

Heads and Tales
Stories From
Around The World



BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
HO CHI MINH CITY
A NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION SCHOOL

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An Anthology Of Folk Tales

“

Creativity is the way I share
my soul with the world.

”

Brene Brown

Note From Ngoc And Arjun

This folk tales collection is created by students from many places around the world who share the same inspiration: writing about our native cultures and traditions.

As you embark on your journey with us, we invite you to open your minds up to the unique cultures portrayed in these stories. This collection of short stories has been made for people to immerse themselves and experience the different cultural aspects of different nations across the globe. We strongly urge you to participate in one or more of the activities that have been listed at the end of each book as they have been designed to enhance the experience of reading the anthology. Lastly, thank you for spending your time on this journey and we hope you will enjoy it!

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Durga

By **Arjun Mitra**

Calcutta – October 2000

Manik was feeling good. It was that time of the year again. The City of Kolkata was gearing up for its biggest festival of the year: the Durga Puja. There was a festive atmosphere in the air, he just had to get through another week of school.

Manik was studying in Grade Six in the Southview National High School. It was English Literature class and the boy was lost in thought staring out of his classroom window when Robin Sir's stern voice bought him back from his daydream. "Manik, can you recite a few lines from the poem Daffodils?" Manik's mind froze. He had memorized the entire poem but now couldn't recall anything. "What were you thinking about?" Robin Sir enquired.

"Sorry Sir, I was thinking about the Durga Puja" Manik replied honestly. Robin Sir was patient. He was not a hard-nosed teacher and allowed the kids to express themselves even at the cost of wavering from the topic he was teaching. He asked Manik, "so what do you know about the Durga Puja?" Manik replied "I love Durga Puja Sir. We have an entire week of holiday." All the boys and girls of grade 7A laughed. Manik felt embarrassed and Robin Sir didn't press ahead with more questions. "I want you find all that you can about Durga Puja during this year's holidays and write an essay which I want on my table just after school opens." Manik was relieved. He was off the hook at least for the moment. There would be plenty of time to do the Essay he reasoned in his head. "I will do as you say Sir" Manik said and just then the bell rang announcing the end of Robin Sir's English period.

Manik lived with his parents in a yellow coloured, two storied house in the Bagh Bazar area of North Kolkata. Manik's father, who he called "Baba" was a Manager in an Advertising Company and his mother "Ma" ran a play school for kindergarten kids. Manik's elder sister "Didi" was in grade XII. The Banerjee family was getting ready for the week long Puja celebrations.

"This year we will go to see the Idols during the night" Baba announced to the family over dinner.

"Wow, that is so exciting" Didi remarked.

"Why do we have to take the children out at night, particularly Manik? He is too young to be staying up all night" Ma said. She didn't agree with her Baba's proposal.

"No Ma, it will be great fun. I want to go Pandal hopping at night" Manik's voice betrayed his eagerness for this new adventure which promised so much. He continued "In fact I need to know all about the Ma Durga. I have to write an essay and submit to Robin Sir just after the holidays. Please Ma, let me go with Didi, Baba and you on this night trip."

The city of Kolkata in Eastern India goes crazy during the Durga Puja week. Colourful

Pandals (Temporary Structures) which house the Durga Idols spring up in every neighbourhood. Each Pandal and Idol trying to outdo the other in its uniqueness and beauty. In the evening the whole city is lit up in multicoloured lamps and chandeliers with popular local music blaring from speakers perched on temporary poles. Millions turn out in bright new clothes to witness this grand spectacle. Manik was very excited. He told his sister, “Didi, this year I am going to see more than 100 Durga idols. More than any of my friends.” She looked at her brother lovingly and replied “I am sure you will, but do you know the story of Ma Durga and why we celebrate Durga Puja every year with such splendor?” Manik was curious to know. It would help him with his essay later. “I want to know, Didi please tell me the story” Manik said earnestly.

Brother Sister Duo settled down on the floor rug of their living room. Manik’s mother brought them some puffed rice flavoured with mustard oil and green peas. Didi began her story:

Durga is the goddess of power and strength; she is multi-dimensional with many names, many personas and many facets. There is an interesting tale of the vicious battle between goddess Durga and Mahishasura.

Mahishasura, the buffalo demon, meditated for years and after his hard and long penance, he pleased Lord Shiva with his devotion. Lord Shiva blessed him with a boon that no man or deity would be able to kill him. Mahishasura, now protected by the boon, grew extremely proud. He became invincible and killed innocent people ruthlessly. He even attacked the abode of the gods. The war between the gods and the demons lasted a hundred years, in which Mahishasura was the leader of the Asuras or demons and Indra was the chief of the gods. The gods were defeated by the more powerful demons and Mahishasura became their leader.

Didi stopped to take a handful of the puffed rice mixture and deftly flicked it into her mouth. Manik was all ears, sitting cross legged with his face resting between the palms of his hand.

“What happened after that?” he asked.

Didi continued “The gods went and asked for Lord Shiva’s help. Shiva asked all the gods to release their energies forming the pure energy of godhood. They all joined their energies and the powerful band of lightning that emerged from the gods led to the creation of a young, beautiful female with ten hands, Goddess Durga. The gods called her ‘the invincible one’ and gifted the goddess with their weapons and other divine objects to help her in her battle with the demon, Mahishasur.” Ma had walked into the room and standing behind her daughter listening to her narrate the story. She was delighted to see her children talking about a very important aspect of Indian Mythology. “So did Maa Durga fight Mahishasur? What happened please continue Didi” Manik pleaded impatiently. He was listening intently to Didi narrate the story. Didi narrated the concluding part of the story. “Thus armed, Durga rode on a lion to the top of a mountain

and a fierce battle took place between Mahishasura and the goddess. At last he fell dead and the scattered surviving remnants of his once unbeatable army fled in shock. The most important form of Durga is as Mahishasuramardini or the slayer of Mahishasura, the buffalo demon.

“Wow! That is an amazing story. Now I know why Maa Durga is such a powerful goddess” Manik rolled over on his back on the rug and Didi gave him a hug.

The festive week is also a time when everyone, particularly the children, dress up new clothes and try to look their best. Manik had gone with Ma and Didi to shop for new clothes a week before the holidays. On the evening the family was to go out to see the Idols, Manik put on his newly bought faded blue denim shorts and bright Orange T-shirts. “Someone is looking really nice today. . .and happy too” Didi commented looking at Manik standing near the entrance. He couldn’t wait to go out. Their first stop was at the local Pandal. It had been made in the shape of the Himalayan Mountain range with the Idol of the Goddess nestled on one of the Peaks. The decoration was a colourful combination of Red and Yellow. Manik met his friend Palash and the two talked excitedly about how many Idols they would see as the night wore on. “Manik, we need to go”, his father’s voice broke up the tete-a-tete. The Crowd was starting to build up on the streets as the Banerjee family headed to the Subway. Their next destination was Central Kolkata, where they would visit a couple of well know Durga Puja Pandals. The subway was packed with an impatient crowd of people all eagerly waiting for the next train to arrive. They had to wait half an hour before being able to board the train that would take them to the most famous Kolkata Puja Mandal at Mohammed Ali Park.



The Mohammed Ali Park

It was in this place that Manik got lost. The crowd at the entrance of the famous Pandal was milling around and there was a serpentine queue. Manik was holding onto Didi's hand as they waited patiently to get into the Pandal enclosure. Manik was awestruck as they entered. The whole enclosure was lit up and in front was a giant stage which housed the Durga Idol. The Crowd pushed ahead and before Manik could realize he had let go of Didi's hand. All he could see in front was a sea of people all advancing towards the deity like a wave. He pushed ahead catch up with the rest of his family, but the sea of human bodies and heads drowned him. Manik tried desperately to catch a glimpse of the familiar pink dress Didi was wearing or his mother's yellow Saree. They were nowhere to be seen. Manik was now out of breath and starting to panic. Tears were flowing down his cheeks as he kept walking with the crowd, feeling completely lost and helpless. The evening which had started with so much excitement and anticipation of the adventure that lay ahead had turned into the worst nightmare. The poor eleven year old boy was sobbing uncontrollably.



A photo of Maa Durga

Manik realized he had reached the stage. The Idol of Maa Durga stood towering over him. The scene of the defeating Mahisashur was in front of him. He looked at the face of the goddess. It was so beautiful and brave. Something inside Manik said he had to face this current situation the way Durga dealt with the Buffalo Demon. It was as if someone was talking to him in his head. "Don't be afraid. I am there with you" the voice said. Manik stood transfixed. His crying had stopped as he stared at the eyes of Goddess. "Go back home, the way you had come" the voice said again. Manik remembered something. He put his hands into his pocket. Yes he was right. The stub of the Subway train ticket was still there. They had bought return tickets when then took the train from Bagh Bazar.

He looked at face of the Idol. She was smiling at him “I told you” she said “be brave, you can overcome your challenge.” Manik felt a kind of confidence, he never knew he had. It came from within and wiped out his fear. He searched for the exit. The crowd was moving towards the exit after paying respects to the deity. He followed them.

In the subway, he noticed two burly and dangerous looking men looking at him. Manik’s fears returned to haunt him again. Last year one of his class mates had been kidnapped by some bad men. Luckily for him, the Police were able to track down the culprits but he also knew of many stories where boys went missing and never returned. His mind was filled with these dark thoughts. The digital signboard on the platform read “next train in 10 minutes 32 seconds.” Manik was desperately hoping the train would arrive and he would be able to get into the relative safety of the compartment. He felt vulnerable on the platform. He started slowly walking away from the men. After a while, he stopped and turned around. His heart was in his mouth. The duo was following him. They were evening closer than before and walking towards him with purpose, an evil scary purpose. Manik didn’t know what to do. His stood transfixed, his mind was numb. The men were now a few feet away looking menacingly at him. Manik tried to scream but his voice was choked with fear. “Manik what are you doing here? Where are your parents?” The voice startled Manik. He turned around to see Robin Sir. Manik ran towards Sir and held his hand. “What happened Manik? Why are you crying and why are you alone.” Manik’s eyes were looking at the two goons. They stopped and spoke softly to each other before returning in the direction from where they had come. Manik was relieved. He explained his situation to Robin Sir. “Oh my God” Robin Sir exclaimed! “Let me first call you father. Your parents must be looking all over the place for you. Do you have his mobile number?” Manik knew the number. He had to memorize one contact number in case of emergency. That was mandatory for all school students. “Yes, Sir. The number is 9330678436” he said.

North Western University, Chicago, Illinois – August 2012

The Graduation convocation host announced “Now, ladies and gentlemen, the much awaited award for the best student of the graduating class of 2012. To announce the award may I call upon stage our Dean of Undergraduate Programs Profession Stevens” The hall was packed with the North western Graduating class of 2012 and parents. Everyone’s eyes were trained on Professor Stevens as he opened the envelope. He addressed the audience “This was not an easy decision for the faculty to make. We have the best and the brightest students here in North Western, and we are proud of the excellent performance of the graduating class of 2012. However, the name I am now going to announce was a unanimous choice. My dear students, Ladies and Gentlemen, the best Student of the 2012 graduating class is Manik Banerjee. Please give him a big round of applause.”

Manik stood up and walked to the stage. Dean Stevens shook his hand and handed over his Scroll and the Medal for best Student. “Now, I would request Manik to say a few words the host announced and handed Manik the microphone. Manik felt that familiar uncomfortable feeling in his stomach. Public speaking was not his forte. He dreaded the stage and spotlight. Manik stepped forward. “Thank you Dean Stevens. Friends, I am overjoyed to receive this award today. North Western has been home to me for the past four years so there couldn’t have been a more fitting farewell. I am not prepared for an award acceptance speech today so instead of the traditional speech, I am going to tell you a story. It’s the story of eleven year old Indian boy in his hometown of Calcutta. It’s a story of courage conquering fear and fortune favouring the brave. Above all it’s the story of DURGA.

Turkey Weaving Carpets

By **Doan Nguyen**

In a small corner in Hereke, Turkey, a village famous for producing the best hand knotted carpets in the world, a small family lived happily and peacefully. Yonca is a carpet weaver whose husband passed away during her pregnancy. However, her daughter, Aylin, never felt lonely, as the comfort and warmth that Yonca provided was more than enough to make her life truly wonderful. Love never failed to fill the house.

Yonca had been weaving carpets for years, which was clearly displayed in her graceful execution of the job. Every time Yonca weaved, she gave a beautiful performance. Swiftly, her hands moved. Swiftly, they danced. As if a ballet dancer were doing a pirouette, Yonca looped the wool in and out of the loom with extreme elegance. Her meticulousness resulted in exquisite carpets, where each told its own story, whether it was a personal experience or a long lasting folktale that made its way through numerous generations. Eyes, birds, flowers and stars. Every object had a special meaning, from family or love, to passion or protection from the evil. There was something magical about it – a carpet was more than just a piece of woven wool and cotton. It was a timeless piece that embodied the complex culture of Turkey and the personal stories of each carpet weaver. For Yonca, this was not simply a family business that she was entitled to work for. It was her life.



The carpet designs of Turkish crafts

Yonca had made carpet weaving look so easy, but this was only because she was extremely talented and dedicated to her work. However, behind the smiles she wore was an array of hardships. Yonca often received bruises and cuts from dealing with sharp equipment and her whole body would ache after every weaving session. Furthermore, the sheer intricacy

of the carpet designs and the large amount of knots needed meant that Yonca spent most, if not all, of her day working. Ever since her husband passed away, a large responsibility laid itself on Yonca's shoulders: she had to work ceaselessly to support Aylin, knowing that her daughter had no one else. Even so, Yonca never complained about this. She wanted the best future for her child and was determined to fulfill her duties as a mother. She knew that it would be unfair to complain as her daughter did not suffer any less; Aylin was a 12-year-old girl who could only receive half the amount of support and care that other children who still had their families in whole received.

Meanwhile, Aylin was rarely seen at home and always seemed to be outside playing with her friends. Although children traditionally helped their parents weave carpets, Yonca did not mind that her daughter did not do this. She did not mind doing all the work by herself, since all she wanted was to see her daughter smile. But buried deep inside her somewhere were still occasional questions of "What ifs". What if my daughter had helped me weave these carpets? Would my life be easier? What if she were to notice the struggles that I have been facing all alone? What if I were to ask her to help me?

However, Yonca was scared that delving further into these questions would only hurt her daughter and so she often boxed her thoughts away and continued weaving carpets with little interruption.

On some days, Yonca would wake up in the morning and notice that her carpet was longer than it had been the day before, even when she did not work on it. She was confused but reasoned that the Gods pitied her for being the only worker in the family, and so they must have decided to help her weave the carpets. Seeing this, she began to compare the Gods' actions to the lack of help that her daughter gave, and started to think of those "What if" questions more frequently. Thoughts that were occasional gushes of wind were soon to become large, frightening storms

"Aylin, dear, can you pass me the wool please?" Yonca asked her daughter on a normal working day. Her daughter handed the roll of wool to her. But she noticed something strange; Aylin had multiple injuries on her delicate, little hands.

"Why do you have bruises and cuts on your hands?" Yonca asked.

Aylin stumbled, "Oh... I injured myself a little while playing with some friends."

For a moment, Yonca stayed silent, but soon the box which held her feelings tight finally ruptured. "Do you always play outside with your friends while your mother works all alone at home? Why don't you ever help me weave the carpets? Yonca questioned, "Do you not care about your mother? I've never complained once about my own life because I didn't want to put any burden on yours, but I can't endure this by myself any longer."

"But -", Aylin muttered, as if she was trying to explain something.

"At least the Gods have made my life easier by helping me weave the carpets. Meanwhile, all you do is go outside and fuss around with your friends and even get multiple bruises on top of that. Do you not love your mother?" Yonca shouted. Aylin was speechless, and this lack of response made Yonca even angrier.

Aylin bursted out crying while her mother looked on. This was the first time that Yonca had ever shouted at her daughter in such an intimidating manner, yet she strongly felt that it was the right thing to do. That night, Yonca lay in her bedroom thinking about what she had said. She knew that it was harsh, but she wanted Aylin to realise her mistakes. Even though Yonca had never expected her daughter's help, she thought that Aylin would at least choose her mother over her friends. She thought that Aylin would have a better reason for her lack of presence at home.

In the middle of the night, the mother woke up to the sound of something collapsing. Yonca rushed out of her room to find her loom on the floor. Next to it were two little, delicate hands holding a string of wool. All along, Aylin had been helping her mother weave the carpets in the middle of the night without her knowing.

“I didn’t want you to find out because I was afraid that you’d stop me...” Aylin mumbled. She was right. Even though Yonca talked as if she desperately needed her daughter’s health, in fact, she would have prevented Aylin from weaving and would have done all the work by herself anyway. She did not want her daughter to have such a tiring job. The mother now realised that the bruises on her daughter’s hands were not from messing around with her friends, but a result of the hard work she had put into secretly making the intricate carpets. They were a product of her loving heart. A feeling of guilt ran through Yonca’s body as she was stricken by the sudden realisation that she was wrong from the start. Just as her daughter’s help was unnecessary, Yonca’s harsh words were unnecessary.

Yonca ran over to her daughter and embraced her. As if they simultaneously understood what the other was thinking, both Yonca and her daughter cried and had a talk to clear any misunderstandings. Truthfully, Yonca was not angry that Aylin did not help her weave the carpets. She felt that the love that she had for Aylin had not been returned in the same way. She put huge amounts of effort into selling the carpets to support Aylin, but knowing that her daughter frequently went out with her friends had hurt her emotionally. She simply wanted Aylin to stay at home more so that they could spend time together. Aylin also admitted that she was at fault for not trying to explain herself to her mother, even when she had many chances. After the talk, Yonca and her daughter felt an ever stronger bond between them.

From that day on, the family continued to weave carpets every day. But Yonca now had a little companion sitting by her side. They weaved and weaved, their hearts weaving into one.

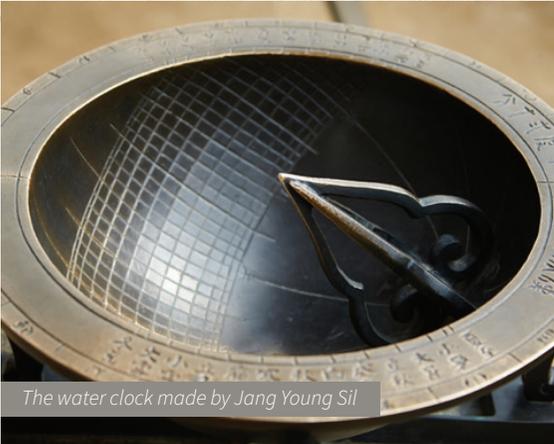
Korea

By **Joo Hyeon Park**

There once was a boy called Sung Oh. He wore rectangular blue glasses and he always had a book with him.

Sung Oh was really interested in history and that was why he was very excited to go to the Korean History Museum. In the museum, he saw some things he has never seen before: a sun clock that was as round as a ball, a water clock that looked nothing like a clock, and some Korean pottery that had beautiful designs of trees and flower on it.

Sung Oh wanted to have a closer a look, to see how these things were made, and when they were made. There was only one thing that wasn't enclosed in a glass case, and it was the sun clock called 'Angbuilgu' made by a famous inventor in Korean history called Jang Young Sil.



Sung Oh decided he would take a closer look at the sun clock, but was still careful not to touch it. While Sung Oh was looking at the sun clock, he heard a noise coming from behind him. Sung Oh turned around, but there was nothing. As he turned back, his hand touched the hard metal of the sun clock and it flew away spinning rapidly to the ground. Suddenly, Sung Oh's head started to spin too and so did his body. He felt dizzy and fell to the ground.

Later, as Sung Oh woke up, he saw a busy market crowded with people. Everybody was peeking at Sung Oh inquisitively. The market looked strange to Sung Oh. All the people were wearing Hanbok, which is traditional Korean clothing, and the market seemed so different - so old. It took Sung Oh a few moments to realise that he wasn't dreaming or on a film set - he was in the past!

At the same moment, King Sejong, the old King who created Hangeul (the Korean language), was taking a walk around the market. King Sejong was wearing a red hanbok with a design made of a golden string and he wore a fancy golden crown on his head. King Sejong saw the boy wearing strange clothes surrounded by curious shoppers and market stall owners. He thought the boy looked like he was in trouble, so he asked him if he needed help. Sung Oh was so confused about what happened to him that he immediately said yes to the kind man's offer of help. Sung Oh followed the man in the golden robes and crown, and as they reached the palace, realised that he must be the king.



A representation of the Korean King Sejong

A representation of the Korean King Sejong

In the palace, there was the exact same water clock and sun clock from the museum. King Sejong told the boy that he could stay in the palace. The boy asked nervously asked the kind man who he was and he was excited to hear that he was indeed the famous King Sejong!

One day, Sung Oh was in his room playing with a carved wooden top. Sung Oh had to roll a string around the top and quickly let it go to set it off furiously spinning. It was such fun, but only for a while. So, he went outside to look around the palace. The palace was big and so ever so fancy. He came across a room with a door half opened. Sung Oh peeked inside and, unexpectedly, there was King Sejong looking very confused. King Sejong was looking at a piece of paper covered in writing. Curious, Sung Oh walked into the room to take a closer look, and to see what was written on the paper. There was Hangul written all over it, but then it stopped suddenly towards the bottom of the paper. Sung Oh realised that King Sejong was confused because he didn't have any idea of how to create more Hangul. Sung Oh decided to do something, something big. Sung Oh was going to help King Sejong just as King Sejong had helped him. Sung Oh knew how to write and speak Hangul, so he would show King Sejong how to create more letters. They worked from night to day and when they were finally finished King Sejong and Sung Oh was so excited to tell everyone about their new language.

When Hangul was first introduced not many people used it, but as time passed everybody started using this new language. Hangul was easy to learn and anyone of any age could use it. King Sejong was so proud, and so too was Sung Oh. King Sejong thanked Sung Oh many times for helping him make Hangul, and Sung Oh knew it was time to go. Before Sung Oh went back to own time King Sejong gave him a little present. It was a fan that belonged to King Sejong - a fan that you can now see in the Korean History Museum, placed very carefully in a glass case right next to the old King's sun clock.

*The Legend of
the Golden Sausage*

By **Rose Duong**

The legend of the last Golden German Sausage was a legend dreamed of by many eagles worldwide. Even after many years of careless exploitation of the supply of sausages, families were not aware that one day there would be no sausages left for any of the eagles.

And soon the day came. There was only one sausage left in the entire world.

So the elder eagle decided he would save this delicacy and hid the very last golden sausage in a secret place, and told no other eagle of its whereabouts. Legend says the sausage bears the gift of immortality, for the elder eagle cast his spells on it before he died along with his secret. Witnesses believed that they saw the elder eagle fly towards the big cave on top of the forbidden hill – a place that no bird had ever attempted to reach.

In a land far away there lived two black eagles named Fabio and Angelika. They were twins, as well as the best of friends and they did everything together. They too were told of the legend of the Golden Sausage, and were as intrigued as any other to find it for themselves. Fabio was brave and confident in all his actions. He loved to express his thoughts out loud and make new connections with people, whereas his sister Angelika was quite the opposite. Quiet and conservative were the best words to describe her.

They were determined to find the final sausage. Every day they searched through clues and books that the elder eagle had left behind; carefully sketching out each path and trail to locate the one and only Golden Sausage. Until one day they finally found the hidden location of the dangerous Barbarossa Cave, a place that nobody ever dared to venture to. For anyone who stepped foot into this place would be faced with their greatest fear. After sleepless nights and never ending dreams, the day finally came when they would begin their courageous journey...

Early in the morning the gleaming sun woke the twins and they rose, absolutely ready for the perilous voyage ahead. They rushed rapidly downstairs and wrapped up some delicious, traditional stollen in a checkered red and white handkerchief along with some fresh, iced tea in a bottle. Stuffing their small feet into thick, furry boots and wearing their long capes with the vivid flag colors of Germany: finally, they were prepared to discover the lost Golden Sausage!

“Goodbye, mama!” squawked Fabio and Angelika as they glided into the cloudless, blue sky with great confidence and excitement. The Golden Sausage will finally be in their possession, providing endless lives for them all.

Through the steaming hot Bibbelsche Bohnensuppe lava they flew, brimming with sweat and risking their beautiful luscious feathers from catching fire and being permanently damaged. They kept going nonetheless; they had to persevere, together as brother and sister!



Minutes and hours passed and their wings became heavier and heavier. They decided to perch on top of the infamous Brandenburg Gate to get some rest and carry on their quest the very next day. Once landed on the Gate, they swiftly devoured the mouthwatering stollen, savoring the sweetness of the fruits.

All of a sudden, whilst earning some well-deserved rest, a very loud marching noise was heard and an army of angry dwarves with firing jetpacks charged towards them, screaming angry curses, all of them desperate for some eagle flesh.

Fabio and Angelika awoke, shaking with terror as they noticed the rumbling of the jetpacks and frustrated roars from the furious dwarves. Realising that they were in dwarf territory they were filled with panic, squawking loudly, feathers shedding everywhere.

“Fabio! What are we going to do? With jetpacks that treacherous, we are sure to be dead any minute now!” cried Angelika, her hopes and ambitions shattering into pieces.

“We’ll do as we trained with Ol’ Master and avoid a fight and then fly discreetly away! I’ll meet you at the next stop on our map!”

And so they split up, camouflaging themselves with green paste since dwarves had very bad eyesight. They had to be careful - one mistake and they could end up being eaten. In the frantic escape Fabio had his tail feathers singed by a jetpack after a heated chase with a dwarf with the biggest nose ever; it hung off his face! However, he got away with only smoking feathers, whereas Angelika had it worse.

Angelika’s wing was bloody and gashed open by one dwarf who had nails like witches - long and sharp and gnarly. In the moment of panic - not being able to fly higher than the height of a tree and for no longer than two minutes before having to rest - she had lost track of their planned path, and got lost in the vast forest leading to the cave. She was angered by Fabio’s plan, with him taking the map and making her go without it. Splitting up was also a bad plan, she decided, and everything was Fabio’s fault. For hours she sulked on a low branch, her wing still bleeding and her stomach rumbling with hunger, hoping that Fabio would come for her, but also hating Fabio for his ridiculous plan.



Fabio, on the other hand, was driven by his successful escape from the dwarves. He decided that he was simply born for this - the life of exploration, and putting stories and legends into reality. Whilst blinded in his burst of confidence, he had completely forgotten about Angelika, his twin sister and skipped the stop where they were meant to meet - only the legendary golden sausage from the Elder and the powers it might hold.

That night, whilst Angelika shivered with only the leaves of a tree for cover and the shelter of her own, injured wing, Fabio ate off juicy berries and found a hollow space in the bark of a tree to sleep in. He had the time to contemplate his actions of that day, and realized how empty he felt without Angelika by his side and he now feared for her life. A tear fell down his face as he feared she may have been taken by the dwarves on jetpacks.

“How could I be so selfish?” Fabio whispered to himself. “I must find her, I cannot just leave her there. She is my best friend! My sister!”

And off he went, soaring through the midnight sky and carefully scanning the landscape for Angelika. Finally, there she was, weeping into the bright checkered handkerchief on a branch. Fabio quickly swooped down towards her, all his worries immediately vanishing.

Fabio, with tears in his eyes cried, “Angelika! Oh, Angelika! Are you okay? I am truly sorry for leaving you behind, I was just so excited to finally retrieve the Golden Sausage that I stupidly forgot about you. We are a team and without you, I cannot accomplish anything. Will you forgive me?”

Angelika said nothing and attempted to hug her brother, despite the injured wing. Fabio helped her bandage the wound with the checkered handkerchief and shared with her some scrumptious berries. Another night ended; a brand new day awaited them.

Although both brave eagles were extremely exhausted, they persevered to collect the one and only Golden Sausage, reunited as one team, more bonded than ever!

The end.

*The Tale of
Two Brothers*

By **Seokkyu Chung**

Once upon a time in a small village located along the seaside in Phan Thiet, lived two brothers : Minh and Bao. Minh had a very warm personality. He enjoyed helping others and believed in the kindness of sharing. On the other hand, Bao had a cold personality. He was very greedy and refused to share his wealth with anyone but himself. He would always think he was right and never wanted to admit he was wrong about anything. They used to live in the same house until Bao saved up enough money to buy himself a bigger house for him alone. Minh warned Bao about the dangers and hard times he might face if he lived on his own but Bao ignored him and thought only of himself.

One day, a dragon with an injured wing approached Minh's house. Minh, unaware of the hurt dragon, continued to pick his crops. Finally when the dragon succeeded in getting Minh's attention by whimpering loudly, the young brother took sympathy on the beast. He decided he had to take care of the dragon until it could soar through the sky. So Minh spent several months feeding, training and healing the dragon's broken wing. To thank Minh, the dragon rewarded him with a couple of rambutan seeds.

Minh planted the rambutan seeds which eventually blossomed into huge trees with abnormally large rambutan fruit hanging from them. The family had never seen rambutan as large as these; they were thrilled just by the thought of the gigantic fruit hidden inside. They tried to cut the giant fruit with a kitchen knife. The kitchen knife made hardly a dent in the strong rambutan vine. They tried a range of sharp things from knives to saws - all to no avail. Just when they were about to give up, Minh procured a chainsaw from one of the local villagers and, with his help, managed with great effort to cut the fruit from the tree - to the relief of the family. As the rambutan dropped to the ground, the family were surprised to see a strange mixture of gold, rice and silk pour out from inside the fruit. They couldn't believe their eyes. It was a treasure beyond their wildest beliefs. The family began jumping with joy and in honour of their new found wealth, decided to throw a party for the entire village.



Rambutan trees

All but one of the village attended the family's invitation to celebrate: Bao with rage spilling from every orifice of his body, turned red with jealousy and anger. Bao wanted to have all the gold to himself so he spent the whole night scheming and calculating on how he would steal the treasure. The next day, an innocent dragon approached Bao's house in search of food. It began nibbling on the rice from Bao's rice field. Furious that the hungry dragon was eating his crops, Bao chased and imprisoned the dragon. Upon remembering how Minh had received the rambutan

seeds, Bao kept the dragon in a tiny cage and fed him and healed the wound which he himself had inflicted upon the poor beast. When the dragon was healed, he set him free.

Upon his release, the dragon rained down Rambutan seeds upon Bao's land. Ecstatic that his plan had worked, Bao impatiently destroyed his rice crops and replaced them with the rambutan seeds. Once the seeds grew, Bao eagerly sliced the fruit open with an axe. Before he opened it up, he imagined the wealth and the power he would have over the rest of the village. Excited by the thought of his profound wealth, he impatiently sliced open the giant rambutan. His joy soon turned to dismay as, shockingly, the fruit, was filled with a rotten substance, a mixture of rice and some weird liquid that appeared to be sewer water. Disbelievingly, he opened another, expecting the first to be a mistake. The rambutan spilled out the same foul mixture as the first. Outraged, Bao began cutting open every single rambutan until none were left. He was speechless. Realising he had lost everything, he began to weep.

Poulet the Chicken

By **Seokkyu Chung**

Two brown eagles flew across the sky, soaring up through the clouds as soft as vanilla ice cream; then swooping down, until they landed on the top of the Eiffel Tower, 324m up from the ground. Poulet (which means ‘chicken’ in French) the chicken stood in his yard, craned his neck and watched the eagles fly, with their large wings reflecting the blinding sunlight.

“Look at those eagles fly! If only I could fly like them, I would be able to go anywhere I want, to beaches with turquoise waves, to mountains with trees as tall as buildings, and to faraway countries!” Poulet shouted excitedly.

Telling himself that he would make it this time, Poulet kicked off from the ground with all his might and flapped his wings as fast as possible. He flapped and flapped. His stick-like legs were elevated in the air. He ascended. He was flying! Then suddenly, he sank. His wings could not hold him anymore, causing him to land in the yard again. His flight had hardly lasted 5 seconds. Poulet sighed. At least today was one of the more fortunate days - usually he could only stay mid air for 3 seconds at the most. Poulet could not remember a day that he did not practice flying, but it was never successful; his flying skills never seemed to improve.



A chicken trying to fly

“Poulet! It’s time for lunch! Come in!” Poulet’s mom shouted from inside their house.

Wanting to watch the eagles fly for longer, Poulet entered the house reluctantly.

“Maman (which means ‘mom’ in French), why can’t I fly?” Poulet asked his mom as they sat down at the dining table.

“Because you are a chicken. Chickens can’t fly, mon poulet (which means ‘my chicken’ in French),” she told him.

“Why not? I want to fly. How do I fly maman, how?” Poulet inquired.

“Oh, Poulet, stop it! Chickens just can’t fly, it’s impossible. Now eat your food!” Maman answered, annoyed.

“But maman, I really want to fly! Have you ever looked at the eagles outside fly? They speed across the sky, ripping through the clouds and the winds as sharks slash through the waves and currents. Oh, if only I could fly like that too! Maman, haven’t you ever wanted to fly?” Poulet asked.

“No Poulet, I have never wanted to fly. We, chickens, are the national animal of France. We are gentle and friendly creatures who are always useful to humans. Everywhere we go, people love us! They give us food and talk about our beautiful feathers in awe,” Maman started to explain, “We are already loved by so many people, Poulet. What else could I possibly want? I don’t need to be able to fly to be happy, I already am happy right now, right here. Now, you must be very hungry. Eat your lunch, it’s sunflower seeds, your favourite.”

“Okay maman,” Poulet replied.

Although what maman had said was true, Poulet still wanted to fly. Being able to fly would make everything better. He would be able to go to places far away from Paris, and experience things no chicken had ever even thought of. He would then tell maman what he had seen. He might even get to take maman to those places with him somehow. They would be the happiest chickens in the world. Poulet had wanted to fly ever since he learned what flying was, and he thought that it was more than possible for him to fly, higher than the eagles. He just wasn’t entirely sure how he could make it happen.

The sun slowly climbed down to the corner of the sky, then disappeared, leaving the city of Paris to once again face the pale moon. Poulet the chicken sat in his cozy nest, ready to go to bed. He was silently watching the grand Eiffel Tower faintly reflect the moonlight. Just before he went to sleep, Poulet closed his eyes and began to make a wish, as he did every night.

‘I wish I could fly, just like the eagles, through the clouds and even through strong winds. I wish my two small wings would let me soar across the clear blue sky.’

In his dream, Poulet found himself yet again on the yard of his house. The sun was penetrating Poulet’s feathers and the soft brown soil under his legs. It was just another calm morning until he heard a tiny, yelling voice.

“Excuse me! Hello! Down here!” It sounded as if the voice was coming from the ground.

Poulet looked down, and to his surprise found a tiny green caterpillar looking at him.

“Whoa! Hello?” said Poulet.

“Hello, my name is Chenille (which actually means ‘caterpillar’ in French),” said the caterpillar.

“Well, hello Chenille. What are you doing here?” Poulet asked.

“I am here to deliver a message,” Chenille the caterpillar told Poulet. Suddenly, Chenille straightened and his eyes got wider.

“Chenille? Are you okay?” Poulet asked, puzzled.

Without a reply, Chenille began to speak in a monotonous tone, like an automatic voice mail. He continued in his newfound manner,

“The king of all flying animals, a great and powerful being residing far away, has heard your wish every night and allowed an opportunity for you to be able to fly. Nevertheless, you must understand that what you desire cannot be attained easily. The king’s message follows:

“I have given you a chance to fulfil your dearest dream, and it is up to you to try your best to make it come true. Among countless people amongst the crowd of musicians, find a drummer boy, with drumsticks made of the hardest silver, and the moonlight in his eyes. Once you find him, he will gift you the ability of flight. Mention my involvement in your journey and he will grant your wish without any disagreement. However, be warned that the boy wants something in return for his gift. It will be in the form of an exceptionally large pain au chocolat, as big as a car wheel. This chance is only valid if the tasks are done by the midnight of the summer solstice,” Chenille concluded. He then turned around, and squirmed and crawled away from Poulet.

Poulet began to wake up from his unusual dream. When he opened his eyes, the fresh cool air of dawn was swirling around him, and through the windows the sunlight shone into his eyes. As he left his nest, waves of music, and the sound of all instruments - brass, strings, woodwinds and percussion - danced into his ears. It was the day of the summer solstice and the Fête de la Musique, the annual music festival. Poulet remembered his dream as if it had just actually happened to him. There was no need to question what Chenille the caterpillar had told him. It was clearly a chance for him to finally be able to fly! Poulet could barely believe such a wonderful opportunity had been offered to him.

“Maman, I’m going out! I’ll probably be outside for the whole day!” Just like that, without waiting for a reply nor having breakfast, Poulet ran out onto the street, eager to complete his quest. Outside, every inch of the street was covered with people, playing their instruments and producing all kinds of music. Anyone who wasn’t playing music was standing, admiring the musicians as part of the crowd, smiling and dancing, surrounded by the joy the music brought. It was enough to make anyone excited, but Poulet could not get carried away. He had a most important task to do.

Poulet the chicken was planning on looking for the big chocolate bread first, as there would be no point in finding the drummer boy without the bread. Poulet roamed around the streets of Paris, looking here and there, turning around one corner after another. As Poulet walked down the streets, some people among the immense crowd, as maman had said, pointed at him, smiling, and threw pieces of bread for him to eat. However, he didn’t stop to look at the people or eat the bread; he had to find the pain au chocolat quickly. He saw countless shops selling crepes, baguettes and even pains au chocolat, but none were big enough.

By afternoon that day, Poulet was trudging through the remote corners of Paris, where even the craze of the music of the Fête de la Musique could not reach, still in search for the pain au chocolat.

“I’m so tired! I need a break,” Poulet claimed. He wished he had brought some water with him when he left home that morning. He looked around, and realized he had walked into a narrow alley, surrounded by the old and faded outer walls of shops. “Where am I anyways?” His surroundings couldn’t have been more unfamiliar. Worry seized Poulet’s mind. It was already long after he had forgotten the way home, and now he wasn’t even sure which street he was in.

As he started to go into a state of panic, a rich and buttery smell slowly wafted into his nose. Poulet stopped. He now realized that he hadn’t eaten anything for hours. Driven by hunger, he stepped towards the direction the wonderful smell was coming from. He turned around a corner, then noticed that the smell was coming from the second shop on the left. The shop was a bakery, with the front painted midnight blue, and a large rectangular window. There was no texts visible, not even the name of the shop, but only a single phrase that read, “pains de toutes les tailles”. “Breads of all sizes,” Poulet translated. The door was left open and there didn’t seem to be anyone inside the bakery. Poulet carefully stepped into the shop.

The moment he entered the bakery, he was amazed by the number and the variety of breads and desserts displayed. The shop was quite large, and owned a couple of tables and chairs. There were at least 50 different types of bread, each type of bread having at least 3 different sizes. The breads were so great in number that they filled up rows of

shelves of baskets that stretched from one end of the room to another at the back of the shop. Poulet approached the racks of bread in awe. Abruptly, Poulet realized that among this overflowing collection of breads, there could be a chocolate bread, possibly even the one he was in search for. Poulet was just about to wander along the rows of shelves of baskets to find the pain au chocolat when he heard a low voice from behind him.

“Welcome! What are you looking for?”

Poulet jumped at the sudden noise and turned around to find a tall man in a white chef’s uniform standing behind the counter, looking at him, smiling.

“Um, I would like a pain au chocolat, please,” answered Poulet nervously. He was taken by surprise at the baker’s sudden appearance.

“A pain au chocolat. Sure, my bakery has breads of various sizes. From ones no bigger than a paper bill to ones as big as car wheels! Which size of pain au chocolat would you like?” the baker asked.

Poulet sat up. He noticed that the baker used the comparison of the breads’ size to car wheels. He could feel immediately that this was the very place where the drummer boy wanted his big chocolate bread from. “I would like one as big as a car wheel,” Poulet replied. He was so glad he had finally found what he needed.

“Great. Please wait a moment,” said the baker, walked over to the back of the room and disappeared into the jungle of breads. A few seconds later he reappeared, holding with both of his hands a large basket containing a single pain au chocolat, as big as a car wheel. It was the largest piece of bread Poulet had ever seen. Poulet’s eyes followed the great chocolate bread. The baker placed the basket on the wooden counter.

“Here you go, that is be 1 euro,” the baker told Poulet.

“Here, Mr. Baker,” Poulet handed him a single 1 euro coin to the baker. Chickens did not need money, but he had found the coin when he was younger on the street and had always carried it with him ever since. Finally, it was put to use, as a key to achieve his dream.

Poulet bade the baker goodbye and walked out of the bakery with the gigantic chocolate bread inside a basket the baker had given him. “Ah, now I just need to find the drummer boy. It can’t be hard, today is the summer solstice, the day of the Music Festival! The boy would be one of the musicians there, I’m sure,” Poulet muttered to himself. It was around three in the afternoon, and Poulet was walking amongst the musicians and the crowds. The finding of the pain au chocolat had given him some relief and he was relaxedly approaching the center of Paris, the Point Zero, in front of the Notre-Dame Cathedral, appreciating the uplifting music, hoping to find the drummer boy on the way.

However, it wasn't until a couple of long hours later, which felt like forever to Poulet, that he finally reached the Point Zero. There was no drummer boy matching the description of the king of all flying animals on the way.

"Maybe the boy is around here, at the center of the city," Poulet hoped. If he could not find the boy here, then his effort to attain the pain au chocolat and find the boy would be in vain and there would be no hope left for Poulet to fly. This was his final opportunity. It was already nearly evening. Afraid he was not going to be able to find the drummer boy in time, Poulet stumbled through the musicians and the crowds around them. "Have you seen a drummer boy, with silver drumsticks?" Poulet shouted, not at anyone in particular, hastily pushing through the clouds. The crowd either ignored him or replied no.

His hope was deserting him. This quest was his only chance to finally achieve his lifelong dream, to be able to fly, and now it was slipping away. Poulet turned around. It was that moment when he heard a loud, low boom. The sound was repeated continuously, keeping the beat. It was the sound of a drum. Poulet whipped his head in the direction of the noise. The beat sounded as if it was coming from the middle of a huge crowd located ten feet away from him. The beat got faster and started to play a rhythm. The crowd cheered. "This is going to be my final attempt," Poulet thought, then raced towards the source of the drumbeat.

Poulet pushed through the crowds and zig-zagged between their legs, attempting to reach the drummer, whoever it was. The stifling forest of people cleared and the scene of performance shone upon Poulet. Before him was a large plain drum, and standing behind the drum was a tall boy, banging the drum with solid silver drumsticks. The drumsticks reflected the persimmon red glow from the setting sun. The boy's electric blue eyes beamed too, but rather than the sunlight, theirs was the silent and cool illumination of the moonlight.

'A drummer boy, with drumsticks made of the hardest silver, and the moonlight in his eyes,' Poulet remembered the king's description, relayed by Chenille the caterpillar. During the performance, the drummer boy glanced at the crowd, and his eyes met Poulet's. He held the eye contact for a few seconds, glanced at Poulet's side, where he was holding his massive pain au chocolat, then focused back on the drum.

With a final boom, the boy finished his performance, bowed to the audience without a word, and stood still. The crowd clapped, and slowly dispersed once they realized he was finished for the day. Drawing a deep breath, Poulet walked up to the boy. The boy was watching Poulet expectantly as he drew closer to him.

"Hello, my name is Poulet. I have been told by the king of all flying animals, a great and powerful being residing far away, that you are capable of granting me the ability of flight in return for a pain au chocolat as big as a car wheel," explained Poulet. Poulet hoped

desperately that this was the drummer boy he had been looking for, and if he was, the boy would take him seriously.

“Hello Poulet, I have been told that I may be visited by you today. the drummer boy remarked. His voice was pleasantly high, smooth and songlike, “I presume you have been warned about my demand for a chocolate bread, and is that the very bread you possess in that basket right now?”

“Yes. Here is your pain au chocolat,” Poulet handed the basket to the boy. The boy opened the basket and checked for the pain au chocolat. He smiled in satisfaction and closed the basket. Poulet tensed. He was finally going to fly, any second now.

“Thank you Poulet,” said the drummer boy. He looked into Poulet’s eyes and snapped his finger.

For a moment, a wind of golden glitter rained down around him. When the glitter touched his wings, power seeped into his muscles. The shower of glitter stopped. Poulet looked at himself, but there didn’t seem to be any change in his appearance. Poulet looked up at the boy, but he had disappeared. His drum, his silver drumsticks and the basket of pain au chocolat were all gone too.

“Thank you,” Poulet mumble, slightly bewildered.

Poulet turned his head upwards to the dimming sky. With conviction, he jumped up. He



A flying chicken

fluttered his wings and he rose with ease. He continued to move his wings. He was rising higher and higher. Poulet was finally flying. Beneath him people on the street begun to point at him one by one. Poulet kept flying, soaring up towards the clouds. Now everyone had noticed him, Poulet the flying chicken, and were watching him, cheering, clapping and talking excitedly. Poulet reached the clouds. He ascended through the soft white haze until the mound of cloud was below him. All around him was only the gentlest winds, and the cozy silence. Poulet was grinning.

He didn’t think he had ever been happier in his life; his lifelong dream finally had come true! Poulet the chicken did a 360 degrees turn, then whipped through the atmosphere, beginning his first journey in the air. He flew and flew, as he had always dreamed of, to home, to beaches with turquoise waves, to mountains with trees as tall as buildings, and to faraway countries.

Hina Matsuri

This story explores Japanese culture, focussing on a festival called 'Hinamatsuri' which translates to English as 'Doll's Day' or 'Girl's day. It is celebrated on the third of March and is when parents wish happiness, growth and good health for their daughters. To celebrate this festival, families set up a display of ornamental dolls inside their house, and they offer a variety of traditional foods to the Doll. In this story, it describes how the main character 'Aoi' and her family celebrates this festival on the street by wearing the Japanese traditional costumes, the Kimono.

By Mai Thi Nguyen

Aoi tỉnh giấc khi ánh nắng nhạt màu của buổi sớm rọi qua lớp rèm mỏng và dịu dàng hắt lên những cuốn sách, những mẫu giấy nhớ vẫn đang ngổn ngang trên bàn. Aoi ngáp dài, nghiêng người về phía cửa sổ và lơ đãng nhìn những món đồ trang trí trong phòng. Cũng chẳng có gì nhiều nhận, chỉ là đôi ba chiếc đèn lồng đỏ shuiro bé xíu, một mảnh vải may kimono lớn - họa tiết hoa anh đào hồng nhạt nổi bật trên nền vải màu đỏ karakunerao tao nhã - treo trên tường, một vài bức tượng phòng theo những nhân vật anime Aoi thích - trang phục của tất cả đều có phảng phất chút đồ enji và cả tông đỏ hiiro nữa - đặt trên tủ sách, và một bức ảnh chụp kẹ búp bê dành riêng cho ngày Hina Matsuri chi tiết và rực rỡ nhất Aoi từng gặp. Mỗi món đồ trang trí trong phòng đều mang một sắc đỏ khác nhau.

Mẹ thường than phiền, rằng những người như Aoi sẽ làm mất giá trị truyền thống của màu đỏ mất. Trong văn hóa người Nhật, màu đỏ là màu của những ngày lễ, của những dịp đặc biệt cả năm mới xảy ra một lần. Màu đỏ ẩn mình trong tất cả những ngày vui của mọi người. Nhưng với Aoi, sắc màu rực rỡ này chỉ đơn giản là hạnh phúc.

Cũng như sáng hôm nay, khi tỉnh dậy trong tiết trời se lạnh của những ngày đầu xuân, khi mà tuyết vẫn thỉnh thoảng rơi xuống nhẹ nhàng từ bầu trời xám xịt nhưng không khí đã không còn lạnh buốt, tông màu ấm áp này khiến Aoi cảm thấy thật dễ chịu. Và có lẽ Aoi vẫn sẽ nằm đó, vui mình trong tấm chăn sưởi dày sụ, ấm sực này nếu mẹ không cất tiếng gọi, “Này muộn rồi, dậy ăn sáng đi nào! Hôm nay con còn phải giúp mẹ chuẩn bị đấy, nên đừng lể mể nữa.”

Aoi sức nhớ ra, hôm nay là mừng ba tháng ba, là Hina Matsuri, ngày hội của các bé gái. Dù đã quá tuổi để tham gia những hoạt động của ngày này, nhưng Aoi vẫn cảm thấy chút phần khích khi nghĩ về những món đồ trang trí rực rỡ, nhưng con búp bê sứ được vẽ tay đầy tinh xảo, mô phỏng theo trang phục của hoàng đế, nữ hoàng, những vị quan thần trong cung và cả những món đồ nội thất lộng lẫy thường được trưng bày trên chiếc kệ bậc thang phủ vải đỏ. Ở nhà Aoi chỉ trưng bày hai con búp bê chính - hoàng đế và hoàng hậu trong bộ áo bào được may bằng vải truyền thống của Nhật, cả hai đều ngồi trên bệ cao bọc vải đầy màu sắc. Hoàng đế đội mũ cao, tay phải cầm quạt, hông đeo kiếm vàng, còn hoàng hậu đội vương miện, tóc vấn gọn gàng, quạt xòe che nửa khuôn mặt xinh đẹp. Aoi thích hai con búp bê ở nhà lắm, nhưng bữa nay mẹ sẽ cho cả Aoi lẫn Midori tới trung tâm mua sắm, năm nào nơi đây cũng trưng bày một kệ búp bê đầy đủ cả bảy tầng. Aoi đã hứa với mẹ sẽ giúp Midori mặc kimono - bộ đồ Nhật Bản truyền thống - trước khi đi ra ngoài.

Vì vậy, Aoi lập tức bật dậy, thay quần áo thật nhanh rồi chạy vào phòng ăn, vừa đúng lúc mẹ đang bung bát cơm nóng hổi ra, đặt trước mặt từng người. Bên cạnh đó, mẹ đã dọn sẵn một khúc cá ba sa nướng, bát súp miso gồm rong biển wakame, đậu phụ mềm và vài lát củ cải trắng, rồi còn cả một cốc trà gạo rang mugui vẫn còn đang bốc khói. Aoi chột nghĩ, mẹ chu đáo thật, một ngày bận rộn như vậy mà vẫn dậy sớm làm cho cả nhà một bữa sáng thật đầy đủ như thế. Ngày hôm đó, Aoi thưởng thức những món ăn của mình với lòng biết ơn vô hạn.



Búp bê trưng bày trong ngày hội các bé gái của Nhật

Sau bữa sáng ngon lành, Aoi qua phòng giặt, lấy bộ kimono đã sạch sẽ và là phẳng phiu rồi đem qua cho Midori. Con bé vừa mới ăn sáng xong, còn đang giúp mẹ dọn dẹp bàn ăn nên vẫn chưa quay lại phòng, vì thế nên Aoi ngồi ghé bên mép giường, lấy quyển Totochan bên cửa sổ xuống từ giá sách của Midori rồi lướt qua vài trang trong lúc chờ đợi. Aoi vẫn nhớ, ngày còn bé, lần đầu đọc quyển sách này, cả một chân trời mới như được mở ra. Aoi mê mẩn câu chuyện về lớp học trong những toa tàu cũ, cô bé Totochan nghịch ngợm và thích khám phá, hay những ngày lễ hội của Nhật được biến tấu đi, dù mới mẻ nhưng vẫn giữ được nét truyền thống. Cho đến tận bây giờ, đây vẫn là câu chuyện Aoi yêu thích nhất. Dù đã đọc hàng trăm cuốn sách, Aoi vẫn chẳng thể quên được cảm xúc của mình khi đọc Totochan bên cửa sổ.

Đang chăm chú đọc nên Aoi không để ý rằng Midori đã xong việc tự khi nào, chỉ đến khi nghe tiếng ngâm nga khe khẽ, Aoi mới sực nhận ra rằng mình đang ở phòng của con bé. Aoi cất tiếng gọi.

“Nè nhóc, ra đây chị mặc đồ cho nào, còn chuẩn bị đi chơi nữa chứ.”

Midori phụng phịu, “Sao em không được tự mặc? Em có còn bé nữa đâu mà chị lại phải mặc đồ cho em.”

“Đai lưng obi thắt khó lắm đó nhóc, đến người lớn còn không tự mặc được thì nói gì đến nhóc.”

Midori vẫn còn bĩu môi, nhưng con bé đã thôi vùng vằng và chịu khó đứng yên. Aoi choàng áo qua người Midori, ngắm làn da trắng ngần, ửng hồng của con bé nổi bật trong màu áo trắng tinh khôi, điểmuyết vài bông hoa đỏ rực rỡ. Rồi Aoi cuốn chiếc đai lưng, cũng là màu đỏ, quanh người con bé, bật cười khi nghe tiếng cầu nhàu rằng sao Aoi thắt đai chặt thế. Mắt đến nửa tiếng đồng hồ để chỉnh trang cho bộ đồ được ngay ngắn nhất, rồi lại còn vấn mái tóc dài ngang hông của con bé lên thành một búi gọn gàng, nhưng Aoi rất tự hào về thành quả của mình. Midori lúc nào cũng thật xinh đẹp với sống mũi cao, bờ môi hồng hồng và lúm đồng tiền xinh xinh nơi má, và con bé cũng rất hợp với bộ kimono truyền thống này.



Kimono – trang phục truyền thống Nhật Bản

Khi cả nhà đã đến trung tâm mua sắm, Midori cũng nhận được ánh nhìn ngưỡng mộ từ rất nhiều người. Còn Aoi chỉ đi bên cạnh, tay cầm máy ảnh, sẵn sàng chụp những món đồ trang trí lộng lẫy, và cũng để chụp cả Midori nữa.

Rồi Aoi nhìn thấy kệ búp bê lộng lẫy được trưng bày ngay hôm đó.

Aoi đã từng đến rất nhiều nơi trong ngày Hina Matsuri, cũng đã nhìn thấy nhiều bộ búp bê, lớn nhỏ đều có, nhưng Aoi chưa từng thấy bộ nào đẹp đến thế. Cả kệ có tổng cộng bảy tầng, mặt kệ được phủ vải nhung đỏ mượt mà, bên trên tuy chỉ bày biện như một bộ búp bê truyền thống, nhưng từng chi tiết một trên những con

búp bê đó đều đẹp đến xao lòng. Từng chi tiết đều được vẽ tay, tuy không hoàn hảo nhưng Aoi lại thấy, như vậy còn đẹp hơn nữa. Nước sơn trên những món đồ nội thất nhỏ cũng không đều, nhưng màu sắc và họa tiết đều rất hài hòa.

Aoi mãi mê chụp hình, đến lúc ngẩng dậy thì thấy bố mẹ và Midori đã qua quầy vẽ tượng. Aoi đang bước tới, vừa đúng lúc con bé đang phụng phịu dỗi vì ống tay áo dài đã bị dấy một giọt mực vàng, khuôn mặt rất ngộ nên Aoi thuận tay đưa máy lên, chụp một bức, rồi lại chụp cả bức tượng được tô lem nhem của Midori nữa.

Sau đó, cả nhà cùng đi ăn sushi, Midori được ưu đãi cho hẳn một bát chirashi sushi to bự. Bát cơm trộn giấm thơm thơm, bên trên trải đều một lớp cá hồi và cá ngừ, bên cạnh còn có một ít trứng cá muối. Đến món tráng miệng, cả nhà mỗi người ăn một miếng sakura mochi, cái loại bánh gạo nếp dẻo dẻo với nhân đậu đỏ ngọt lịm, lại còn mang màu hồng



Loại hoa anh đào truyền thống của Nhật Bản

dịu dàng. Năm nào cũng thế, dù có tổ chức Hina Matsuri hay không thì mọi người cũng phải ăn trưa bằng những món ăn truyền thống của ngày lễ này.

Vì bố, mẹ và Midori cũng đã thấm mệt, cả nhà quyết định quay trở về. Lúc ở trên tàu điện, Aoi để ý thấy một vài cây sakura đã lác đác nở sớm. Những bông hoa năm cánh phớt hồng này mỏng manh vô cùng, chỉ cần một làn gió nhẹ cũng lìa cành, rơi xuống đất như những bông tuyết.

Rồi Aoi chợt nhận ra, mùa xuân thật cuộc cũng đã về.

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List of activities

1. Choose your favourite story and write a song or short poem to sum up the key events.
2. Have a discussion about the stories:
 - a. Which story is the most different from your reality?
 - b. Discuss one story that you find most memorable. Explain why.
 - c. If you could talk to 1 character, who would it be and why?
3. Write a letter to your favourite characters asking any questions you might have regarding their life and their story. You could also ask them for advice.
4. Pick a story. Imagine you are the author and write an alternative ending.
5. Imagine you are a talk show host and are interviewing the characters of your choice. Write or role play this interview. You could film this and upload it onto the Global Campus.
6. Take 2 characters from 2 different stories and write a conversation you think they might have.
7. Choose a story and write about the decisions you would make differently if you were the main characters.
8. Act out a scene from your favourite story and share it with the class (or if you are brave, record it and share it with us here on the Global Campus!)
9. Draw 2 or more characters from any story.
10. Create a comic strip of the events that are happening in this story. Remember to draw speech balloons for the characters with their dialogues.

Inspired by: November! Idea Book: a Creative Idea Book for the Elementary Teacher by Karen Sevaly (© 2002, Scholastic Teaching Resources)

The Scholastic Teacher Plan Book by Bill Singer and Tonya Ward Singer (© 2005, Scholastic Professional Books)

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