doll on it, right?”

“Yeah...”

“OK. Leave it to me. If it’s at the school, I’ll find it. I’ll get all my friends to help me search everywhere. Just wait here,” Kenshi told her, and he took off to find it.



“Yuka, I need your help,” Kenshi said to her as he entered her classroom.

“Anything for you, Kenshi,” she said. Her hands were full, but she moved them behind her and leaned in to give Kenshi a kiss. “What’s wrong?”

“Well, I know you don’t like her, but can I get you to help Suzuka this one time?”

“What did that idiot do now?” asked Yuka, annoyed.

“It’s her bag. It’s missing. Can you and your friends help me and the boys look for it?”

Yuka got a nervous look on her face. She backed up against the wall, holding what was in her hands in a way that Kenshi couldn’t see it. “Uh, sure. Yeah. We’ll look for it.”

“Thanks, babe,” he said. “I knew you had a wonderful heart. That’s why I like you.”

Kenshi threw his arms around Yuka and hugged her tightly. The hug made her drop what she was holding and Kenshi saw it. It was a bag with a hedgehog doll on it.

“It was you! You took her bag! Have you been taking her things all along?!” Kenshi was shocked and angry.

“I... I was jealous. I thought if I stole her things, she’d stop talking to you. Then you and I could be happy,” Yuka admitted.

“What? I liked you because I thought you were nice. I didn’t know that you are like this.”

Kenshi grabbed the bag and left the room.

Yuka sat alone, with tears of regret falling from her eyes.



Yuka heard the footsteps approach her. Before she could even look up to see Kenshi’s face, she saw her bag held in front of her.

“My bag! Thank you, Kenshi!”

“You’re welcome. I found it... um... Yuka had it.”

“I thought so.”

“Did she also take your pencease and the other things?”

“Yes.”

“I should have known. You know, Suzuka, I didn’t ever really love her. I mean, I did when I was young. Then, now, I dated her because that young boy in me told me to. And, well, she was so clingy and aggressive. I mean, I felt love. Just not for her.”

“What are you talking about?” Suzuka asked.

“I mean, I felt so much happiness helping you. I want to always help you. I want to protect you. Suzuka, I did feel love, but not for Yuka. I felt it for you. I love you, Suzuka.”

Suzuka was surprised. She was even more surprised when he took her hand and led her out of the school.



No one had seen Yuka for a week. It made it all the more surprising when she called out Suzuka and Kenshi’s name while they were on a shopping date.

“I...” she tried to speak, but she was crying, “I wanted to tell you that I’m sorry. I want to change – and I want to give you something.”

Yuka handed Suzuka a new pencease and Suzuka returned it with a hug.

MONK AND DINNY

by Shodai Ochai and S.O.2

Long, long ago, there was a hungry dinosaur in the jungle. He was hungry because he had eaten everything around him already and now there was nothing left, it seemed. Dinny the Dino would be famous in the future, but no one knew him now, because he ate everyone who knew him. Not even Monk the monkey knew of him, and Monk was smart.

Monk was playing around that day, like any other day, taking care of his banana trees. Most monkeys ate all the bananas and then swung to the next tree to find more. They were always uncertain where they would live the next season. Not Monk. He loved this part of the jungle. It was near the water, it had a nice view, and it was quiet. He also had all of the food he needed here as the bananas grew well on these trees and he could trap insects to eat. Monk was a specialist at making little traps.

That quiet was broken. In the distance he heard a large yell that he had never heard before. “Ah, what a nice morning! Let’s make breakfast!”

Monk didn’t know what to think, but he was afraid something bad would happen.

Just then, one of Monk’s favorite banana trees fell down with a large sound. A second later, he saw what happened. A large dinosaur came out from behind.

“A monkey! I wonder what monkeys taste like? Why not try it?”

Monk jumped up and started to run away.

“Come back, little monkey,” called out Dinny. “I was just joking! I want to be friends. Come here and let me give you a hug!”

Monk ran as fast as he could, he jumped up a tree and swung from one to another, but Dinny was always right behind him. After a few minutes, Monk realized that he wouldn’t be able to outrun the dinosaur. He had to trap him, he thought, but he had never made such a big trap.

Monk knew that there was no way he could even carry materials

big enough to make such a trap. He had to do something. First, he started tossing around his insect traps as he ran in circles. Dinny kept following him, but Monk picked up the traps with insects in them.

“Insects, listen to me. I won’t eat you if you help me.”

The insects agreed.

As Monk ran around, he told the insects how to make traps and he asked them to cooperate together to make one large enough to catch other monkeys.

Monk was getting tired, but as he kept dodging Dinny, he saw that the insects had set up a trap.

“You’re just making me hungrier with that tiny trap,” yelled Dinny. “I’m not even going to be able to chew you and enjoy your taste! I’m going to swallow you whole.”

After a bit more running, Monk checked his trap. There were four monkeys inside. They looked scared.

“Look everyone,” Monk said, “there is a dinosaur out there. He is going to eat me and then he will eat you. But we can stop him if we work together. I want you to build a trap big enough to catch him.” And Monk explained how to build the trap.

As the monkeys got to work, Dinny suddenly saw them. “One monkey or four monkeys? Of course four would taste better.” He began to walk towards them. Monk got worried. If he lost his workers, there would be no way to stop this dinosaur. “What can I do?” thought Monk. Then he had an idea.

Monk rubbed bananas all over himself. “Hey, dinosaur! You can eat them later, but eat me now! I’ve got the best flavor.” He started getting closer to Dinny.

“So, you are now too tired to run? You realize that I’m going to eat you anyway, don’t you?” Dinny licked his huge lips.

Monk sat on a tree with his tail hanging down. Just as Dinny got close, Monk jumped up – but not fast enough. Dinny bit Monk’s tail and ate part of it.

“You taste amazing! I love the banana seasoning. I need to eat all of you!”

The pain made Monk run faster and the taste made Dinny run faster, too. Finally, though, Monk saw that the trap was ready. He ran in

and Dinny followed. Dinny was happy to see that Monk couldn't escape. The other monkeys closed the trap and Monk and Dinny were both inside. And then Monk opened a small door in the back. It was big enough for a monkey to walk through, but too small for Dinny.

Monk walked out and threw his hands in the air! Finally, he had won. "We did it!"

Monk, the other monkeys, and the insects all celebrated. Only Dinny was sad.

"Please let me out. I promise I won't eat you guys," cried Dinny.

"But you will eat others," replied Monk. "We can't have that."

"Well, I have to – or I'll starve to death."

"You could eat bananas instead."

"There's not enough bananas."

"I could teach you to farm them," said Monk.

Dinny agreed and they let him out and everyone was happy. The other monkeys and insects now knew how to make traps, Dinny had his freedom, and Monk had an eager new student.



Long, long ago, there was a hungry dinosaur in the jungle. He loved bananas. Dinny the Dino was now famous for being kind and gentle.

"Look at this banana! It's the biggest and yellowest one yet," Dinny said as he showed it to the monkey.

This monkey was called Monk. He was Dinny's first and best friend.

CANDY AND THE ICE CREAM FACTORY

by Riko Fujita and Ayu Tazawa

Candy sat looking inside of the ice cream shop window. It was a hot summer day and all the people inside looked so happy. One girl who looked like a cake was choosing flavor after flavor and creating the largest sundae. “How could she even eat all of that?” thought Candy.

Just then, Candy’s grandfather walked up behind her. “What are you doing?”

“Just thinking about that wonderful ice cream. If I think hard enough, I can almost taste it.”

“Why don’t we go inside?” asked her grandfather. “But we don’t have enough money to spend on ice cream,” Candy sighed.

“Well, they usually give some free samples. Let’s see if we can get some. We’ll say we’ll buy some next time.”

Candy and her grandfather went into the shop. It was the most famous around, owned by Lady Hagen. Lady Hagen was a master ice cream maker. The shop had more than 200 flavors, including all the kinds you know, like chocolate and vanilla and mint and strawberry and so on. But they were much more amazing than any you have ever tasted. They also had flavors that you couldn’t imagine, with names that sounded like they came from exotic places or even outer space.

Candy had never had any of Lady Hagen’s ice cream before, but she knew all about it. She studied the posters on the shop walls whenever she went by, she read the pamphlets, and she had heard so many stories about Lady Hagen as well. She was the biggest fan of the Lady and her ice cream even without having eaten any.

“Would you like a sample?” the worker asked Candy.

Candy took it and placed it in her mouth carefully so it would melt slowly and she could enjoy it for as long as possible. It was like tasting magic.

“Today we have a special deal. Buy one ice cream cone and you get a chance to win a special ticket to take a private tour of the factory with Lady Hagen herself. Only two people get this wonderful opportunity,” the worker explained.

“We’ll take one cone,” said grandfather.

“But grandpa! We don’t have enough money.”

“Nonsense. I have grandma’s medicine money.”

“But she will be in pain without her medicine,” cried Candy.

“Nothing cures her pain better than seeing you smile,” said her grandfather as he handed the cone and the envelope that came with it. “Let’s hope the ticket is inside. But even if it isn’t, the ice cream is delicious, right?”

Two sounds were heard at that moment: a sound of happiness from Candy and her grandfather and a scream from the girl that looked like a cake. “How did that candy girl get a golden ticket?! Buy me more ice cream, daddy!”

Candy showed the ticket to the worker, who took down Candy’s contact information.



Two weeks after that day, Candy was in a room at Lady Hagen’s factory. She had received a phone call suddenly the day before telling her to come. It was everything she imagined. The whole room looked like it was made from chocolate swirl ice cream, but it wasn’t cold. All of the furniture looked like it was made from waffle cones.

Just then, a door opened and in walked another girl.

“Hi poor girl, I’m Cake. Do you remember me?”

“Yes, you were at the ice cream shop. You had so much ice cream. How wonderful,” said Candy.

“I can have anything I want. My daddy bought me all of the ice cream in the shop after you left so I could get a golden ticket, too.” Cake then walked over to the bench that Candy was sitting on and broke off a

piece. She put it in her mouth. “Wow. Waffle cone. That’s amazing. I’m going to eat everything in here.”

The door then opened a second time. Wonderful music played and in stepped a beautiful older woman. She was wearing a dress the color of mint that was shaped like a sundae glass. It looked like little chocolate hearts were on it. Her hair was tied up and held in place by the most wonderful straws. She smelled like 30 flavors at the same time and all of them were delicious. All of her jewelry and her makeup seemed to be something related to ice cream, and it was all perfect. “Hello Candy, hello Cake. I’m Lady Hagen,” she said. “Welcome to my factory – or maybe your factory.”

“Our factory?” asked Candy, surprised.

“That’s right,” answered the Lady. “You see, I’m old and I want to retire. So, I made this golden ticket contest to choose the best person to get my factory. It will be one of you.”

“I want it! I want it! It’s mine!” yelled Cake.

“It’s not that simple. There will be three missions to see who is the best girl to run the factory.”

“Can’t my daddy just buy it from you?” whined Cake.

“No,” said Lady sternly, “you will have to pass the missions.”



After a tour of the factory and a chance to try many different ice cream flavors that were not being sold yet, the first mission began. It was a knowledge quiz about the factory. Of course, this was the easiest challenge that Candy could have had and she answered every question correctly. She won the first mission.

The second mission was a taste test. The girls would try various flavors of ice cream and say what the name of the flavor was. Candy knew the names of the flavors well, but she had only eaten one flavor – the strawberry sudsy surprise that she had that day two weeks ago with her grandfather – and of course the samples from the tour. Candy’s face was bright and happy as she put each one in her mouth. It seemed they got more and more delicious. She kept telling Lady Hagen how much she loved them all. Lady Hagen also began to smile. Nonetheless, Candy got very few answers right. Cake, who had tried every flavor of ice cream

made by Lady Hagen, stuffed her mouth again. For her, naming the flavors was easy and she won this mission by a large margin. Candy looked disappointed. Cake looked bloated and queasy.

The third challenge was next and the winner of this would be the person who got the factory. It would be a challenge to arrange the ice cream into an attractive serving, using cones, sprinkles, and an assortment of toppings and objects. Both girls looked to have a great chance. No one had studied how Lady Hagen's ice cream looked better than Candy, but no one had held more of them in their hands than Cake. It seemed impossible to tell who would win.

Suddenly, Cake let out a burp. The air that exited her mouth was rainbow colored.

"That wasn't very polite," said Lady Hagen.

Before Cake could reply, her eyes got large and they too became rainbow colored. Then her body, starting from her head and moving to her toes, all became rainbow colored.

"That's what happens when selfish girls eat too much ice cream. They start to become the ice cream," laughed Lady Hagen.

Cake's hands started to drip. It seemed they were melting. She panicked and took off running through the factory towards the freezer.

Candy was shocked. She became more shocked, however, when she started glowing. "Oh no, what have I done?!" she screamed.

Candy started walking towards the freezer, too, but then noticed she wasn't glowing anymore. She looked behind her and saw that it was a spotlight. The spotlight then moved to Candy again.

"Don't worry, Candy," said Lady Hagen, who was smiling. "You won! The factory is yours."

"That's amazing! I'm so happy," beamed Candy. Then her face became a little down. "But you know who loves your ice cream as much as me?" Always the gentle spirit, what Candy said next would not surprise anyone who knew her, but it surprised Lady Hagen. "Cake. I want to share it with her."

"What?! Are you nuts? She isn't worthy of this. Plus, she's a mess. You wasted all of my time! One greedy child and another stupid one!"

While yelling this, the Lady began to hit Candy. Candy tried to get away and Lady Hagen chased after her, until she slipped on the

melted trail left by Cake and hit her head. Lady Hagen laid dead on the floor, her dress shattered.



Candy found Cake in the freezer.

“You can come out now. I’ve turned the temperature down. Now the whole factory is cool enough for you to walk around in,” Candy called out to her.

Cake emerged slowly.

“I have some good news. Well, if you accept. I want to share the factory with you. We can be presidents together.”

The only part of Cake that melted that day was her heart. She was so touched that it was enough to reform her and, from that day, she was such a sweet and kind child and her business knowledge learned from her father made her the perfect co-president of the newly renamed Candy Cake Ice Cream Company.

Oh, and Candy’s father? It seems he was rich because he was the owner of a medicine company. Candy’s grandma never had to worry about her medicine again.

FRIENDSHIP STOPS FOR NO ERA

by Aira Miyashita and Natsumi Yasumoto

Oda Nobunaga looked at the stars over Kyoto. They were so far away. How long would it take someone to reach them? It was 1582 and if he started walking now, what year would it be when he reached them? Of course, no one could walk to the stars, but that was just one of the thoughts he liked to think about. “Crazy thoughts,” some people said. There were many people around Oda that called him crazy. But he wasn’t crazy, he was a dreamer.

To Oda, the stars represented the future. The future wasn’t clear. Oda’s father had just died and everything was changing. His father had been a military man and with his death, Oda inherited his fighters and his territory. He also inherited his enemy, Akechi Mitsuhide. He thought that in his future, he would like to unify all the areas of Japan. But, for at least tonight, he could just relax and look at the stars. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the moment.



The bright light shone in the eyes of Oda. He rubbed them as he woke up. He couldn’t believe what he saw. He wasn’t surprised that the stars were gone – they were gone every morning. He was surprised by the large structures that rose from the ground so high. He had thought that Azuchi Castle was tall, but these buildings were so much higher. First, he rubbed his eyes a few more times to see if it was real. Then he pinched himself to make sure he was really awake.

Such a surprise was difficult to deal with and as he walked around a bit, he worried that this would be his new reality. He wondered if each of these tall buildings was a castle of a different samurai. He wondered how he could ever defeat them all to unify Japan. He wondered if he

could live in such a world or if it was time to commit seppuku. He was also sure that Akechi would use his absence to attack and take over.

“Excuse me!” Before Oda could think anymore, two girls called out to him. They were running over. “Your costume is amazing! Are you a YouTuber? Can we take a picture with you?”

A costume? YouTuber? Picture? What were they talking about? Before he could ask, they took out a small, shiny object and held it up. It made a sound and his image was on it.

“What is this? Some kind of magic!? Are you witches?!” screamed Oda as he pulled out his katana.

“Wow you are really in character! This is great!” They said as they started to take his video.

Oda was now scared that they were going to capture him in this small device, so he dropped his katana. “Please, please don’t use your magic on me,” he pleaded.

The girls, who would later introduce themselves as Aira and Natsumi, asked him who he was and where he was from.

“I’m Oda Nobunaga of Kyoto.”

After a bit of talking, they realized that this was THE Oda Nobunaga – the real one. Somehow, he had traveled to the future. The girls were excited to teach him everything and decided to start with lunch.



Oda looked at the strange food in front of him. It was rather boring looking – flat and a dull color. On top of it, though, were white, fluffy cream and colorful berries.

“What do you call this again?” he asked.

“It’s a pancake. Isn’t it great?”, said Aira.

“And what is this?” Oda asked as he pointed to the metal utensil.

“It’s a fork,” said Natsumi. “Stab it into the pancake to eat it.”

Oda didn’t know what to make of the food, but he ate it all.

After eating, Aira suggested that they all go for a printclub photo.

Oda could not believe all of the sights and sounds he saw at the arcade. What was this? Japan had developed such amazing magic in modern times. They took a photo. Oda was first shocked to think the

machine had captured him, but then delighted to have something to look at and remember.

“Show me more of this modern Japan!” he said, excitedly.

Natsumi handed Oda a tapioca drink. He drank it quickly – then two more, all different flavors. His smile was large. “More, please!” he said.

“Are you sure you can drink so much? You’ll get sick!” said Aira.

“I’ll be fine. Here, pay with this,” he said, handing Aira a coin from his era.

“I don’t think they will take this. Hey, Natsumi, look at this, it’s so cool.”

But as Aira tried to hand the coin to Natsumi, it disappeared. “What happened,” Aira said.

They looked over at Oda Nobunaga, and he was also starting to fade. Before they could even talk to him, his last tapioca drink fell to the ground. He had disappeared.

Oda’s sudden disappearance shocked the girls. They couldn’t believe what had happened.

As they looked down, they noticed his sword was still there. They both reached for it and as they did, they began to feel strange. Suddenly, they were both transported back in time as well.



A castle stood in front of Aira and Natsumi. It was larger than any other building around – and it was on fire.

“Oda must be in there! We have to help him,” screamed Natsumi.

They ran in despite the burning heat and the smoke and they saw a man holding a sword above Oda, who was unarmed.

Thinking quickly, Aira took out her phone and turned on the flashlight. The brightness shocked the attacker.

Natsumi threw Oda his sword. He used it to knock the other man’s sword away and then kicked him down. Now it was Oda who held his sword above him, ready to strike.

“Akechi, you thought that you could kill me, but today is not your

day to win. If you live a second life, you can try again. Today, though, you die.”

“Wait!”, called out Aira. “Let him live.”

“What? No. He will only attack again if he lives,” explained Oda. “Anyway, what are you two doing here?”

“We wanted to see you,” they responded.

“We want you to stay with us in 2020,” said Natsumi.

“I loved that time, but there would be no one to take care of this land,” Oda said sadly.

“I have an idea,” said Aira. “Mr. Akechi, if you promise to stop fighting with Oda forever, I’ll give you this delicious drink from the future.” And she handed him her tapioca drink.

Akechi took a sip, smiled, and said he never wanted to fight again.

“Aaaaaaand, if you promise to protect Oda’s area while he’s away, I’ll give you this machine with the light. It can do so much more than that, too.”

After showing him how to take photos and play apps, he was hooked. All was arranged. Akechi even took a photo of the three as they held onto Oda’s sword and faded away.



Back in 2020, the three held hands and began walking. Oda was excited to see so many more new things and the girls were excited to teach him about everything.

As they began to drink yet another tapioca drink, Aira dropped hers. “Oh no. I forgot to charge the phone before we went to the past. I hope Akechi isn’t going to get angry if the battery runs out.”

PEPPER KINGDOM

by Takumi Taniguchi and Hiroki Nishikatsu

“It’s time for Yama’s Kitchen! What kind of food should the chef serve up today?” The audience cheered as the narrator opened the show.

“We have some ingredients on hand that you don’t want to eat.”

Everyone gasped.

“Let’s let ourselves in and see how they look.”

The camera focused on the kitchen. It was large and clean. Still, it felt scary. “How can I get out of here,” Kokeko thought, “I can’t walk much and the windows are closed, so I can’t even fly out.”

In a tub of water just a few feet away, Pichipichi splashed nervously. “How can I get out of here,” she also thought, “there is no other water to swim in and if I go out of this water, I’ll die within minutes.”

Then they each thought of another idea to save themselves.

“Hey chicken,” Pichipichi yelled at Kokeko, “you look delicious. Yummy yum yum. I bet the cook will make you into a wonderful meal and leave me alone.”

“Shut up, salmon!” yelled Kokeko. “You look the best. I’m going to recommend that the cook make a meal out of you. In fact, I’ll lay him an egg so he can make tartar sauce to eat you with.”

“No way! I’ll tell him to use that egg with you to make oyakodon. I’ll use some of this water I’m in to start boiling some rice to help him,” said Pichipichi.

“Both of you stop fighting,” screamed a pepper, who was part of a group of vegetables. “No one has to be eaten if we work together.”

The door opened and everyone, the ingredients and the audience, became silent.

“Let’s see,” said the chef, “What should I make for today’s

special?”

Pichipichi was so nervous that she couldn't control her body and eggs poured out. The water filled with beautiful orange-red salmon roe. “Oh no,” thought Pichipichi, “now he will look at me. I thought I was safe!”

Sure enough, the chef looked over. “What was that noise? Oh – a salmon! I forgot I had a salmon. That sounds wonderful. Yeah, I'll make salmon oyakodon today.”

Pichipichi was devastated, but Kokeko and the vegetables were happy – except for the onion, who would be part of the dish. The others, though, would have one more day to think about how to escape.

The narrator's voice boomed again. “Today's dish will be salmon oyakodon. Oyakodon is a Japanese dish. It means parent child rice bowl. It is usually made with chicken and eggs, but today the chef will try a variation with salmon and salmon roe.”

As the crowd cheered more, it only made Pichipichi more nervous. “We'll be right back after the commercial break.”

As the commercial started, the chef opened the window for ventilation and stepped out to use the bathroom.

It was the last chance for escape. Kokeko and the vegetables jumped to the window. Unfortunately, there was a large fence and the only way out would be through a stream.

“Sorry, veggies. I can't swim. And I can't fly enough to get very far. I guess it's the end of us,” said Kokeko sadly.

“Wait, chicken, I have an idea,” said Pichipichi. If you get me into the stream, I can swim really quickly and pull you guys under the fence. Once we are out, you and the vegetables can fly away.

They agreed. But it would be difficult as Kokeko's feet could not hold everyone.

As the vegetables and Pichipichi were trying to figure it out, the lights came back on and the chef walked through the door. Everyone was shocked to see all of the ingredients together. “

Stop!” yelled the chef. As he got close, though, Kokeko grabbed the vegetables in her feet and Pichipichi bit onto the chicken's tail feathers.

They jumped as Kokeko flapped her wings and flew out the window just as the chef tried to hit them with a frying pan. The crowd was so excited seeing this.

As soon as they got out the window, Kokeko dropped. She couldn't fly anymore. They fell into the water.

"Leave it to me," said Pichipichi. This time it was Kokeko who held onto the tail of the salmon.

The chef did not want to lose his ingredients. He jumped into the stream just behind them. As salmon move through the water using their tails, having Kokeko holding on made the swimming go more slowly. The chef was going to catch them unless Pichipichi let everyone go.

At that moment, the pepper jumped out of Kokeko's feet. "I love you all. Be free and tell my wife I love her!" he said.

No one could believe it and they screamed. The pepper fell into the mouth of the chef. They watched as their friend was chewed up and died. Pepper was so spicy that the chef started coughing. He couldn't chase the ingredients anymore and started trying to drink stream water to stop the burning in his mouth. Thanks to Pepper's sacrifice, the ingredients managed to escape.



There came a point where Pichipichi could no longer swim. The weight of the others was too much. She pulled over to a very small island and all of the other ingredients climbed on to it.

"What shall we do?" cried the onion.

"Pichipichi is safe. She can swim in the waters. But for me, there is nowhere to go," said Kokeko. "If I go on the land another chef will find me or a bigger animal will eat me. I hadn't thought about it when we were worrying in the kitchen."

"We could stay here," said another vegetable.

"But there is no food here."

Pichipichi volunteered to catch food in the stream and bring it to Kokeko until something was figured out.

"Well, it's just a pile of mud, but let's make the most of it," said the onion. "I just wish pepper could have been here with us."

"Maybe he can – in a way," said Pichipichi. "Chicken, in your

feathers are some of pepper's seeds! They must have come out when he was chewed by the chef."

The ingredients planted pepper's seeds on the small island and after a short time, there were small peppers all around. In fact, there got to be so many peppers that the small island was named Pepper Kingdom.

News of Pepper Kingdom, a sanctuary for fleeing ingredients, spread and more and more came and joined them. They lived happily ever after in memory of the heroic pepper who sacrificed himself for their freedom.

THE SECRET OF RAY'S HAMBURGERS

by Miyu Hirakawa, A.T., and A.C.

Ray sat at the grave of his parents. He was on the way home from shopping at the supermarket and going to add some wonderful new toppings on his burgers. The supermarket was near the grave, so he went to pay his respects and he left his parents' favorite snacks at the headstone.

It was difficult for him to be here because of the emotion he felt. Ray was only a child when his parents were killed, so he didn't have many memories, but he still felt love for them in his heart. He started crying a bit, missing them, and feeling powerless. "My new sister, Mary, taught me to kill people," he thought to himself, "but how could I kill a demon? How can I ever get revenge on the demon that killed my parents? All I can do is come here and leave them snacks."

He stayed as long as he could, remembering what he could about them.



Business was good. Ray often had many customers. His hamburgers were really popular. Even though he set up his shop across from the church of a strange cult, many people, including the cultists, often came to eat there. Well, the cultists used to come to eat there. These days many of them were dying.

The bell rang when the door opened. A police detective entered looking hungry. He looked over the menu.

"Hmm...", said the detective as he stood at the register.

"First time here?" asked Ray.

"Yeah, but I've heard the burgers here are the best. Thought I'd give it a try. What's the most popular burger?" asked the detective.

“It’s the Humongous Burger. It comes with fries and a drink of your choice.”

“OK. I’ll take one of those and a soda to drink.”

Ray went to the back and started cooking.

Just then Mary walked in the back door. “Got some more meat for you,” she said with a wink.

“Thanks, Mary! You’re doing great work. I’ll see you later. I want to hear all about it.”

Detective Johnson smelled the burger before Ray sat it down on his table. It looked even better than it smelled. And when he bit into it, he couldn’t believe how good it tasted.

After eating, he was so happy that he left a tip. Then he walked to the cultist church to talk to the priest about the murders.



In the weeks that followed, cultists continued to be killed. They posted guards outside, but it didn’t stop the deaths. The cultists put pressure on Detective Johnson to solve the mystery soon or, they said, they would call the demon to help them.

The detective’s visits to the hamburger shop were also more common. He couldn’t get enough.

On this day, he didn’t have time to eat at the shop, so he bought takeout and got some extra sets for other police officers in his department.

“You won’t believe these burgers, everyone. They taste incredible. It’s not like any beef I’ve had before,” Johnson told them.

All of the officers eating them agreed that these were fantastic, until Officer Nelson screamed, “Johnson! I found an eyeball in mine.” Everyone at once threw up their burgers. The eyeball and what was left of Nelson’s burger were sent to the lab for testing.

When the results of the test came back, they found that the burgers were made from human meat.



Detective Johnson and a team of police arrived at Ray’s burger

restaurant. Police cars were parked all around and no one would be able to escape. There were no customers, but Ray's car was there.

Johnson kicked the door down and rushed inside. No one was there. They looked at the meat and also found artifacts from the cultists.

At that moment, they heard gunfire from across the street at the cultists' church.

"Follow me! I'm going in!" yelled Johnson.



Mary and Ray had killed all of the cultists except for the high priest, who was chanting strange words and holding a cup of blood in the air. Just as Ray shot him in the head, a demon rose from the cup of blood.

"I have been summoned, but someone has killed my summoner! I will get revenge," it said, scanning the room and seeing Ray.

This was the demon that had killed Ray's parents. He could never forget it. Ray was ready to make sure that he was the one who got revenge, not the demon.

Ray shot his gun. The bullet bounced off of the demon. He only had one bullet left and bullets seemed unable to hurt the creature.

"Ray! It's the blood," yelled Mary. "The demon gets life through that. Somehow, we have to destroy the blood - but how?"

The demon heard Mary and shot a bolt of energy at her. She ducked. Ray used that as his chance to try to attack while the demon wasn't looking. He ran and dived at the cup of blood that was now on the ground.

The demon turned just as Ray was close. It froze him with a blast of energy. Ray was then lifted off of the ground by the power of the demon. The demon started laughing as its energy began to pull Ray's soul from his body. Ray's eyes went white and his body was limp.

Mary ran and grabbed the cup of blood before the demon could stop her. She held it to her lips and drank. The demon only laughed.

"Foolish woman. Now I will take over your body!"

Detective Johnson and his police rushed in just as this was happening.

The demon dropped Ray as it started to disappear and take over

Mary's body instead.

"Ray! You have to shoot me! It will kill the demon. Otherwise, you'll never stop it! Aaaaaaaah!" She screamed as the demon started transforming her body.

Ray cried as he shot the last bullet from his gun. It went through Mary's body, hitting the detective in the leg.

The demon let out a loud noise as Mary exploded.

In that moment, Johnson lifted his gun and shot Ray in the shoulder. Ray collapsed as the other police officers surrounded him.



Ray hung up the photo of Mary. His new restaurant was named in her honor. It wasn't as big as the last place. He found it difficult to get someone to rent him space after getting out of prison.

He hadn't stayed in too long. The murders were all attributed to Mary. They couldn't prove that Ray had actually killed anyone. Detective Johnson and the police department overlooked the serving of human meat due to Ray's cooperation in turning over information about the cult and their other supporters. Now it was time for a fresh start.

"One Mary Burger, please," called out a customer.

"Coming right up!" They were regular burgers now, just beef. Well, mostly.

They were flavored with the aged remains of the demon that he found in the cultist's church. In that sense, each burger really had a part of Mary in them – a true Mary burger.

"I'll never forget you," he said as he looked at her picture and began frying the patty.

THE BRAVE EARRINGS

by Sakura Takasugi

Even when they sat on a table in an accessory shop in Shinjuku, Leo had promised Raisy that he would show her the world. She wanted to believe him, but as a pair of earrings, they couldn't move by themselves. They needed someone to move them around. Leo always had a lot to say, and, while the diamond that decorated him made him beautiful, it all seemed to be just empty words. Still, even if she didn't believe him, they would be together forever. They were a pair.

When Sayo's boyfriend presented Leo and Raisy to her, Raisy was hopeful that Leo's promises would come true.

It was date night, both for Sayo and her boyfriend and for Raisy and Leo. Sayo was going to meet her boy friend in Odaiba for shopping and dinner. She decided to wear the earrings that he had given her.

Raisy was excited to see a new place, but she also felt uneasy. Would it be too much for her? Would all of the swinging on Sayo's ears make her feel sick? What if she got dirty? She told Leo everything she was feeling.

"Don't worry, Raisy, I'll be by your side," he told her.

This made her feel better and she was ready to explore the world.



Sayo's boyfriend was waiting at the station. "You came," he said. "This is going to be a great date. Hey, are those the earrings I gave you?"

"They are," Sayo said cheerfully. "I love them."

"Well they look perfect on you." They held hands and started walking quickly.

Raisy and Leo swayed back and forth and they felt so happy at that moment.

Odaiba was wonderful. Raisy and Leo saw so many interesting

things in the shops, saw other girls on dates wearing earrings – maybe even one pair they had met at the shop – and smelled delicious food.

After dinner, Sayo and her boyfriend still didn't want to say goodbye. There would be a large typhoon tomorrow so they couldn't meet for at least another day. They went to the arcade to play a few games. Their favorite was a drum game where they would hit the drum together. They would jump up and down and they laughed happily as they played.

“I want to go take a printclub photo before we leave,” said Sayo.

They went into the booth and took such happy looking shots.

As they were editing the photos, Sayo's boyfriend said, “Hey, aren't you missing an earring?”

Sayo checked and it was true. Leo was gone. He must have fallen off.

Raisy silently screamed.

Sayo felt down. “I have to find it.”

“Don't worry about it,” her boyfriend said, “I'll buy you a new pair.” He comforted Sayo as they walked, but no one could comfort Raisy, who was crying for her partner.



Leo sat on the floor in the arcade. The fall had been hard and he had now just woken up. Immediately he knew that the others were away and that he was alone now. Still, he didn't think about himself. He thought of Raisy. Would she be ok alone?

A large noise started in the distance and was getting closer. He could see specks of dirt on the ground flying away. Now he was being pulled. Suddenly he was sucked into a vacuum cleaner and buried inside a lot of trash.

When the cleaner finished his job, he walked outside and emptied the contents of the vacuum into the garbage bin. Leo didn't know what to do, but he knew if he went in, he would be finished. Spinning as he could, he hit the rim of the garbage bin and bounced off of it, falling on the street below. He was unsure of his next move, but he fell asleep anyway.

It was the morning wind that woke him up. It was cold and getting stronger. Rain was falling as well. Suddenly the wind picked up speed

and with huge force, Leo was blown into the air. All around him leaves, plastic bags, and any number of things were flying. It was so exciting that for a moment he forgot his sadness, but only for a moment.

Finally, after a time longer than he could remember, Leo landed in a distant park. “Where am I?” he thought.



Sayo’s boyfriend had given her a new pair of earrings. She tried them on in the mirror, but they just didn’t feel right. She would put her hair up, or let it down, put it in a ponytail, and so on. She tried them with different outfits as well. Still, she preferred the other earrings and wished she still had the set.

The new earrings weren’t all that bad. They were a nice couple and they tried to comfort Raisy. Maybe Sayo would get another piercing in her ear and they could all go out together, they’d say. Raisy appreciated their sweet words, but it didn’t stop her from missing Leo.

Sayo gave up and decided to go to school without earrings today.



A cawing sound gave away the location of his stalker. A crow sat perched on the branch of a tree looking down on Reo. Crows often liked to collect shiny things, and Reo’s diamond, despite now being much dirtier, still twinkled in the sun.

Reo tried to avoid being caught. He couldn’t imagine what the crow might do to him. He tried to reflect the light from the sun into the crow’s eyes.

Unable to be dissuaded, the crow flew down and grabbed Reo in its beak. It began to fly.

Sayo had woken up late that morning and didn’t have time to eat breakfast at home. She had bought some bread at the convenience store and ate as she walked. She couldn’t eat it all before getting to school, though.

Near the gates of the school, Sayo opened the trash to throw away the remaining bread when she saw a crow sitting on the fence. “Do you want some bread?” she called to it. She threw it over to the bird.

When the crow opened its beak to grab the piece of bread, it dropped a shiny object. Sayo went to see what it was.

It was her earring. She couldn't believe it.



That evening after washing Reo, Sayo put him with Raisy. Raisy was even more surprised. Emotion and happiness overcame her. "I thought I had lost you!"

"I promised I'd show you the world. I just explored a little of it by myself first. Now I have more things to show you," he lovingly told her. "Besides, nothing can keep us apart. We're a pair."

A HERO NAMED KAI

by M.S. and K.N.

The rain was heavy and it pounded on Kai's window. Kai became very sad on seeing it. His mother had an incurable disease and thus everything was gloomy now. She had been sick for a while and she just seemed to get worse and worse. All she could do was sleep in her bed.

To escape from this, Kai would also stay alone in his room. Suddenly, he heard something fall outside the window. It made a sound too big to be from the rain. Kai rushed outside and saw a small bird. It looked injured. "Yet another suffering life in our home," thought Kai. He grabbed the surprised bird and brought it inside.

The bird looked so weak and troubled. Kai made a small bed for it in the corner of his room and continued nursing it into the night.



The morning sun was bright. All of the rain had cleared up. He could hear the sounds of the morning outside the window. He heard children playing and cars driving by.

Kai looked over at the bird. It was sitting up, looking at him. It seemed cured.

"Ok, little friend, I am going to take you to the veterinarian now. We'll get you better," Kai said.

"Thank you. I feel fine now. You really helped me," said the bird.

Kai was shocked! A talking bird? It wasn't like a parrot that was mimicking sounds, it was having a conversation with him! "How can you talk?"

"I just move my mouth. It's easy," said the bird.

"I mean why can you talk? I never seen a bird that could talk like you before."

"Oh, right. Where I am from, all the birds can talk. I was surprised when I came to your world that your birds can only sing," the

bird replied.

“You’re from a different world?” asked Kai.

“That’s right. And now that I know you are good at helping, I need you to help me with another thing.”

“What kind of help do you need?”

“Our world is dominated by a monster. We birds can’t defeat it, but you are big. I think you could defeat it for us,” said the bird confidently.

“Impossible! I’m just a boy. I can’t do it!”

“You can! And if you do, we birds can get back our magic stick. We could use it to cure your mother.”

“You know about my mother?”

“I can feel that she is sick. We can feel these things.”

Kai immediately knew that he had to try so he could help his mother.



The next morning, Kai put on some durable clothes and his boots. He grabbed his bag. He was as ready as he could be.

“Here,” said the bird, “hold this feather of mine. Then close your eyes. If we count to three, we will be in my world.”

Kai opened his eyes and they were in a magical place. There were trees all around, but they didn’t look like the trees he knew. They were glowing and all different colors. He also saw that he wasn’t alone. There were many more birds flying in the air and tiny fairies on the ground. They all stood looking at the boy with surprise just as he looked surprised at them.

“Chirpy! What have you brought with you?” asked another bird to the bird that Kai had met. It seemed Kai’s friend’s name was Chirpy.

“I brought a hero who will help us!” Chirpy said confidently.

“He’s big, but the monsters are bigger,” said the others.

As they argued, Kai opened his bag to get some juice. He was thirsty. He took a drink. At the same time, his toy squirt gun fell out.”

“What is this?” everyone asked. “Oh, it’s just my squirt gun.” Kai said. He picked up and shot some water in the air. “Wow!” said one of

the fairies. “This boy controls the water! We are water fairies, so he is our master. Let us hold this powerful object!”

Kai handed it to the tallest of the fairies.

With this, everyone trusted him and they began to tell Kai everything. The monster that controlled the world had two other monsters that protected him. One was a water monster and one was a fire monster. They would have to be defeated first.

Kai was scared, but the others thought he would surely win. He was the water controller. Chirpy looked proud of himself for finding such a hero.



The next day the group started their journey. At first, they approached the water monster. They watched it safely from behind some trees. It was large and it sat in lake. It looked so strong, but Kai asked, “if he is in the lake, can’t we just walk around him?”

“That’s not possible,” said Chirpy, “he needs water to survive, but he can leave the lake. He keeps a pool of water on the top of his head. It’s enough.”

Kai thought long and hard. Then he had an idea. “Birds, I need your help. Please fly around and make him leave the lake. When he is out, everyone fly around his head and distract him. Then I will defeat him.”

“But we will get tired while flying. When we slow down, he’ll eat us,” said one bird.

“I’ll defeat him as quickly as possible,” said Kai.

The birds flew out and the monster followed. Kai was nervous but he began to walk behind the water monster. Then the birds began to fly in circles in front of its face. As they did this, Kai climbed on the monster’s back and crawled towards its head. The monster was so angry at the birds that he didn’t feel Kai.

When he reached the top of the monster, Kai took out his juice box. He took the straw from it, put it into the water on the monster’s head and drank it. After all of the water was gone, the monster fell down. It was defeated.

They found in the lake half of a sword. This sword, they said, would help them to defeat the final monster.



After walking further, the group came to a terrible burning creature. This was the fire monster. Kai had no idea how to defeat it. If the birds got close, they would be burnt.

Just then the tall fairy walked up behind Kai. “There you are, master!” It said. “My assistants and I have been looking for you. Here is your weapon. Let’s defeat the creature.”

The fairy handed Kai his squirt gun.

“This is not enough water to beat the monster,” Kai cried.

“We copied your design and we made this,” said the fairy. His assistants rolled out a giant water gun several meters tall on a cart.”

Ropes were tied around the trigger. Before the monster even seen them, Kai, the fairies, and the bird pulled on the ropes. A giant stream of water hit the monster and the flames were extinguished. They had defeated the fire monster.

The other half of the sword was near the monster’s body. Kai put them together and felt powerful. With this, he was sure he could defeat anything.



The journey to the mightiest monster was the hardest. It lived deep in a dark and dirty cave. Spiders crawled the walls and bats flew in the air. The spiders were said to have a love for the taste of fairy meat and the bats were rumored to hunt birds. Kai knew he had to go in alone.

Kai took the sword in his hand. It created a magical shield around him. When the spiders and bats tried to attack him, the shield pushed them away. Kai felt all the more confident.

Kai could hear the breathing of the beast before he saw it. When he did see it, it was massive.

“So, they have brought a warrior from another world to battle me? You think that you can win?” it hissed.

Kai smiled, knowing that he was protected by a magic shield. He walked confidently towards the monster.

The monster shot a beam of fire at Kai, it hit him, burning his clothes. How is this possible, thought Kai as he ripped his shirt off, but not before his back was burned badly.

“I hold the birds’ magic stick! Your magic defense is nothing.” And with that, the monster grabbed Kai and tried to throw him in his mouth.

Kai put the sword in first. As he did so, the spiders and bats surrounded the monster, helping push the sword in, deeper and deeper.

The monster collapsed, dropping the stick.

“Thank you, brave fighter,” said a bat.

“The monster forced us to fight for him, but we only wanted peace,” said another.

“We weren’t strong enough to beat him on our own, but with you, the sword, and the way you pushed us away, we knew you could,” said a spider.

“Then let there be peace,” Kai said as he grabbed the stick.

The spiders carried him out of the cave like a hero while the bats danced in the air. When they got to the fairies and the birds, they all held a giant celebration.



Kai opened the door to his mother’s room. Her eyes were wide open as she watched him enter with a collection of birds, fairies, bats, and spiders.

“Kai, what are you doing? Am I hallucinating? Am I getting sicker?”

“No, mom, in fact, you are about to be much better.”

Chirpy held the magic stick in his beak and flew around Kai’s mother while the others said some magic words.

Suddenly Kai’s mother sat up. It was the first time she had done so in a long time. Kai hugged her and the others applauded.

“Son, I think you have a lot to tell me,” she said.

Everyone laughed.

Kai was now a hero two times over.

MAGIC FOR LOVE

by Ririka Ota and S.K.

Yuka sat in the hospital bed, surrounded by the most beautiful flowers. She was a mystery. She had this power that allowed her to make flowers bloom, but even though the flowers were healthy, she could not help herself.

Tsubasa was also always there with her. He loved Yuka's angelic face and that she was so kind. He would do anything for her. He had tried to use his magic wand to cure her many times, but nothing worked.

The doctor walked in. "Has she talked?" asked the doctor.

"No. She's just the same as always. How about you, doctor? Have you found any spells or potions that might help?" asked Tsubasa.

"No. We've tried everything. I think there is only one chance left."

"What is it?"

"Maybe the North Witch can help, but she's on Rock Mountain. Who would go there?"

"I'll go," said Tsubasa.

"But it's dangerous."

"If it's our last hope, I'll do it. I'd do anything for Yuka."



Early the next morning, Tsubasa made his way to the base of Rock Mountain. He started climbing, knowing it would not be easy. Nonetheless, he didn't expect to have trouble so quickly.

A bear jumped out of the woods and pinned Tsubasa down before he had a chance to grab his magic wand. The bear growled and its drool landed on his face. Tsubasa was less scared than he was sad that he would die before he could help Yuka.

Just then, the bear froze and it was lifted off of him. Tsubasa saw a boy standing nearby, holding a magic wand of his own.

"Are you OK?" asked the boy. "

Thank you. I think my legs are injured, but you saved me. I really

appreciate it.”

“No problem. It can be dangerous here. Let me take you to my house and we’ll see if my teacher can help you. By the way, I’m Makoto.”

“Thank you, Makoto. I’m Tsubasa.”

Makoto used his power to pick Tsubasa up in the air and fly him up the mountain. After the long journey, they arrived at a run-down house.

An elderly woman came up to the boys. “What happened?” she asked.

“This boy was injured,” said Makoto.

“Yes, I came to look for the North Witch, but I got injured right away. I was lucky that Makoto was there.”

“Well,” said the woman, “you are lucky again. First, I can cure you – and second, I’m the North Witch. You found me.”

After she performed her spell and cured Tsubasa, they talked about why he came.

The witch held the picture of Yuka in her hand and showed it to Makoto.

“She’s the most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen. I’m really jealous of you, Tsubasa,” said Makoto.

“I want to help you,” said the North Witch. “As you can see, I can cure people. The problem is, there is a curse. I can’t leave this mountain. You have to be able to cure her. There is too much to risk, so I will train both you and Makoto how to cure people. Then, you will both go back. Only one of you needs to do it correctly to save her.”



After about a year of training, the day was coming when they would try to help Yuka. The training had been very intense and both boys pushed each other and became competitive. Tsubasa never lost focus, though. Thoughts of Yuka kept him motivated and determined. Makoto, however, was different. He began to hate hearing Tsubasa talk about her. When this ended, Tsubasa would have love and what would Makoto have? He started to imagine that Yuka was his girlfriend and he treated Tsubasa as a rival, not as a friend.

The North Witch entered the boys’ training area. She looked at

them. “I know it has been difficult, but I think that you have trained your minds and bodies well enough to use the magic. However, only the boy who has the magic ingredient of healing can really use this magic. There is only ingredient at present and it is hidden in this mountain. You will compete with your other powers to find it.”



They met on the mountain’s peak. Each of the boys squared off. First Makoto cast a spell of fire and fire surrounded Tsubasa. Tsubasa made the clouds above open up and it started to rain. The rain put out the fire. Then the rain turned into hail, hitting Makoto on the head.

“Your magic is weak,” yelled Makoto. “A weakling like you could never cure the girl.” As he said this, Makoto summoned a dragon. The dragon put a wing over Makoto’s head, stopping the hail from hitting him. It let out a large breath that blew the rain clouds away and knocked Tsubasa down.

“Shut up! Why are you even studying magic?” Tsubasa said as he was on the ground.

The dragon walked towards Tsubasa, its mouth open to eat him. It licked its long, sharp teeth and laughed. Makoto climbed on its back, ready to watch as the dragon killed his rival.

“I want revenge. You see, I was an orphan. I was abused. I want to go and hurt all of the people who hurt me. If I take the ingredient of healing, no one can help the people I hurt. They will suffer forever.” Makoto laughed an evil laugh.

Tsubasa screamed, “magic is not for revenge! Magic is for helping people! It’s for love!” And with that Tsubasa also summoned a dragon high in the sky. It was the most beautiful dragon anyone had ever seen, glistening in the sun. But surely it was too far away to get to Tsubasa in time to save him.

Makoto’s dragon looked at the dragon that Tsubasa had summoned. It paused. The scary dragon had fallen in love with the beautiful dragon. Suddenly it jumped into the air and flew towards Tsubasa’s. Makoto was still on its back, screaming from the speed as the two dragons played in the sky and then flew away. Only Tsubasa was left, the winner of the challenge.

The battle had drained Tsubasa. He collapsed on the ground and closed his eyes.

When he opened them, he saw in front of him the most beautiful and delicate flower. It reminded him of Yuka. He decided he would give it to her when he went to cure her.

Tsubasa plucked the flower from the ground and suddenly felt stronger, so he started his walk back to the North Witch.



“Ah, brave Tsubasa. So you are the winner?” said the North Witch.

“Makoto was so strong.”

“And where is he?”

“He tried to kill me. He said he was abandoned by his family and unloved. He wanted revenge.”

“Silly boy. I love him – and I think that I am his new family. I guess it wasn’t enough for him. Anyway,” continued the witch, “you found it.”

“Found what?” asked Tsubasa, puzzled.

“The curing flower. With that, you can cure Yuka. Go to her now. You’ll know what to do.”



Tsubasa made his way back to the hospital.

As soon as the doctor saw him outside, he came over. “Tsubasa, you returned... but it may be too late. She has worsened.”

Tsubasa began to cry. He dropped the flower and it blew away in the wind. He grabbed for it, but he wasn’t quick enough.

“Did you see the North Witch?”

“I did.”

“And did she help you?”

“She did,” said Tsubasa. “But that flower, it was the cure. And now I’ve lost it. I’d still like to see her, though.”

The flowers in Yuka’s room were wilting. It was the first time he

had ever seen flowers around her in such a state. He understood how sick she had become.

Tsubasa grabbed Yuka's hand, told her he loved her, and asked her to forgive him for coming so close, but failing.

At that moment he heard a knock on the window outside her room. He looked and there was Makoto on a dragon. He held a flower in his hand.

Tsubasa opened the window.

"Makoto. I saw the flower blowing in the wind and I caught it. I'm sorry I was so jealous. I realized I wasn't alone. I had the North Witch for a new mother and over one year, you became my brother. I wanted to help you to save your love."

With these words, Makoto handed him the flower.

Tsubasa chanted the magic words and placed the petals one by one on her forehead. Yuka awoke with a gasp.

They embraced and all of the flowers, not only in her room, but for miles around, bloomed.

What happened after? That's another story.

A HERO OF MANY SIZES: HOW DAIGO GREW ON MIKI

by Jason Pratt

Taking out the garbage on Saturday mornings was Daigo's chore. He didn't mind it at all. To be honest, he looked forward to it. His mom was happy to see him helping around the house. Though it was just the two of them, there was so much to do.

The car pulled up, as it always did at this time, and the music was too loud for this time of morning, as it always was. Miki got out and waved to her friend inside. She always returned around now after a night of clubbing at Ageha.

"Hi, Daigo!" This greeting was the reason that he took out the trash. He just wanted to hear her say his name. Even after an all-nighter, she looked amazing, like an angel.

"Hi, Miki."

And that's where it usually ended. It was still enough to give him the happiness he needed to last until Monday when they would have class together. Well, they never talked in class, but still... Today, though, she kept talking.

"You know that test in Ms. Kaneda's class on Monday? Do you think you could help me study for it - maybe tomorrow? I'm lost."

"Uh... sure. Yeah. I'll get my notes ready."

"Great. I'll come over at 7. By the way, you look taller."

"Ok. Sure," he barely said as his heart was about to explode from beating so fast. She waved goodbye and he stared at nothing for minutes before he could walk inside his apartment.



Daigo didn't really have any good notes from class, but he had a day and a half to study hard enough to make Miki think that he knew it all. He took off his glove that he had been wearing on his left hand lately and moved his four fingers and his fifth half finger. See, Daigo had a gift, but it came with a cost.

A week ago, he had learned that if he concentrated, he could change his size. It happened by accident at first, but the other day, he decided he wanted to be taller. He didn't want it to be too noticeable, so he just grew about 5 centimeters. Still, everyone was complimenting him and his confidence was finally increasing. The problem was that each time he changed size, his body needed energy, and it got this energy by absorbing part of itself. This time he had lost half of a finger in order to grow. He figured that no one would notice with the glove on.

Daigo looked through his text and tried to find any notes he had taken in class. There were no notes. He realized that he would have a lot of studying to do.

"Let go of me!" - he heard the scream coming from outside. He knew it was Miki's voice. "Somebody ... please!"

Daigo looked out the window and saw a man, nearly 2 meters tall with the left half of his hair gray, shove her into a black sedan. He shut the door as he screamed, "Get in!" Daigo didn't even have time to see the license plate number before the car sped off quickly. Daigo stood again staring out of his window for what seemed like forever before he realized that he might be the only one who could save Miki.

Daigo went to where the car had pulled away from. He could not believe what had just happened. The soil around the area and the weeds were scattered from the struggle. The usual litter was on the ground - cigarette butts and whatnot. There was also a card for a Chinese restaurant. Daigo picked it up. There was a note written: "Ask for Tony," and yesterday's date was written. Could Miki or the man have dropped it? It would be Daigo's only hope.



Chinatown wasn't so far away, but Daigo almost never went there. Still, he was dedicated and somehow it was easy for him to find the

restaurant. When the place opened for lunch, he went inside and asked the woman at the register for Tony.

Tony walked up and looked over Daigo. Tony was a bit shorter than Daigo, but he looked a bit dangerous and intimidating. He seemed annoyed to be called on.

"Have you seen this girl?" Daigo showed a photo of Miki on his cellphone.

"I wish. She's cute. You a stalker or something?" Tony laughed a little as he said this.

"No. She was taken. I gotta find her."

"Good luck. Lunch starts in a minute. Why don't you have some?"

"Wait," pleaded Daigo as Tony was turning to walk back into the kitchen. "I found this card." Daigo handed over the card with the note.

"I give out a lot of these cards, kid. Look, I gotta get back to work."

"I think the man who took the girl might have dropped it."

Tony looked a bit nervous.

Daigo continued, "he was tall. Really tall. And his hair - one side was all gray and the other black."

Tony stammered, "look, we get a lot of customers here. I can't remember them all."

"You have to remember this guy - no one else looks like that!" Daigo stepped in his way.

"Leave me alone!" Tony tried to push Daigo, but Daigo grew to about 2.5 meters and grabbed Tony's shoulders. "What?! Look - he'll hurt me if I say anything!"

"I'll hurt you if you don't!" screamed Daigo. He looked down and noticed that all the fingers on his left hand were now gone.

"Fine.... fine... his name is Suzuki. He's the leader of a gang. They have a place near Aobadai station. It's right behind the Tokyu Plaza. It's an oyster restaurant, but the back room is really their headquarters. Don't tell him I told you! Please!"

Daigo walked out of the restaurant, having to shrink again to fit out of the door. Panting from adrenaline, he moved to put his hand in

his pocket to look for his train pass, but he realized, he now had no left hand after changing size again.



The oyster place was busy that evening.

"Sorry, sir. We're full tonight."

Daigo was not good at lying, but he tried. "My friends are here already. I'm late."

"I see. Ok, come on in."

Daigo walked around, pretending to look at the other customers, but really checking for some kind of back entrance. Just then, a man who looked like a gangster walked past him and towards the bathroom area. Daigo followed.

A door shut just as he arrived. Right next to the bathroom doors was a thick metal door. Daigo tried to open it, but could not. There was a keypad next to the door. There was no way that he could get that password.

He heard two restaurant staff talking, "we found a couple of cockroaches yesterday."

"What? I hope the customers don't find out."

"I hope Mr. Suzuki doesn't find out!"

"But we clean this place so well!"

"Yeah, but they sneak under the doors. You can't stop them."

Daigo looked down. There was a small space under the metal door. He knew what to do. Daigo shrank and shrank and shrank until he was small enough to walk under the door.

Once inside, it was a different conversation he was hearing. Two gun-holding gangsters were talking about a girl. It had to be Miki.

"I want to see this girl. I heard she's really cute. I wish Suzuki would open his office door sometime so we could just get a peak."

"Look only I have a key for that door and I am not giving it to you. I won't even use it! That guy scares me. He'd kill us both."

Daigo had to get the key. He knew the gangsters would not just give it to him, so he decided to take action. The still small Daigo climbed up the clothes of one of them. After he reached his head, Daigo climbed

up into his ear, he got even smaller so he could enter very deeply. Once inside, Daigo grew fast to his regular size. The gangster's head exploded.

Quickly, Daigo fell to the ground and grabbed the dead gangster's gun. As the shot was fired, both of his arms disappeared. Daigo was now without arms.

From the other side of the office door he heard a voice yell, "what's happening out there?!" Daigo recognized it. It was the voice of the man who took Miki. It was Suzuki.

Daigo grabbed the key in his mouth and put it into the door.



Suzuki stared at Daigo. At first he stared with shock, then with anger. "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"Daigo! Why? How? What happened to your arms?" Miki was sitting in the corner in a chair. She was bruised, messy, and her clothes were torn. Suzuki's gun was pointed at her.

"I love you. I always have. I had to try to save you," Daigo blurted out.

"You aren't saving anyone! You're done!" yelled Suzuki.

Daigo started growing. He felt his toes disappearing. "You'll let her go or I'll make you! You don't know what I'm capable of!"

Suzuki was obviously shocked, but he turned quickly, pointing the gun at Daigo. He pulled the trigger.

Before the bullet reached him, Daigo shrank quickly. The bullet raced over his head, but his left leg was now gone. "This is your last chance! Let her go and never bother us again!" Daigo yelled.

"I'll kill you, you freak!" yelled Suzuki.

"I warned you..." Daigo began growing larger and larger. His right foot disappeared. He kept growing. His calf disappeared. He got bigger. Soon, he was just a giant torso and head without any arms or legs. He rolled onto Suzuki and crushed him. The yakuza died under his weight.

"Miki, you're free. Go," Daigo let out sadly.

"Not without you!" Tears rolled down her cheek. "I'll take you with me."

Daigo began to shrink to a size where she could carry him. He was just a head.

Miki had tears in her eyes. She was relieved and heartbroken at the same time. "Thank you, Daigo," she said as she kissed his forehead and placed his head in her bag.

Miki made her way out of the big door. She looked very rough, but none of the customers in the oyster restaurant noticed her walking towards the exit. They were too busy concentrating on the police who had gathered outside.



"Honey, I'm almost ready!"

Daigo was watching TV waiting for Miki to get ready for the night out. Even after two weeks, the news was still talking about the mysterious Yakuza boss who was found mysteriously crushed. No one could guess what had happened. No one knew the truth. The police had rounded up all of the group's members, but the only ones who had been in the area when Suzuki was killed were also dead. Daigo was sure that no one suspected him, so he told the TV to turn off and just waited for Miki.

Miki came out looking great. She was wearing a new outfit for the club tonight. She picked up Daigo. Miki put him in the baby harness on her front, his new little legs and hands stuck out the side. They were growing well and were over 4 centimeters long already. "Pretty soon you won't fit into this anymore. Then how am I going to take you to the club."

"You can go without me for a while then."

"Without my love? No way! I'll figure it out."

"Let's take the garbage out on our way. We might be too tired in the morning."

Miki grabbed the garbage and called her friends to see if they were ready to pick her and Daigo up. She then locked the door behind them for the night.

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