

ADULTS ONLY

87 pages **20** illustrations

ONE YEAR IN TOKYO

THE STEPMOTHER SERIES: BOOK 5

Story by James J. Craft • Illustrations by Kwon Lee Tran



J A M E S J C R A F T

ONE YEAR IN TOKYO

THE STEPMOTHER SERIES: BOOK 5

by James J. Craft

illustrations by Kwon Lee Tran

A Tales of Transformation Story



2013 Digital Edition

Design & cover © 2014.
Story © 2014 James J. Craft
Illustrations © 2014 Kwon Lee Tran
All rights reserved.

The body text is printed in New Caledonia.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part,
or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form
or by any means without written permission.

Printed in the United States of America.

j6p@sixpacksite.com
www.sixpacksite.com

ONE YEAR IN TOKYO

Annabelle Jones-Cole was a woman in love, and Buff was the man of her dreams. At least the most recent one. Since divorcing her first husband, there had been more than a few incarnations of ‘the man of her dreams.’ However, more so than the others she had met through the years, she was quite sure Buff was ‘the one.’ She would do anything for him, believing that showing her love for him was just as good a substitute for feeling love.

When he first suggested that they shed their worldly possessions and spend a year traveling the world, she had her doubts. But after he proposed to her on bended knee, she decided that it was exactly what she wanted to do. Buff, after all, was an experienced world traveller – as he rarely missed an opportunity to mention to anyone who would listen. A year circumnavigating the globe to find the passion she knew she must have for her new husband sounded so romantic there was no way she could refuse.

But what to do with her son?

Annabelle had fought hard for full custody of Mickey, and won it. She was legally responsible for his well-being, and had been for the past nine and a half years. He was a good kid, though unusually subdued most of the time and fairly low maintenance. He generally did as he was asked.

In fact she couldn’t recall a single instance of him ever not doing as he was asked. That was just who he was. He kept decent grades in school, yet he didn’t have any plans on what to do after graduation. Annabelle didn’t worry much about it because Mickey was always good at adapting to whatever got thrown at him.

When his Dad and her had first separated, he adapted. When his father announced that he was taking a job overseas and wouldn’t be back in the U.S. for several years, he adapted. When he never returned, he adapted. When Annabelle went through a brief spell of self-discovery and thought she was a lesbian, he adapted. When she banned meat and synthetic fibers from the house, he adapted. When she did the exact opposite three months later, embracing an all-meat diet and allergy-free textiles, he adapted.

Which is why she was so certain he would be okay with the idea of her and her new hubby just up and leaving, and Mickey going to live with his father for a year.

It was true, Mickey was used to his Mom being a little on the flaky side. Since leaving his father nearly a decade ago, she had married and remarried several times since. So there was no reason, in his mind, to expect that her most recent arrangement would be any different.

That is of course, until she told him their honeymoon plans.

Mickey had been downstairs in the den reading when she approached him with the news. She paused for a moment, taking a proud, Motherly moment to look her son over. In her mind he was a handsome young man who looked like a miniaturized version of his father.

She sighed. Though she loved Buff (the abbreviated version of Buford, his real name) more than anything, she couldn't deny that she still held Mickey's Dad in very high regard.

Mickey was walking towards her, book in hand, his longish hair brushed back in stylish fashion. He wasn't a particularly large boy, never had been, but in her mind he was just about perfect.

"Honey?" she began, "You know your stepfather and I will be taking a little honeymoon together soon, right?"

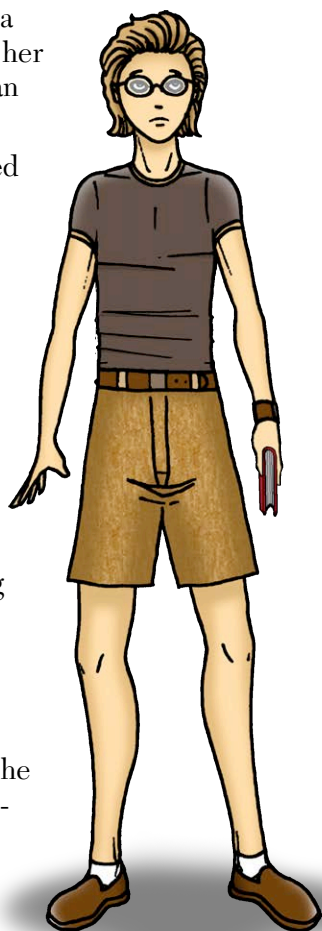
Mickey nodded. He was used to his mother talking to him in this sugar-coated way. It bothered him a little, but it was just a part of her personality, and had grown used to it.

"Yes Mother," he rolled his eyes, "I know." Mickey didn't want to sound too exasperated with her, but she and Buff had been going on and on about their 'perfect honeymoon' for quite a while now. "Everyone knows that you and Buff are going on a big honeymoon this summer"

It was true that Annabelle had taken the time to inform nearly half the town of her intentions to travel the globe with her new beau. Mickey wasn't sure it was a smart idea, but hey, it was her life. He was looking forward to a little peace and quiet around the house.

"Well actually Dear," she looked away, "It's going to be a little longer than a few weeks..." she let her voice trail off. This was proving to be harder than she thought. Annabelle was used to making people happy, and tried to avoid situations where she thought that she was going to have the opposite effect.

"Okaaaaay," Mickey narrowed his eyes behind his trademark round glasses, still holding his book in his hand. He knew when his mother was about to tell him something that she thought he might not want to hear, and he was sensing that such a thing was just about to happen.



“Your stepfather and I are planning to be away for about a year... actually...” she paused for a moment to review her words in her head, “actually it’ll be more like a few months.”

“*Months?*” Mickey yelped.

“Well, maybe as much as a year,” Annabelle said. “Well, exactly a year.”

Mickey’s jaw fell open, “What?” he finally said, followed by “Wow!” His mind started to think of a year living alone. He pictured having the house to himself, cooking his own meals (fish-sticks and French fries every night) watching TV, playing video games, reading... maybe thinking about applying to college... maybe get a job for a while...

A smile curled up at outer corners of his lips.

Annabelle’s next sentence would quickly make it disappear.

“And since you’re taking a year off of school... before you commit to college,” she paused again, “We... your Stepfather and I... thought you might want to spend some time with your father in the Orient.”

“Huh?” Mickey furrowed his brow, “Why would I want to do that?”

Annabelle paused, “Well Mickey,” his mother continued, “You know that our trip is going to cost a lot of money...” her voice trailed off. “So we’re going to have to downsize a little bit while we’re away.”

“Downsize?” he repeated her word back to her with question mark at the end.

“We... Well... We’re selling the house dear,” Annabelle finally spit out the point she had been trying to make since the beginning, “And pretty much everything in it.”

“*What?*” Mickey had roared, “You can’t just sell the house! This is our house! This is where we live! Where I live!”

“Now dear,” Annabelle began, “I know it seems a little drastic, but your stepfather and I have done the math. The house is worth quite a lot, and by the time we get back, the market could drop and we’ll lose all the...” she paused for moment to think of the word that Buff had used, “what does he call it again?” she wondered aloud.

“Equity?” Mickey offered. He was used to filling in his mother’s sentences for her. Annabelle was a very pretty Southern girl, and had gotten by on her looks for most of her life.

“Equity!” She continued, “We’ll lose all the equity in the house, and that would be bad. And with borrowing costs expected to go up...” she twanged in her Southern drawl, “And besides, you haven’t seen your Dad in years... Won’t it be exciting to catch up with him... Have some new adventures in the land of the rising sun?”

“The what?” Mickey looked at her like she had just fallen off the turnip truck. “No, it won’t be exciting and *no* I don’t want any new adventures. The adventures I have right here,” he pointed downwards at the hardwood floor, “are just fine thank you. And besides,” his voice turned to a mocking tone as he coined his mothers’ phrase, “Dad doesn’t have any adventures because he’s a self-absorbed workaholic! Which is why he’s *there* and we’re *here* in the first place”

And with that, he stormed off to his room and slammed the door. It was the most emotional she had seen Mickey in a long time.

“Well?” Buff asked as he wandered into the room from the hall. “How’d it go?”

“Not very good,” Annabelle sighed, “he just got mad and stormed off... Just like his father would have. But he’ll just have to deal with it, ‘cuz you and I are selling off our junk and going on a lovely trip around the world...” she leaned into her new husband and kissed him on the lips.

Buff chuckled as he kissed her back, “That’s my girl”

Annabelle giggled like a schoolgirl at her new hubby. She loved to be referred to as his ‘girl.’ It showed commitment and responsibility, something she had lacked in her previous relationship with Mickey’s dad, and most of the ones that followed. While her ex husband had been just as driven and determined as Buff was, he had never taken the time to show her that she mattered – or that anything other than his career mattered. She knew the animosity that Mickey had towards his father was justified, but like she’d told her new man, he’d just have to deal with it.

And that’s just what Mickey would eventually do, in his own way. Over the next several hours, he had to get himself right with this new reality. He knew quite well that his Mom wasn’t going to back down from something once she had set her mind to it. Not that she was a stubborn person, she just made herself oblivious to objections. She would live in blissful ignorance of anything Mickey could do or say to show how foolish she was behaving. So if she was committed to selling the house and taking a trip around the world, than that is, in fact, exactly what she would end up doing.

Which meant that Mickey was days away from being shipped off to live with his estranged Dad. Last he had heard, he was working in Japan, of all places.

Great, just great.

He grabbed his phone and began to break the news to his friends on social media. He carefully phrased it to avoid having to explain that his mother was a dingbat. Mickey told them was taking a ‘year off’ to spend some time traveling across Asia with his father. He knew that it wasn’t exactly truthful, but it sure sounded better than, ‘my flaky mother and her bull-headed new husband are leaving the country so I have nowhere else to go.’ Mickey’s closet friend Kyle

messaged him back within seconds, “I thought you hated your Dad?” he commented.

Mickey chuckled. Nobody knew him better than Kyle. “I don’t hate him...” he began to type on his phone’s touch screen, “We just never... connected... you know?”

Kyle replied with, “I guess I misunderstood when you said that you hated your father and always would, lol”

Mickey chuckled again, paused, then replied with “says the Momma’s boy.” It was a well known fact that Kyle was heavily and easily influenced by his mother, to the point where most of their mutual friends questioned Kyle’s sexual orientation.

“Whatever,” Kyle posted, then followed up with, “Just remember, when I’m flipping burgers all summer, you’re going to be touring around Asia. Lucky bastard.”

Mickey laughed. He knew there wouldn’t be very much ‘touring’ going on, as his father was a chronic workaholic. The most sight-seeing he would likely end up doing with his Dad would be at the airport when he first arrived.

Kyle posted another comment, “I hear that Chinese girls are really horny for American guys... You might end up getting some Chinese tail!”

Mickey rolled his eyes. He was almost glad for a break from his ignorant and slightly racist friend, “I’m going to Japan moron, not China. And I’m pretty sure I won’t be getting any.”

Kyle continued to push the matter, “I’m just sayin’, if you get the chance to get some Geisha goddess in the sack, promise me that you’ll do it. Don’t let us all down over here! You’re getting a once-in-a-lifetime chance here... Don’t blow it!”

Mickey scoffed aloud then replied with, “Sure. Whatever.”

He closed out the app on his phone and tossed it on his nightstand. Kyle was such an idiot. Getting it on with a Japanese girl really isn’t his priority. Surviving a year with a neglectful father in country that doesn’t speak English was. He sighed deeply and flopped down on his bed, closing his eyes.

It would only be a year, he told himself. He’d just have to survive it.



Mickey was trying his best to ignore what Kyle was blabbering on about. His idiot friend, dropped by to say his goodbyes.

“But seriously, if some Chinese bitch throws herself at you... You’d do her, right?” he asked.

Mickey checked the time on the clock. Kyle had ten more minutes before his ride to the airport. He was beginning to wonder what he saw in his friend in the first place. Clearly it wasn't for insightful knowledge of foreign women.

"Right... Okay," Mickey sighed, "I'll 'do' every Chinese bitch I see..." he paused for a moment with his hand on his hip, "while I sit in my Father's boring-assed apartment... for seven days a week... in Japan... which is a totally different country."

Kyle didn't seem to get it. All he wanted to know was that his pal would get lucky in the Orient. That seemed to be all that that mattered, "Okay... Just promise me you won't mess up the opportunity of a lifetime, okay?"

Mickey raised a vexed eyebrow. "Yeah, sure. I'll even bring you back a bitch of your own, okay?"

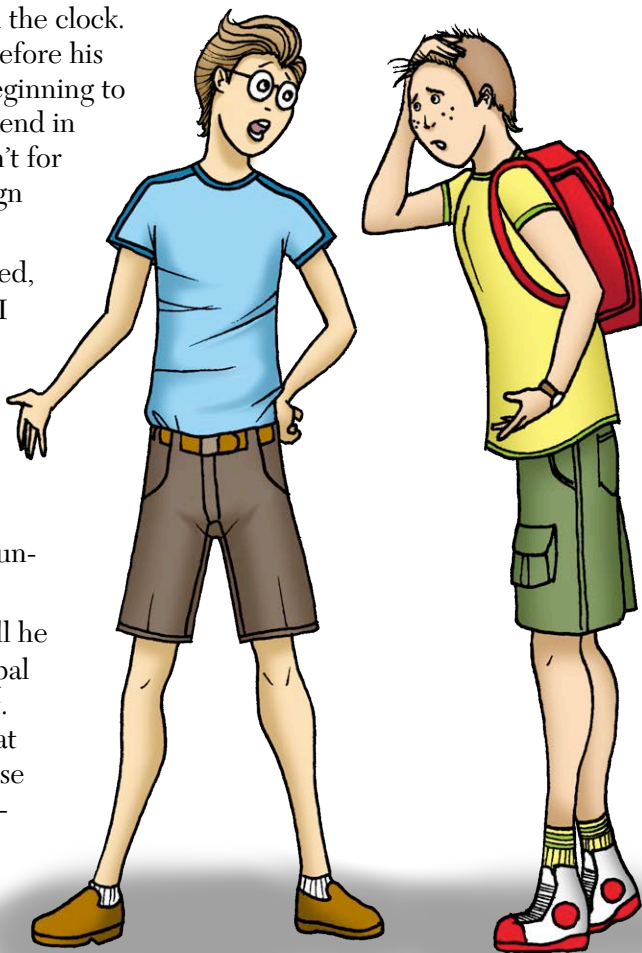
Kyle's face lit up, "You can do that?"

Buff's loud and thick Texan accent interrupted the two teens. "Yer cab's here sport," he boomed.

Grateful to get away, Mickey shrugged. "Sure, why not?" He said, happy to end this ridiculous conversation, then he grabbed his suitcase as he headed for the door.

Asa he was about to exit, Buff awkwardly offered his Stepson his outstretched hand in a 'good luck' kind of way.

Mickey paused as if not sure what to do with it, then gave the hand a weak shake before leaving the room. *The boy shakes like a sissy*, the big Texan said to himself as he made a derisive sniff. He had never thought very highly of



Mickey, and in a way, was hoping that a year in Japan with his father would toughen him up. Or maybe he'd just stay there, with any luck.

Kyle's well-wishing was far less manly. He threw himself at Mickey, giving his friend a giant bear hug, then wiped a tear from his eye as he sighed.

Buff gave the display a full-on snort of disapproval.

Annabelle was fighting to hold back her tears as well as she could. She wanted to look strong for her son and new husband, but her sorrow in seeing her only son leave could barely be contained.

"Have you got your boarding pass?" she asked, trying to deflect her emotions.

"Yes Mom," Mickey replied, feeling a tad-bit teary eyed himself.

"And your passport?"

"Yes, for the *third* time," he sighed, realizing that he might be sounding a little harsh.

"I love you son," she said as she threw herself at him, wrapping her arms around her boy and sobbing loudly.

"I love you too," Mickey whispered.

The taxi driver sounded his horn again, breaking up the moment.

"He really should get going," Buff interjected, gently removing his wife from her son.

Mickey nodded, took a deep breath, and headed for the door.



The cabin of airliner was loud and crowded. Mickey had been pressing his headphones into his ears for most of his flight in an attempt to listen to one of the in-flight movies. He was trying to drown out the noise of the young families that were seated around him. They appeared to be Japanese, returning home from a trip to Orlando, judging by their Mickey-Mouse ears and Harry Potter t-shirts. There were several children under the age of six, and all were wound up on American sugar and culture. They were running, fighting, yelling, hitting and otherwise behaving boisterously. Especially for such cramped quarters.

Mickey had already been climbed over, bumped into and unintentionally kicked at least once. He pressed the volume button on his phone to make the sound as loud as possible. He then looked down at the time display and sighed. *Only eight more hours left*, he said to himself, gritting his teeth. Mickey wished he had been old enough to drink. He could use it right now.

He closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair, trying to envision his arrival in Tokyo. He wondered if his Dad would pick him up in a shiny Toyota sports car? Maybe he would take him to see a baseball game – Mickey knew that the Japa-

nese were big into baseball. Hopefully his father would at least take a few days off to show his son around.

Mickey smiled at the thought of spending time with his Dad. But his smile didn't last. He knew his Dad was a chronic workaholic, and the chances of his dream coming true were slim. He checked the time on his phone again – seven hours, fifty-five minutes. He looked around him at the madness of over-tired, over-excited children gallivanting about unsupervised – it was going to seem a lot longer than that.

Eventually the plane and its cargo of noisy tourists touched down at Tokyo's Narita Airport. Mickey was instantly awe-struck by how new and modern-looking everything was, and at how many people there were. It was quite literally a sea of people. It was nothing at all like back home.

Mickey's first stop was customs where he presented the officer with a three-month tourist visa. His stepfather had suggested he apply for an extension after a month, since it was easier than applying for a year-long visa. 'Those Japs don't like forr'ners staying too long,' he had muttered. The customs officer furrowed his brow as he read the document over.

"Stay with father?" he asked.

"Yes," Mickey replied.

"You stay ninety days?" the officer inquired after a pause.

"Yes," Mickey replied again.

The officer looked up at the boy and narrowed his eyes, "And then you leave."

Mickey wasn't sure if that was a question or a statement, but he remembered the answer that Buff had coached him on, "Yes," he said.

The customs agent glared at him for a moment, then stamped Mickey's documents before handing them back to him, "Have nice stay," he forced a smile at the end of the sentence.

Mickey grabbed his stuff and headed into the arrivals line, where his mother had told him his father would be waiting. But once in the line, things began to get a little overwhelming. There were people everywhere, all frantically scurrying about like ants at a picnic. He stood in the middle of all the hustle and bustle, feeling somewhat dazed, clutching the ancient, fraying suitcase his stepfather had lent him.

How the heck would he ever find his way anywhere in all of this? It was everything he had feared about Japan. The frenetic pace of life, the incomprehensible signs and language, and the feeling he was the only person in the entire country who didn't know what was going on. He moaned and looked around hopelessly – until a somewhat familiar voice spoke to him from behind.

"Mickey?" the voice said.

Mick turned around to see his father towering over him with a tentative look on his face. Mickey's Dad was a tall man, and being surrounded by thousands of Japanese pedestrians who were substantially shorter than him, made him appear to be almost giant-like.

"Hi Dad," Mickey tried to force a smile.

"Let's go Mick," his father returned a forced smile of his own. He checked his phone. "I've got a meeting in 75 minutes I have to get to."

Mickey sighed, "Yeah... Okay," he said with a heavy exhale. He had fully expected to find that his father hadn't changed, but it was still a disappointment to discover he was right. *It's going to be a long year*, he said to himself as he picked up his suitcase. He had to run to catch up, and followed his father out of the airport terminal. The train station was located next door, where they boarded a waiting train for the hour-long ride into the city.

The ride was impressive, to say the least, as the train sped at an insane rate through the various towns and cities that surrounded the Japanese capital before stopping in the bustling metropolis itself. Neither Mickey nor his father spoke a word as they travelled. Mickey pulled out his phone and switched it out of 'airplane' mode. It took a minute, but the device eventually found a signal.

His father had arranged for Mickey's phone to be switched to his mobile service provider upon the boy's arrival. *At least he did something for me*, Mickey thought as he popped his earbuds into his ears and turned on his playlist. He sent a text to his mother to let her know that he had arrived, and another to Kyle which read 'In Tokyo. No hot babes yet. Keep U posted.' He looked over at his father who was typing away on his blackberry.

Same old Dad.

His father didn't look up from his phone's screen the entire train ride into the city, nor on the way from the train to the waiting taxicab, or for the cab ride to his apartment building. Mickey wished his Dad would pay more attention to him. He longed for it, now more than ever – but his father wasn't on the same page.

What can I do to get his attention? Mickey wondered. *If I knew that, maybe he wouldn't have given up on me in the first place.*



The downtown apartment wasn't really what Mickey had expected. By American standards it was tiny, though his father assured him that by Japanese standards it was 'huge.'

It featured a central room, ornately decorated in traditional Japanese décor, with four separate rooms branching off. A kitchen, a bathroom, and two bedrooms.

There was one more surprise in store for Mickey what he certainly wasn't counting on when he arrived at his father's home.

His father's new wife.

The woman had been standing quietly when Mickey and his Dad first entered the room. Mickey had assumed that the woman – who was dressed in traditional-looking Japanese garb – might be a maid. She was taller than he expected a Japanese woman to be and glared at him with disapproving eyes. When his father introduced her as his wife, Mickey's jaw hit the floor.

"What?" he gasped.

"This is my wife... Your stepmother..." his Dad repeated, "Keiko"

Keiko stepped forward changing from glare to an extremely forced smile.

"I am please to meet you Mickay" she said in a thick Japanese accent.

Mickey looked at his father, "What?"

His father looked a little confused, perhaps even upset, "I thought you knew. Didn't your mother tell you?"

Mickey lied, "Oh... Sure, yes." His mother had said nothing of the sort. "She just isn't..." he paused to choose his words, "she isn't what I expected"

Keiko bowed slightly, "Well you are certainly not what I was to expect either Mickay"

"What?" he turned to his father, "What was she expecting?"

His father chuckled, "It's the funniest thing. You see, in Japanese – like other languages – the language is sexed, you know, there's a male version and a female version. So when I told her that my child 'Mickey' was coming," He paused scrunching up his face, "well let's just say that in Japan, Mickey is not a boy's name..."

Keiko huffed and shrugged her shoulders, as if re-living a traumatic event.

Mickey paused, as if taking a moment to digest what he had been told, then blurted out, "So you never told her that I was a boy?"

His father looked defensive, then softened his look, "Well Son," he shrugged, "It never occurred to me that I would have to. Japanese is a complex language, don't forget."

"You've been in Japan for ten years, dad" Mickey retorted, "You'd think you'd have figured out the difference between having a son and a daughter in ten years," he turned to Keiko. "Hasn't he ever talked about me before?"

Keiko looked confused by the question, "Well yes Mickay," she began to reply.

"It's Mick-ee, not Mick-kay" he corrected her.

Keiko looked deeply offended, huffing and stomping a slippered foot as she turned to her husband in anger. She muttered something in Japanese to him. It sounded to Mickey like she had said 'Care wah donna yo,' which wasn't too far off the truth.

Mickey's father's face turned red. "Now listen here!" he roared at his son, "You are a guest in this house..." he paused and looked over to Keiko then back to his son, "Our house... So if this is going to work, you will need to start showing a little more respect for both Keiko and I! Are we understood?"

Mickey shook his head. His father was exactly the way that he had remembered him. Short tempered, abrupt, inattentive. *Staying here is going to suck*, he thought to himself.

"This isn't the U.S.A. son," his father continued on his tirade "This is Japan. You just can't go around blurting out things like that – it just isn't done like that here. The Japanese are very big on etiquette, honor and decorum. So either you start to show some of each along with a little respect, or you can go back to America." He pointed upwards with this finger to emphasize his point.

Mickey glanced up at the ceiling, wondering to himself when the United States was moved into outer space. His father realized his gesture was incongruent with his statement and slowly retracted his hand.

"Now," his dad continued in a much calmer voice, "while you are here you will show respect to Keiko and I – is that understood?"

Mickey nodded, his eyes wide from the shock of his father's angry outburst.

"Now..." his father continued, again, "Keiko will help me in getting you settled in, show you around, and show you how to behave in Japan. I expect you to listen to her every word, and treat her with the same respect I would expect you to treat me with."

Keiko leaned forward and whispered something in her husband's ear. Mickey's father paused and nodded his head then turned back to his son, "Keiko suggests that she take you on a shopping trip for some new clothes. She believes it will help you to 'blend in' a little better while you are living with us."

"What?" Mickey lamented aloud.

"You'll stand out like a sore thumb dressed like that..." he motioned at his son's very American-looking shorts and shirt, "No need to bring any more attention to yourself than you need to."

Keiko nodded in agreement. Mickey just sighed and shrugged his shoulders, "Fine," he muttered. One hour in Tokyo and he wanted to leave already. How on earth was he ever going to last the year?

"Follow me," Keiko commanded, as she turned to leave the room. A brow-beaten Mickey grabbed his suitcase and obeyed. His father had already left the



room to take an important business call and was yelling into the phone about ‘not caring if that’s the way we do things back in the U.S., it won’t fly here.’ Apparently Mickey wasn’t the only one not showing the right amount of respect for the way things are done in Japan.

“This your room,” Keiko said in a rushed tone, “Get unpack and get to bed. Very busy tomorrow”

“But it’s, like, two in the afternoon,” he protested.

“You have jet-lag,” she barked, “You get rest!”

Without another word, she turned around and minced away in her slippers and long gown. After the lecture that he just received, he wasn’t in the mood to get any more. So he decided to get unpacked and take a nap as Keiko had suggested.

Mickey’s ‘room’ was essentially an oversized closet. There was a bed along one wall, and closet along the other – and that was it. Mickey was pretty sure that if he fell out of bed in the night, he’d end up sleeping in the closet, they were that close to each other.

He opened the closet door, hoping to find a spot to stow his luggage, but discovered that the cupboard was crammed full of what he could only assume was Keiko’s stuff. There were shoes, and brightly colored outfits on hangers and in

drawers, and not one square inch of available space for anything that he had brought.

“Great,” he mumbled to himself, as he propped his suitcase up between his bed and his closet door, and climbed into the tiny bed.

This is going to be a very long year, he said to himself again as he closed his eyes and tried to sleep.



The next morning, Mickey slept in. It turned out that he really was severely jet-lagged and extremely exhausted from the previous day's travel. When he finally awoke, he discovered that his father had already left for work, and his new Stepmother Keiko was puttering around the tiny apartment.

Today Keiko was dressed in trendy leggings and tunic-style top. She could have easily been mistaken for a Japanese-American, at least until she opened her mouth.

“What are you staring at, rude boy?” she growled in her thick Japanese accent, “Do you have no manners?”

She glanced him over.

“You stick out like sore drum,” she said in an out-of-the-blue kind of way, “We go buy you some new clothes.”

“I’m pretty sure you mean a sore thumb,” Mickey tried to correct her.

“Don’t you insult me boy!” she yelled, “Have some meal, then we will go to shop. If you want to see Tokyo, I will show you – Let’s go, eat up now!”

Keiko pointed at the food on the table in front of him. Mickey could only assume it was what they considered to be breakfast. There was a bowl of plain white rice, another of what appeared to be some kind of soup, two odd looking pickles, another bowl containing an uncooked egg, and several sheets of a green leathery looking substance. On a plate at the centre of the spread was some cooked fish.

“Eat!” Keiko barked.

Mickey, fearing that he would be yelled at more if he declined her offer of food, sat slowly at the table. Thankfully there was a fork placed before the plate of fish, so he began with what he knew, and took a mouthful of rice into his mouth.

“Mmmmm,” he muttered as he chewed the bland rice.

“No-no!” Keiko shouted, “Like this” she moved him aside, then used the fork to place rice, fish and pickle on one of the green sheets. She then proceeded to roll the sheet up and hand it to Mickey. “Eat,” she commanded.

Mickey took a big bite of the green ‘tortilla’ roll, and instantly realized that he was eating seaweed. He gagged a little, but didn’t want any more shouting from his new stepmother, so instead made the same muttering “Mmmmmm” as he had before, even though the roll tasted like a mouth full of ocean.

Once Mickey had finished, Keiko grabbed her purse and the two of them descended from the apartment down to the City’s hyper-congested streets.

“Follow close,” Keiko ordered.

They began to cut through the crowded sidewalks to the subway station, where they boarded a train for the ‘Ginza’ district, whatever that was. Mickey pulled his phone from his pocket and checked his messages. His mother was now on her way to Mexico, and was happy to hear that he had arrived in Japan safe-and-sound. Kyle was also happy to hear from his friend, but seemed to be more concerned with how cute the girls were there.

He really hadn’t had a chance, yet, so Mickey looked around the crowded subway car. There were so many people everywhere that he couldn’t really tell if any of them were cute girls.

Keiko saw him texting and smiled. “You like new phone?” she asked.

Mickey glanced down at his aging, cracked, off-brand handset. “It’s not that new.”

Keiko shook her head. “Not what I mean. I buy new phone for you? You would like?”

Mickey smiled, “Oh yes... I’d love a new phone!”

“If you are good boy, maybe get good phone,” she then glared at him with a hint of anger.

Mickey wasn’t sure how to respond, so he didn’t. He just nodded.



The streets of Ginza were just as crowded and busy as the other section of town from which they had come, only instead of rows of office towers, the street was lined with rows of stores and boutiques. People were buzzing about everywhere, chatting amongst themselves, or on cell phones. They paid no attention to Mickey as he struggled to keep pace with his stepmother.

Their first stop was a small salon. Mickey was immediately confused about why he needed to be there. Especially after Keiko began to talk to one of the salon’s workers, while pointing and gesturing at him. Finally the young woman smiled and motioned at Mickey to come over to her, which he did – reluctantly.

She sat him in one of the big salon chairs, under Keiko’s watchful eye, and spun him away from the mirror as she began to brush and trim his already mid-

length hair. The whole process didn't take more than fifteen minutes, and without allowing him to see what had been done, Keiko thanked and paid the stylist and escorted Mickey briskly from the salon.

From there they spilled back out onto Ginza's teeming streets and walked another block to their first destination. The store that they entered bore a passing resemblance to the night clubs back in Texas. Though this certainly wasn't a country bar or hillbilly shack. Instead, it was decorated with bright-colored lights and oversized neon fixtures in strange Japanese symbols, along with faces of cartoon kittens. Thumping techno music played over a high-powered sound system as hordes of teenaged girls looked over the racks of brightly colored clothes, tittering to each other in their native tongue as Mickey walked past them.

This certainly isn't Texas, he thought to himself.

One girl, who caught his eye, smiled then giggled before turning to her friends to chatter in Japanese. 'Something-something-something, American?' was all Mickey could make out.

"Come-come," Keiko barked, "Stop playing around! Let's go!" She grabbed Mickey's shirt and gave him a tug. Mickey lurched forward, almost tripping, as he scrambled to follow.

"No grace, no balance," Keiko muttered loudly, "Such a disgrace." She maneuvered through the store with Mickey in tow until she reached her destination near the back. Mickey didn't need to translate the big red and white sign over the rack of clothes that stood before him, it was already pretty apparent.

It was the clearance rack.

He sighed and stood silently as Keiko held a few articles of clothing against him, scowling and groaning after each item was tried. There were a couple of pieces that actually looked good, as far as Mickey was concerned, but she snapped at him with an abrupt "Urusai!" every time he so much as looked like he was going to open his mouth. He didn't know what that meant, but he figured it was along the lines of "shut up."

This process was repeated over the course of four grueling hours in seven different stores, until Keiko seemed satisfied she had either sourced an adequate number of articles of clothing to sufficiently improve her stepson's image – or – she had spent as much time and money as she could stomach on her husband's disgraceful child.

Only Keiko would know which one was true.

At the last store they visited, Keiko ordered Mickey into a changing room to try on an outfit that she had selected for him. It was a little loud for his tastes, with bright white shorts and a deep red tank-top, but nothing terribly over-the-top.

That was, until she through a little jacket over the door and slid a shoe-box under it.

“These too!” she commanded.

Mickey tentatively slid the red-trimmed white half-length jacket over his tank top and looked in the mirror. It wasn’t a look he was familiar with, but he recognized that Japanese styles were bound to be a little ‘different’ than he was used to.

However the contents of the shoe box were a different story altogether.

Contained inside the brightly decorated paperboard box were a pair a thick-soled white sandals that looked very much like something a girl would wear, not a man.

“Keiko?” he asked through the door, “Are these the right shoes? They look a little...” his voice trailed off as he carefully searched for a word that wouldn’t be offensive, “...a little, girly”

Nice going Mr. Culturally Sensitive! He thought to himself.

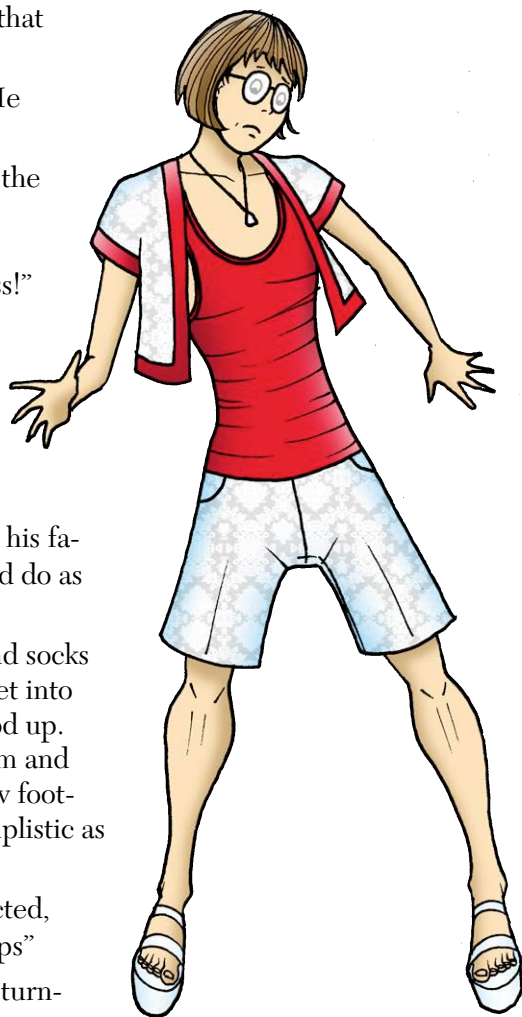
“Girly?” Keiko cried back, “These are the highest in fashion you disrespectful insect! You put those on right now or I will tell your father about your rudeness!”

Mickey rubbed his forehead with his hand. Keiko was talking to him like he was five years old. Clearly this woman wasn’t playing with a full deck. But what other option did he have? He couldn’t go back to the U.S., and he couldn’t stay here without his father’s help. So he decided that he would do as he was asked, for the time being.

He slipped off his grungy old shoes and socks and with a long sigh, slid his slender feet into the straps of the new sandals, then stood up. He opened the door of the change room and stepped out, only to realize that his new footwear wasn’t as straight forward and simplistic as his old shoes had been.

“Walk slow, foolish boy,” Keiko instructed, “Use balance and grace. Take small steps”

He nodded and did as she instructed, turn-



ing to view himself in the mirror. What he saw made him nearly lose his newly-found balance. His hair had been styled into a weird bob-cut with short bangs, and even worse, his new shoes had a definite pronounced wedge heel at the back of a thick platform sole. It was a girl's haircut – and they were girl's shoes!

“Keiko I...” he began to protest, but she interjected before he could start.

“You look perfect. Just right for a child your age,” she smiled for the first time since Mickey arrived, “I am so please.” She collected two more boxes similar to the one Mickey's sandals had come from, and proceeded to the front counter to pay.

Mickey sighed, stuffing his old shoes into a bag which he handed to Keiko. He gasped as he watched her then stuff the bag into the garbage.

“But!” was all he could muster in protest. He didn't protest any further though, not wanting to end up in trouble from his dad. Instead, he grabbed the bags of clothes he had been carrying since the first store, and followed Keiko out.

Later in the day, Keiko would tell Mickey's father of their great shopping adventure and of how rude and uncooperative he had been. Mickey's dad glared at his son as he ate his rice and chicken. He handled the chopsticks with ease. Mickey was still struggling to figure out how to use them.

“Well, I'm sure that he will do better for you the next time,” his father growled.

“Yes, Father,” Mickey sighed with a defeated expression. He didn't think he had done that poorly, and was both surprised and disappointed that Keiko had made the comments that she had. Clearly this woman was going to be impossible to please, but Mickey was not going to give up. He reasoned that if he could somehow make her happy, it would somehow make his dad happy.

That was more important to him than anything right now. Just for his survival, if nothing else.



“Get up!” came a shrieking voice. “You going to layabout all day lazy boy?” Keiko growled as she poked her head in the door of Mickey's room. It had been a few days since Mickey's arrival in Tokyo, and since then every day began with her same cheerful greeting. Mickey groaned and got out of bed. He wasn't sure what it was that he was supposed to be doing instead of lounging about. He didn't have school or anything like that, and it wasn't like his dad seemed to care what he did.

Just to nice, he thought he could try to help out with the household chores, such as sweeping and doing dishes. But his efforts were futile. Keiko would

complain about him doing it 'wrong' and berate him with more negative comments, like "How did you become so useless?" and "What purpose do you serve?"

But he didn't give up. Instead, he took it as a challenge. He was determined to show his stepmother he wasn't the 'lazy boy' she assumed he was. Gradually, he took up doing even the most menial of household tasks, in hopes that Keiko would change her tune. Instead, she would berate him again, and make him do paces in his new platform wedge sandals. Back and forth, across the floor, she made march and march in tiny mincing steps.

"His lazy American attitude is shameful," she would complain to his dad, "But his balance and grace are better."

Mickey's father just shook his head and glared over at his son, who quickly went back to immersing himself in his phone with either texts or listening to music. Mickey could tell that he didn't approve of his son's new clothes – especially those weird looking shoes – but his wife claimed that it was the latest trend, so he didn't push the issue. At this point all he wanted was for his son to acclimatize to living in Japan, and as fast as possible.

Mickey's dad had his reasons for leaving his son in his step wife's hands. One of his coworkers was joining them for dinner soon and he wanted to ensure that Mickey was not an embarrassment. Mickey's father gave his wife full control over making sure that didn't happen.

For the week that followed, Keiko continued to browbeat her stepson while explaining how to behave in the presence of dinner guests. "Do not make eye contact. You must not speak until you are spoken to. You must not look at anyone unless they speak to you. You must remain still and not draw attention to yourself, unless you are asked to move." She instructed him daily, in between telling him how lazy he was and making him practice walking in his 'weird-looking' shoes.

What Mickey didn't know was that Keiko had already decided that she didn't like the boy, and was going to make his life full of misery, until he reached the point of begging his father to leave. She wanted him out of their lives, as soon as possible. For his part, Mickey was determined to do everything she asked, to that his father would finally show some kind of pride in him.

In short, neither of them were going to give in.

On the night their dinner guest was due to arrive, Keiko ordered Mickey to dress in the red and white outfit she had made him try on at the store days ago, and to brush his hair in the 'proper' manner.

Mickey hated doing it, but he didn't want to get yelled at again, so he stood in bathroom in front of the mirror, brushing his short bangs, styling his hair into the 'bob' he had been shown originally. He convinced himself that it was a 'Beatles' haircut, and that it was likely all the rage in Japan.

When he emerged from the lavatory, he discovered that his father's co-worker had already arrived – with someone else in tow.

A girl.

A pretty Japanese girl.

Mickey ran his fingers through his hair to muss it up again, not wanting to appear too proper to the guest. Beetle-cut be damned, he wanted to protect his macho pride.

Mickey's Dad attempted to introduce his son in Japanese, "Watashi wa anata ni watashi no on'nanoko Miki ni teiji," his father said with a smile, not realizing that he had unknowingly made an error in his translations and introduced his 'son' as his 'daughter.'

The Japanese girl giggled, Keiko looked horrified while the co-worker looked confused but remained quiet, as he did not want to bring shame to his friend. Mickey was oblivious to the entire interaction.

The co-worker approached Mickey and bowed politely and in terrible English told him "It pressure to meet you Mickey-Chan."

Mickey nodded in return as he had been instructed by Keiko to do, but spotted the girl giggling to the side.

"This is Mr. Makato," Mickey's father introduced the man before him, "And his daughter Yoshiko. He thought that maybe you would like to meet another person your age. Isn't that thoughtful?"

"Um, yes," Mickey stammered as he looked over at the girl again, who was still looking very amused at something that had happened. Mickey had no idea what it was.

"Tell Mr. Makato, thank you," he added at the last minute, remembering his father's speech about how the Japanese like to be shown respect.

The five of them sat down to a dinner of steamed rice, fish and chicken, which Mickey was starting to believe would be his daily ration, morning, noon and night. The adults conversed with each other, mostly in Japanese, while Mickey ate quietly. It was strange to hear his father speaking in a language that wasn't English.

Occasionally he would glance over at Yoshiko, who seemed to be keeping a very close eye on him. She was looking at him nearly every time he looked over.

After they had finished, Mickey began to clear the plates away as he had been asked. Mr. Makato turned to Keiko and with a very quiet voice asked, "Mikki wa minikui on'nanoko desu. Kanojode wanai desu ka?," which essentially meant 'Mikki is an ugly girl, isn't she?'

Both Keiko and Yoshiko gasped. Keiko covered her mouth and Yoshiko broke into another fit of giggles, while the American Father and son looked oblivious

again. Keiko glanced from her husband's friend to her stepson to her husband and back. Not knowing who to shame and who to honor, as the mistake her husband had made would surely make him look like a fool – and would make her the devoted wife of a fool. So she instead nodded, “Kashikomarimashita. Kanojo wa shonen no yonimieru” Which essentially acknowledged his statement, while adding that Mickey ‘looked like a boy.’

The man scrunched his face into a concerned expression as he looked Mickey over, before turning to his daughter. “Anata wa, menta, kono-ko to,” he said, “kanojo wa watashitachi no bunka ni doka tasukerubeki.” Which meant ‘You should mentor this child and help her assimilate to our culture.’

Yoshiko nodded, then turned to Mickey and his Dad, “My father thinks that Mickey and I should hang out. I can show him around Tokyo,” she said in near-perfect English.

Keiko didn't wait for a response, “Yes, tomorrow, absolutely!”

Mickey's father looked unsure, but knew that turning down the offer down would be disrespectful.

“Of course,” he smiled, “Mickey would be happy for the opportunity”

Mickey shrugged, “Sure, okay.”

Yoshiko spoke up, “Oh, I'm a little busy for a few days, let's do the end of the week or so, okay?”

Makato-san smiled and nodded his head, thinking he had just helped a great cultural divide. Keiko smiled, worried that she had just allowed her husband to bring the mother-lode of disgrace into her house. Yoshiko smiled, knowing that her Dad thought his co-worker's son was a girl, and also knowing that neither the co-worker, nor the son had a clue. Mickey smiled, because he thought he was going to finally get somewhere with a hot Japanese girl.

Later that night, he decided to try his luck, and approached her. She was extremely thin, yet had nicely-sized breasts that he couldn't take his eyes off. In her fancy wedge-heeled boots she appeared to be slightly taller than he was, which was somewhat intimidating. But regardless, he took a deep breath, and tried to start up a conversation.

“Your English is really good,” he began, “You almost sound...”

“American?” she cut him off, “I should. I grew up in New York.”

“Oh?” Mickey replied, “Whereabout? Like Albany? Syracuse?” he tried to sound smart. Those were the only two cities in New York State that he knew.

“Um,” she rolled her eyes, “Try Manhattan. You know, New York City?”

“Right,” Mickey nodded, “Of course. That would make sense.” *Way to go, idiot*, he thought to himself.

“Were you going to school there?” he tried to recover the conversation.

"I lived there with my Mom after my parents broke up," Yoshiko replied, "My dad is a frickin' workaholic and very old school. He doesn't think that a woman should have a career, so my mom left him."

"I know all about that," Mickey sighed, "My mom left my dad for the same reason – except she didn't want to have a career, she just wanted to be looked after," he chuckled, "And then he got transferred here."

Yoshiko nodded, "My mother wanted to be a fashion photographer. My dad thought she should be a housewife. Needless to say, he didn't get his way, and I'm not exactly what you'd call a traditional Japanese girl either"

Mickey nodded as he looked her over. Her long hair was dyed bright purple, matching her knee-length shorts, worn under a short white miniskirt with blue trim, that complimented her knee-high boots. A blue crop-top with puffy sleeves accentuated her breasts. She accessorized with bracelets, earrings and a white headband, and her face was carefully made up in complimentary purple tones. "Clearly," he replied.

"I like to call it fusion fashion," she continued, "I blame my mother's fashion photo shoots back in the States. I saw a lot of fashion in my childhood. You might say it's become a bit of a hobby of mine. Hey!" She pointed at him to emphasize her statement, "I could totally help you with your look too. You look like you could use a little help."

"No kidding," Mickey replied.

"Yeah," she said, "I don't know who told you that red is your color, but it's totally not."

"It's not my outfit," he tried to explain his clothing, "It's my stepmom's."

"You're wearing your stepmom's clothes?" she asked in a droll voice.

"No!" he retorted, embarrassed at his mis-communication, "I mean she picked the outfit for me. It was her choice."

"It's fine by me if you want to wear her clothes. The Japanese can be very traditional in some respects, but when it comes to that, we're very liberal. You'd be surprised what you can get away with wearing here," she said with a laugh.

"For the last time, I'm not wearing girls clothes!" he shouted, then turned to see the adults staring at his outburst. Keiko in particular looked extremely displeased.

"Okay, okay!" Yoshiko chuckled, "You don't have to shout." The adults had gotten up and were shaking hands, indicating an end to the evening. "I'll see you on Friday. It'll be fun!" she gave Mickey an air-kiss on each cheek leaving him standing, a shocked expression on his face, as she took her father's hand and left the apartment.

"Well," Mickey's father exclaimed as he closed the door behind their guests, "I think that went really well!"

Mickey nodded nervously, unsure what to expect in the days to come. "Yeah, I guess" he said.

Keiko looked more nervous. She was trying to figure out how to break the news to her husband's co-worker that Mickey was a boy, not a girl, so as not to bring any embarrassment to her husband, or to her. It was a reivous shame that the mistake had been made in the first place. Now, letting it go on through the evening had made it doubly more so. Just a single mention at the office of this sort of gender-mix up might get her husband fired. A boy dressing as a girl at home was a humiliation they could not survive. But there didn't seem to be any way to fix the error at this point.

Then the thought occurred to her. If she couldn't find a way to make Makato-san think that Mickey was a boy instead of a girl, could she find a way to make Mickey look the part of a girl instead? All she needed to do was fool Mr. Makato, whenever their paths crossed. That would save face for their family.

A smile formed on her lips as she looked at Mickey across the room.

To Mickey, things were looking up. His father seemed pleased. His step-mother was smiling at him. And he was about to get to know a hot Japanese chick. But in reality – he had no idea that things were about to get a whole lot worse.



Keiko was very anxious the next morning. She didn't wait for Mickey to get up, she just came storming into his bedroom at a very early hour.

Early by Mickey's standards, anyway. It was six.

"We must shop before you meet the daughter of Makato-San," she said.

"What?" Mickey yawned, "What time is it?"

"Get up now!" Keiko shouted, "We need a new outfit for you!"

"What are talking about?" Mickey wondered aloud, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, "Besides, we got all kinds of stuff last week. What else could I possibly need?"

"Insolent boy!" She yelled, tugging his blankets from his bed. "Your father instructed you to be obedient to me. You should not question me!" Her voice was so fierce it was cracking.

Mickey looked shocked at her outburst. He didn't want to be lectured by his father again about listening to Keiko's rules, so he ended his protests with a grumble, before standing up and stretching. It wasn't worth inciting a confrontation over something as stupid as shopping. What did he care? If she wanted to buy him more stupid clothing, why should he complain? It wasn't like it was costing him anything. And clearly no one seemed to care about him wearing ridiculous-looking clothing and shoes here. He had seen far weirder outfits on people everywhere he looked.

So if she was hell-bent and determined to take him shopping for more ridiculousness, than he would go. At the very least, he could just break the monotony of being cooped up in the apartment.

"Be ready to go in two minute!" she demanded as she stomped out of the room in her tight green jeans and wedge-heeled shoes.

Must be casual day, Mickey snickered to himself, thinking of the elaborate costume that he had first seen her in when he first arrived.

Out in the common room, Keiko was trying to remain calm. Mickey was right to assume that his clothes were satisfactory to maintain his image as a middle-class son of an office manager. But Keiko's mind was running a million miles an hour – Makato-San suspected that Mickey was a girl, which meant he expected to see him appear as such, otherwise there would be questions asked, and eventually the truth might be revealed.

And that would be horrifyingly shameful.

On the other hand, if she pushed him too far – made him look too feminine, he might become upset. Or worse, his father would be become upset.

She paused and thought about her Husband's oft-short temper, and envisioned him blowing a fuse at the sight of Mickey dressed as a girl. But perhaps that wasn't a bad thing?

It was possible that he would be so incensed that he would send the boy back to the United States for good, which would restore order to their home and

return Kieko's life to the way it was before her insolent American stepson appeared. She smiled at the thought, knowing what she must do next.



The Ginza district was crowded and busy again when they arrived. School was out, and the city's teenagers had flocked to the area to shop for clothes. Mickey was having trouble not staring at some of the elaborate outfits that we being worn. Young Japanese girls had extremely varied tastes, with some dressing so ultra-conservatively, they looked nearly Amish, and others so vividly bright and flashy they looked like they had jumped out of an Anime cartoon, and everything in between.

I've got a date with a hot Japanese chick! He texted Kyle along the way, *My stepmom is taking me to get some new threads. Totally awesome!*

Kyle's reply was almost instantaneous, *Dude U rock! I'm sooooo jealous! Pics or it didn't happen!*

If only he knew how ridiculous-looking the new 'threads' were, Mickey thought as he placed the phone back in his pocket, *he wouldn't be so jealous then.*

The first stop on their trip was to the same hairdressers where Keiko had taken him last time to have his hair trimmed and styled. Naturally, Mickey was confused by attending the salon so soon, and questioned the need to have his hair done again, as less than a week had passed since his last 'appointment.'

Keiko rolled her eyes, "You are a boy," she muttered, "How could you understand such issues?"

She dismissed his concern with a hand gesture and led him to a waiting salon chair. The hairdresser spent only a few minutes trimming and styling his brown locks. She blended his bangs with the longer hair at the side of his head and brushed it back and over in a sweeping motion, then cut the longer hairs in an angular fashion to frame his face, giving him an androgynous-looking bob-cut.

Before she let Mickey see his revised hairstyle, Keiko quietly whispered something to the hairdresser in Japanese. The woman's eyes seemed to light up, as she turned to him and gave him a command in Japanese, "Anata no me o toji" Mickey stared blankly at her, not understanding a single word.

"Lean back and close your eyes, rude boy," Keiko translated in a loud commanding voice.

Mickey groaned his displeasure and leaned back into the chair. He hated the way Keiko barked orders at him. More importantly, he hated the way he automatically capitulated every time she did it. He wanted to tell her to fuck off,

but he knew that would just lead to more shouting and terse words from his father. He really didn't have much of a choice.

As he lay back in the salon chair, he felt something warm and comforting being applied to his legs. A few moments of soothing warmth passed, and Mickey heard a 'ripping' sound, followed by a searing, stinging pain.

"Ahhhhh!" he screamed, "What the hell?" He leaned forward, opening his eyes in the process. Both of his legs were being waxed.

"Keiko!" he cried. "Why are they..." he began, but the beauticians did not stop their assault, ripping another chunk of body hair from his legs. "Fuuuuck!" he exclaimed.

Keiko slapped his face. "Watch your mouth rude boy!" she scolded.

The procedure carried on until his legs were devoid of what little hair he had once owned. A sweet smelling lotion was then applied, that slightly soothed the burning sensation he was feeling. Keiko took some of the lotion on her fingertip and rubbed it over the boy's mouth, "That is for being rude" she said, "Now rub your lips together" she demanded before the salon chair was turned to face the mirrors. He obeyed, scrunching his face in confusion at the smooth feel of whatever had been applied.

"Open your eyes!"

He did, and almost fell over as his eyes focused through his thick glasses to the reflection in front of him. His hair was straight and weird looking, but nothing to concerning as compared to the hairstyles he had already seen in Tokyo.

His legs shone under a thin coating of lotion, as did his lips! He instinctively puckered them which made them sparkle and shiny as he moved them. It was extremely un-masculine and made Mickey wonder why Keiko was determined to make his life so miserable.

Why does she hate me so much? He wondered to himself, but dared not ask. Keiko seemed somewhat pleased at the moment, "You look much cleaner with smooth legs. Very important to be well kept," she decreed.

He wanted to scream and yell at her, but given the torture she had just put him through, he decided against it. No need to make a scene – especially one that would result in a lecture from his dad. Keiko grabbed his hand and motioned for him to follow her out of the salon, and though he wanted to, he didn't resist. He followed her quickly from the hairdresser's to a boutique a few doors down, where she began searching the racks for outfits for him to try on.

Mickey was concerned that the color schemes she was selecting were a little 'loud' compared to the browns, whites and grays that he was used to wearing. Even as compared to the red outfit she had made him wear when he met Yoshiko, the bright oranges, purples and lime greens that Keiko was selecting, made Mickey's stomach turn.

“Try this on,” she said finally, shoving a pile of orange material in front of him, then pushing him into a changing room. Mickey tried not to fall as he was forcibly shunted in the small booth with his newest outfit. He took a deep breath and began to remove his clothes.

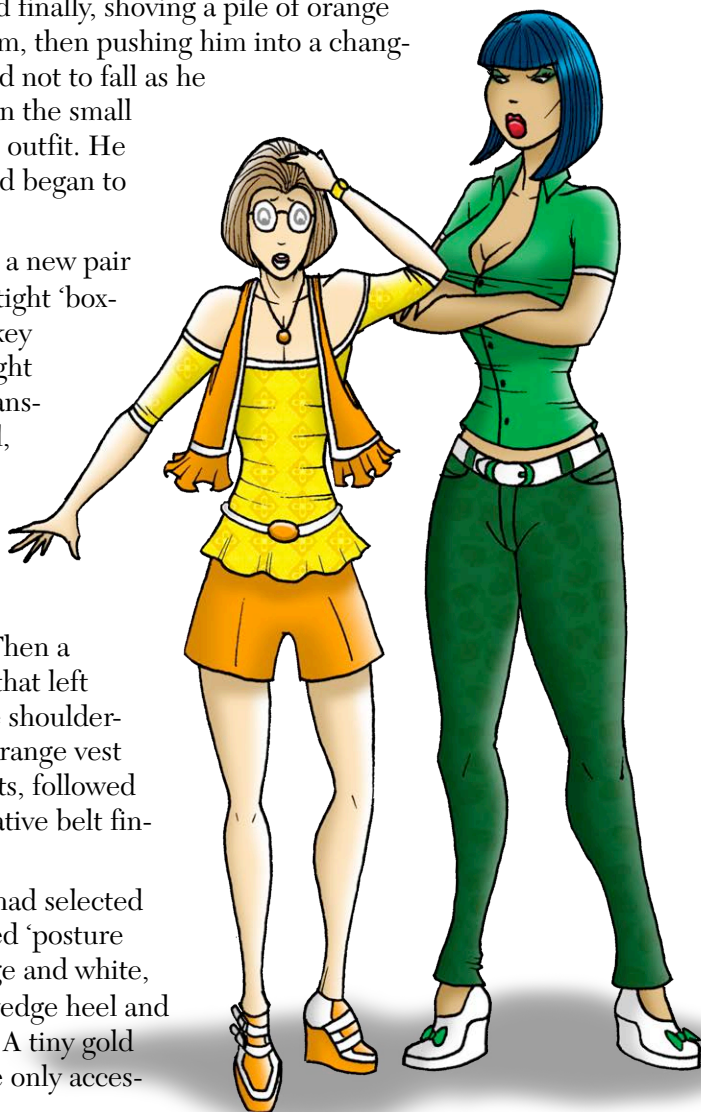
Keiko had given him a new pair of super-short, super-tight ‘boxers’ to replace his jockey shorts. They were bright orange and slightly transparent, and worse still, were tight around his male bulge. A pair of slightly short shorts in an amber-colored orange, followed next. Then a goldenrod tinted top that left him exposed from the shoulder-blade up. An amber-orange vest that matched his shorts, followed by a thin white decorative belt finished his outfit.

For footwear Keiko had selected another pair or ramped ‘posture shoes’ in amber/orange and white, with a slightly taller wedge heel and thicker platform sole. A tiny gold banded watch was the only accessory.

“Keiko!” He exclaimed as he came stumbling out of the change-room, holding his head, “I can’t wear this! There’s no way!”

Keiko glared angrily at him, her arms folded in front of her. She said nothing. “Now!” she gritted her teeth into a snarl and pointed at the checkout counter.

“But, but, isn’t there anything else I could try?” he pleaded. He was very concerned that she didn’t understand how ‘odd’ he looked in the outfit, and wanted to ensure that his position was properly and emphatically explained. “It’s just too...” his voice trailed off as he tried to find the word, “Girly.”



Keiko continued to scowl. She knew that she had chosen the perfect look for him. One that would satisfy Makato-San's need to see Mickey look more feminine, and also that would leave Mickey neutralized against her.

"Let's go," she said.

"No wait!" Mickey implored, "At least let me wear the other vest. This is leaving me *way* too exposed. I feel foolish Keiko. Please!"

Keiko remained silent as she pointed to the checkout a second time.

Mickey felt tears welling up in his eyes as he began to walk ahead of her in the store. He noticed people looking at him. Some smiled, some giggled, and others paid him no attention at all. His face felt flush with embarrassment. He was convinced that he had entered the third ring of hell – and his step mother was the devil.

He kept his head low as she paid for the outfit he was wearing, along with several others she had collected while he changed. She pointed at the clothes, now bagged on the counter. "Let's go lazy boy," she barked, "One more stop." Then huffed out of the boutique. Mickey sighed and slumped his shoulders, as he collected his bags and followed.



The ride on the subway back to the apartment had been similar to the 'walk of shame' that Mickey had taken in the store. People smiled, snickered, or ignored him altogether.

The last stop on their trip had taken them well off the beaten path, to some kind of natural pharmacy in a very old part of town. There, Keiko had conferred with a relic of a man in Japanese while occasionally pointing in Mickey's direction. The man was the very stereotype of an ancient Japanese medicine-man, complete with pointed hat and cascading white beard, who said little, but listened intently.

Finally, after Keiko's lengthy spiel, the man nodded and left the room, through a beaded doorway behind the counter, returning a few minutes later with a small glass bottle.

"Kore wa, anata ga kensaku nanika," he said with a faint smile, glancing over at Mickey.

Keiko turned and glanced at the boy, who was checking his phone for new text messages, oblivious to their stares. She uttered something in Japanese as Mickey looked up at them, unsure what their eyes were fixed on.

The old man chuckled, then rang the purchase through his equally old cash register, as Keiko placed the tiny glass bottle in her purse.

Mickey looked over at her again as their train approached their home station. She had been looking unusually pleased ever since her interaction with the old man, which Mickey found to be unnerving.

His father's reaction to his new attire however, would quickly make him forget all about that.

"What on earth are you wearing?" he roared when his orange-clothed son entered the room. Mickey's father's eyes were wide, and his face flush with anger. "What the hell is that?"

"It was Keiko's idea Dad! She did this!" Mickey lamented.

Keiko had been in the room, just out of earshot. But when she heard her name, she came barging into the conversation.

"This all Mickey idea!" She blatantly lied, "He said he want to fit in in Tokyo. He want these clothes!"

"I did not!" Mickey screamed in a pitch so surprisingly high his voice cracked at the end of the sentence. "Dad!" Mickey turned back to his father, "She's crazy! She made me try this on. I begged her not to make me wear this, but she didn't listen."

"Liar!" Keiko shouted, "Li-ar!"

Mickey's father rubbed his head and waved his arms around. "Hold on a second!" he bellowed. He paused to rub his head again, trying to make sense of it all. He inhaled a very deep breath then turned to his wife, "Darling, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have yelled like that. It's just that it's a bit of a shock from where we're from." He motioned at Mickey and himself. "So if this," he paused to motion again, this time towards Mickey's outfit, "is how he wants to try and fit in here..." his voice trailed off as if the words were painful to say, "than this is what I suppose he needs to do, and we need to be supportive of it."

"What?" Mickey exclaimed, "Wait, Dad you think I want to..."

"Oh Eric!" Keiko's shrill voice drowned him out as she came over to her husband and wrapped her arms around him, "I'm so sorry husband, I will certainly try to be more supportive of Mickey's wishes. I must be more supportive of him."

Mickey's Dad smiled, and kissed his wife on the lips. She returned the kiss, and then some, eliciting a long low growl from his voice box.

"Wait! Hold on!" Mickey tried to interrupt. But to no avail. His father was clearly under his stepmother's spell.

"Thank you dear," Mickey's dad spoke softly as their embrace drew to a close, "I'm sure Mickey appreciates your help. He certainly looks more like the Japanese kids I've seen around the city more now than when he first arrived. I am thankful I have you." He kissed the cunning woman a second time as his son watched. Mickey felt like he had turned invisible.

Typical, he grumbled to himself as he stormed off to his room. *It's just like when he and mom split up all over again. He doesn't ever listen to me. He's such a jerk!*

He slammed his tiny door and flopped down on his bed, tears streaming from his eyes. He didn't know how he was going to survive a year in Tokyo.



Yoshiko arrived early Friday morning. After eating his daily rice and egg breakfast, Mickey had just finished the tea that Keiko had prepared for him. He was dressed in a pair of lime green shorts, with matching shoes and white snug-fitting top, that was very similar to the orange outfit he had been forcibly changed into a few days back. Now, he had no choice, with all of the clothes he had brought with him having disappeared.

Back in Texas, a girl would have beat him up for wearing such a get-up. But Yoshiko seemed to be impressed, if not amused by what she saw when he greeted her at the door.

"You've really gone high-fashion Yankee boy" she smiled, "I thought they were a little more conservative than that in Texas." Her hair had changed from purple to blue, and she wore a tight pair of white shorts, with blue stockings and white boots with it. Her low-cut shirt gave ample view of her splendid bosom.

"I was, but this ain't Texas," Mickey grumbled, "My stepmom seems to think that this is how I should dress. It wasn't my idea at all, but my dad says that I should just do what she asks, so here I am, dressed like a dork."

Yoshiko chuckled. She could tell that he wasn't pleased with his look, but could also see how naturally he pulled the look off. He wasn't big boned or tall, and had a rather boyish face – boyish, or girlish – it could go either way. She thought back to the night that she had first met Mickey, when his father had mistakenly introduced him as a girl – at least she had assumed that it was a mistake. But now seeing the kind of outfit that he was being forced to wear, Yoshiko began to wonder.

"I wouldn't say you look like a dork, Yankee boy," she chided, "I see lots of boys dressed like that all the time." She paused, contemplating how to continue. It was true that she had seen boys dressed like he was, but she failed to mention that many of them either pretending to be girls, or flamboyantly gay. She was pretty sure that Mickey was neither.

"You do?" he asked with a hopeful tone, wanting her to validate his outfit as 'normal' to alleviate the overwhelming sense of embarrassment he was feeling from wearing it.

"Sure!" She forced a smile as she chose her reply, "In fact that outfit is tame compared to some outfits I've seen. I bet you we could find you some really crazy looks if we tried."

"Well..." he pondered his response carefully, "I guess I could do that, Yoshiko." He was remembering Kyle's words from back home about Japanese girls being enthralled with American boys. Maybe it was true! Maybe if he played along with her game of fashion, he would get a chance to get some action.

"My friends call me Yoshi," she smirked, "And we're friends now, Mickey." She winked at him.

Mickey blushed, "Okay... Yoshi."

"So what do you say we go hang out, maybe do some shopping, I'll show you what Japanese kids our age do."

Mickey nodded, "Okay. Great!"

She took him by the hand and led him out of the apartment and down to the subway station, but she did not take on the train he expected to go on.

"Aren't we going to Ginza?" he asked, trying to show off his knowledge of Tokyo's most famous shopping district.

She shot him an undignified expression, "Ginza?" she scoffed, "We're way too young to shop in Ginza. We're starting at Shibuya and then going up to Harajuku." She shook her head and ran her fingers through her hair. "Ginza" she scoffed again. *No wonder he looks like a dork.*

She took his hand and led him to the train. A short ride later they resurfaced at Shibuya Station. As he looked around, Mickey was again taken aback by the scenery. Much like in Ginza, the streets were lined with boutique shops, though they appeared cater to much younger crowd, as there were teenagers (mostly girls) everywhere in a variety of different styles of loud clothing. It looked more like theme park than a shopping district.

Yoshi pulled Mickey into the first shop they passed, and began to collect an ensemble that would better suit his confused 'style.' She tried dressing him in overtly masculine outfits that she had seen other Japanese guys their age wearing, but with his slight build and short stature, the look was all wrong.

"This isn't working for you," she finally said as she stared at him in long flared black jeans with zippers on the legs and pointy collared shirt under a black leather jacket, "You just aren't..." she let her voice trail off, not wanting to say something that would be misconstrued. "It just isn't *your* look," she eventually said. She put her hand on her hip, and scrunched up her face, looking him over.

"How badly do you need these glasses?" she asked finally, looking at his spectacles curiously.

"I'm nearsighted," he replied, "I can't see more than a few feet in front of me without them."

"Really?" She grinned as curiosity gripped her. She slowly slipped them off his face and stood back. "So you can't see me here?" she asked.

"Well, no," he answered, "I can see you, but you're a little blurry. Why?"

She paused for moment, then slipped his glasses into her purse. A broad smile crept across her face as she sprinted to another aisle and began to assemble a collection of items for Mickey to try on. "What do you think of this?" she asked, holding up a few items for Mickey's inspection.

The boy squinted, "Um" he replied, straining to see what she was holding, "I guess it's okay. But is that pink?"

"It takes a certain kind of guy to be able to wear pink, Mick," she grinned, "And I think that you're that kind of guy."

Mickey wasn't sure what that meant, but he couldn't think of a reason not to acquiesce. He was in Japan, with a cute girl, who was paying attention to him, and it wasn't difficult at all. He was beginning to wonder what he had been so worried and hesitant about before.

He let a small smile settle on his face, then took the handful of clothes from Yoshi and headed to the changing room.



After that first day with Yoshi, the days that followed seemed to blend into one another. Mickey would get up, have breakfast, tea, then follow her on another adventure through the city. They would try on clothes, check out the newest electronic gadgets, grab bottles of Coca-Cola, make comments about other people's outfits, then head home. Mickey would recap the day to his step-mother, and occasionally his father – if he was home.

Keiko would nod and feign interest as she made him dinner. Each time carefully making sure he didn't see her place a dropper full of amber fluid in his tea. It came from the small glass bottle she had obtained from the 'medicine man' in the old city.

The old man had come highly recommended by a friend, who needed a little something 'extra' to maintain her husband's interest. The friend had sworn, that since taking a daily dose of the special elixir, her husband had become intensely loyal and attentive, practically doting on her every word and obeying nearly every command.

Keiko hoped to achieve similar results in her stepson. She wanted to make him obedient and loyal – to the point of never contesting her suggestions of how he should act or dress – and the special potion seemed to be working.



Since befriending Yoshiko in the weeks before, he had given in to wearing the outfits that Keiko had purchased for him, plus a few more that Yoshiko had suggested. On top of that, she had persuaded him to stop wearing his coke-bottle glasses, and had helped him style his hair into an even more feminine bob-cut that would make many a passerby do a double take.

Unfortunately, the change had not been enough to make her husband become sufficiently enraged to the point of sending the boy packing. But she was convinced that with a little more time, she could achieve her desired outcome.

But as the days began to float by again with little change, she knew she would have to take matters into her own hands. Yoshiko's unintended help was certainly welcome, but to make sure her stepson would trigger her husband's ire, she would need to push Mickey along.

On one particular day, Mickey finished his 'tainted' tea, as he always did, then went to check his texts on his phone. His stepmother grimaced at him behind his back, then forced a fake smile and cleared her throat. "Ahem" she hinted, waiting for Mickey to take notice, which he promptly did.

"Yes, Stepmother?" he chimed politely. He had taken to calling her that as of late.

She grimaced again, causing Mickey to moan. She had insisted as of late that he speak to her in Japanese whenever he was able, and although his language skills were still in their infancy, he could muster a few key phrases, such as ‘yes stepmother.’

“Hai mamahaha,” he mumbled.

“Go yosha?” she barked angrily, which translated to a very loud ‘Pardon me?’

Mickey forced a smile, then repeated himself in high pitched trill as she had instructed earlier, “Hai mamahaha.” He hated the fact that she made him do it. But more than that, he hated the fact that in the last few weeks, he had lost all will to rebel against her outrageous commands – even though he deeply wanted to.

“Today, you should wear the pink clothing that Yoshiko has so graciously acquired for you.” She smiled as she issued the command.

Mickey wanted to complain. He wanted to stomp his feet and shout – *no!* But instead, all he could muster was another, “Hai mamahaha,” as he trudged back to his room to change.

The outfit in question was the one he had tried on the first day he and Yoshi had gone shopping. It was a pair of knee-length pink shorts, a pink short-sleeved shirt, and a stylish pink jacket. He wore it with his usual wedge heeled sandals.

When he returned to the main room, he found that Yoshiko had already arrived, and was chatting with Keiko. Upon him entering the room, the two of them stopped talking, but exchanged knowing glances before Yoshi took his hand and lead him from the apartment.

“Ready for a busy day?” she asked.

He wanted to ask what she meant, but found the it impossible to force the question out of his mouth. Instead, though, he managed to ask her what she and his stepmother had been chatting about prior to his coming into the room.

She giggled with a glint in her eye, as she smiled and answered, “Oh just some girl stuff. No biggie.”

Their day began in a very trendy boutique salon. Yoshi approached one of the employees, speaking in Japanese, while pointing at Mickey. The girl then smiled and led him to a small room at the back where she sweetly said something to him in Japanese that he didn’t comprehend.

“Take off your shorts,” Yoshi translated for him.

“What?” he retorted.

“Take off your pants,” Yoshi repeated, “And lay down.” She pointed at the small table-sized bed at the center of the room.

Unable to refuse, Mickey removed his shorts, exposing the skimpy new 'briefs' Keiko had purchased for him earlier that week. They were 'brief' indeed, barely covering anything, and so tight that she had shown him how to carefully tuck himself in, so as to properly fit.

Mickey blushed heavily as he sat down on the bed.

"The shirt too," Yoshi smiled. Her smile was so sweet, he could not resist her.

Moments later, the boutique was filled with a piercing scream as Mickey was introduced to body waxing for the first time.

After being sufficiently excised of what little body hair he possessed, Mickey's stinging skin was rubbed in a sweet smelling, soothing lotion before he was transported to another section and sat before another smiling beautician. This time, the girl turned him away from the mirror, and proceeded to fuss with his hair for a few moments before dusting something over his face.

"Hey!" Mickey complained, "What the heck is this?"

"Just relax and pucker your lips, Mick," Yoshiko ordered, "We're almost done."

Mickey sat back in the salon chair, lips puckered, as the salon employee brushed a sweet smelling substance onto his mouth.

"Seriously, Yoshi," he complained after the girl finished, "What's going on? Why is she putting makeup on me?"

"Shhh," Yoshiko said, tapping the tip of his nose, "Just stay still, and look up at the ceiling."

The salon girl began to apply some kind of pencil around his eyes. "I don't like this Yoshi," he said very slowly, as the beautician did her work.

"Trust me," Yoshiko smiled, "You're going to look great!"

"I'm going to look like a girl," Mickey retorted as the salon worker finished up on his second eye.

"And what's wrong with that? Do you have something against girls?" she raised an eyebrow with a disapproving expression on her face.

"No," Mickey sighed, "I just don't want to look like one."

"This is Japan, Mick," Yoshi smiled, "We don't care about those things here. Everyone is accepted."

Mickey sighed. 'This is Japan' seemed to be the answer for everything he complained about lately. It was as if Yoshi was saying that nothing bothered the Japanese, least of all a boy wearing girlish makeup.

His clothes were returned to him afterwards, or at least a version of them. He hadn't been shown a mirror yet, but he could tell that the shorts, shirt and jacket were all shorter than they had been originally, whilst his footwear seemed bigger.

Maybe I'm just losing my mind! He thought, as they ventured down the congested sidewalk. Mickey was trying to avoid eye-contact with any and everyone, fearing that someone would point or laugh at his appearance. But no one seemed to care. In fact, the people around him seemed to pay less attention to him now in his present outfit than they ever had.

He remembered the strange and disapproving looks he had received at the airport when he had first arrived, and the equally discounting expressions on the faces of people as Keiko led him around town during their first encounter together. He recalled how uncomfortable it felt. He snickered to himself, *Nothing bothers the Japanese except an American teenager*. Yoshiko must have sufficiently changed his appearance so as not to resemble his former self, and thereby helped to make him nearly invisible to crowds around him.

He grinned quietly. Being invisible for once, felt pretty good.

But it was short-lived.

Soon, they had entered the busy Shibuya 109 shopping centre, where they met up with a group of Japanese teens. Only too late, did Mickey realize what was happening.

"Who is this?" the tallest of the boys asked in Japanese. He was dressed in a fashionable pair of flared purple jeans and pale purple shirt under a gold-trimmed black military jacket, puffing on an electronic cigarette. He looked down on Mickey with demeaning glare that made him feel very suddenly self-conscious.

"Ryom" Yoshi replied in English, turning towards Mickey, "This is the very fashionable Miki."

Mickey blushed as he felt the group give him a once over with their eyes. He then caught a glimpse of his reflection in a mirrored pillar to the group's left and nearly gasped.

His pink shorts were now shorter than ever, barely covering anything, with a wide pink belt and white stripes. His jacket had been changed to a cropped bolero-style sport jacket worn over a now midriff-bearing cropped V-neck pink top. His sandals had been replaced with shiny white wedge-heeled platform ankle boots, and his hands were hidden inside tight white gloves. A pink choker collar adorned his neck. He gasped aloud, only now understanding what he looked like.

In addition to his clothes, his now-pink tinted glossed lips and eyeliner-lined eyes, combined with his now-smooth soft legs, and bob cut hair gave Mickey a look that was anything but masculine. He was certain that that was what they were all thinking in their heads as they looked him over.

One of them in particular had the most judgmental eyes, catching Mickey's attention. He was an extraordinarily tall (by Japanese standards) boy who quickly introduced himself as 'Ryo.' There was something about the way that

the boy looked at him that made him feel very 'small.' It was more than the significant height difference between them. Ryo took an electronic cigarette out of his overcoat and inhaled.

The tip glowed with a realistic LED-based amber ember.

He smiled as Mickey watched, exhaling a mouth full of synthesized 'smoke.'

"Don't they have these in America?" Ryo asked, in a deep masculine voice. His Japanese accent was barely noticeable. Mickey surmised that he must have spent some time in U.S. to be able to speak English so well.

"Cigarettes?" he replied, "Sure – everyone smokes in the U.S." He paused, realizing what silly a statement that was, and also how nervous he was feeling talking to the boy.

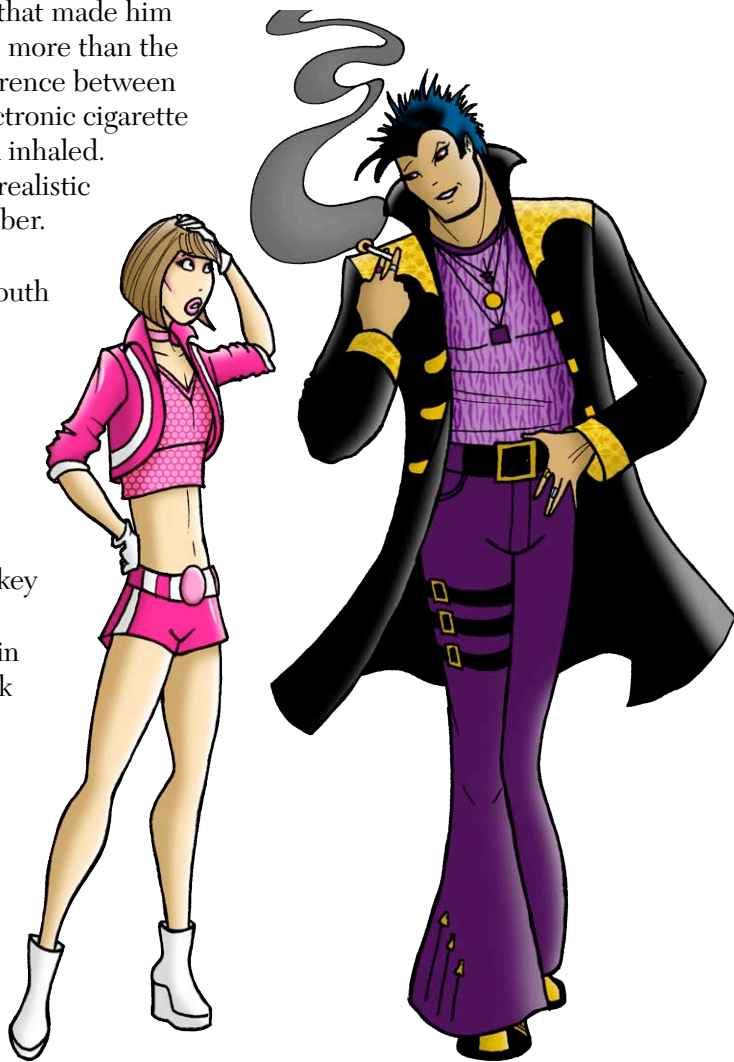
"Well, not everyone," he corrected

himself, "But um... lots of people, just not me. I don't smoke. Well, I did once, but..." He let his voice trail off as he felt a flush of embarrassment wash over him.

Why am I blabbering like such a fool? He wondered to himself.

"I think he meant electronic cigarettes Miki," Yoshiko chimed in, "We all know that you have cigarettes in the U.S."

The group broke into a round of giggles. The girls politely covered their mouths while they laughed, while the boys simply laughed with their mouths shut.



“So,” Ryo continued “What part of America are you from?” He took another drag on his plastic cigarette.

“Um,” he began to reply, “Texas?” He realized that his nerves had tightened his vocal cords, causing his reply to sound squeaky and high, and more like a question than an answer.

Ryo chuckled, “Don’t you know where you live? Perhaps you have smoked too many American cigarettes.” He exhaled faux-smoke as he laughed, looking at the others. They all politely giggled with him.

Mickey blushed. There was something about the way this boy was looking at him that seemed both unnerving, and embarrassing. It was obvious that he was trying to make Mickey look stupid.

“I know where I live,” he replied, “Or at least where I used to live. I live here now. But before my mom kicked me out I lived with her in Texas.”

There I go blabbering again, Mickey lamented.

“Whoah!” Ryo exclaimed, “Your mother kicked you out of her house? That is really bad-assed!” He smiled approvingly, as if knowing that Mickey had been forced out of the country somehow gave him instant street cred.

“Miki no chichi to watashi no chichi wa issho ni hataraku,” Yoshiko interjected, sensing that Mickey was struggling in the conversation. The group of teens nodded approvingly, saying “Ahhh” in unison.

Mickey turned to her and asked in a hushed tone, “What did you just say?”

“I told them that our dad’s work together. I figured it’s the easiest explanation”

“Kanojo wa nihongo o benkyo suru tame ni onkei o ukerudarou,” one of the girls said to Yoshiko. Yoshi nodded, with a quick “Hai,” then turned to Mickey. “Nagomi thinks you should learn more Japanese”

Nagomi nodded and the others giggled as Yoshiko translated her suggestion.

“I...” Mickey stammered, “I guess so.”

Nagomi’s eyes lit up, “I teach! I teach!”

“Sure,” Mickey sighed, feeling completely overwhelmed, “Why not?”

What the heck has gotten into me? He wondered to himself. He would never have given in that easy back home. This new ‘home’ of his was messing with his head – and not in a good way.

He spent the remainder of the day with the group, as they tried on clothes at boutiques, made faces at stogy office workers in the financial district, and experimented with different flavors of mist from Ryo’s E-cigarette. Much to Mickey’s surprise, strawberry was his favorite.

All the while, Ryo continued to grin and gaze at Mickey as he followed Yoshi and her friends.

“What’s with him?” he finally asked Yoshi when they had a quiet moment together out of Ryo’s earshot.

“I think he likes you,” Yoshiko giggled.

“But I’m not gay,” Mickey pleaded, “I’m just a guy like he is”

Yoshi took a step back and gave Mickey an ‘Oh really?’ expression.

“Whaaaaaat?” Mickey whined.

“This is Japan,” Yoshi said finally, “it’s okay here. In fact it would be rude of you to not at least smile back and pretend to be interested.”

“Interested in what?” Mickey exclaimed.

“In him,” Yoshi replied in a matter of fact tone.

Mickey’s jaw dropped. He didn’t have a clue of what to think or say.



“What the heck has gotten you?” Mickey’s father bemoaned later that day when he came home to discover Mickey’s new look.

Keiko couldn’t help but chortle and grin when her stepson returned from his ‘date’ with Yoshiko. She had wanted to make him look slightly more feminine in hopes to suppressing suspicions from Yoshiko’s dad. But to have Yoshiko attire him in such an entirely girly outfit was very satisfying.

If Yoshiko continues to humiliate him, his stay here will be torturous – at least until Eric sends him back to America, she thought to herself.

And even more so – a punishment to his father, her husband, for inconsiderately inviting him into their lives without her consent. She relished the thought of her husband’s anger and guilt building inside of him as he watched his only son dressing like a girlish fool.

“But Daaaad,” Mickey whined, “This is what you wanted me to do! You wanted me to be cultured and blend in with kids my own age. This is how I do that!” Mickey pointed down at his outfit with gloved hands. He wanted to tell his dad that this was all his fault. That if he hadn’t been such an ass and made his mother leave him, that this never would have happened. But he knew that that ship had long since sailed.

“I just wanted you get some culture,” he lamented, “Not a makeover. You look like a damn freak!”

“Eric!” Keiko snapped, “How dare you insult your only son. He is only doing what you ask. He is assimilating into Japanese culture. And then you scold him for this?”

Mickey's father recoiled from his wife's outburst. She never, ever used his first name.

"I'm sorry dear," he groaned, "But this is not what I expected." He motioned over Mickey's pink outfit.

"But this is what you should have expected! This is the style that young boys are wearing these days. It is very trendy." Keiko smiled at Mickey then frowned sternly at her husband. "Let me make you two some tea," she said, after an awkward pause.

Eric shook his head and exhaled. Mickey did the same. Keiko went over to the sink and filled the kettle with water, then placed it on the stove to boil.

"I think your outfit is very fashionable," she said to her stepson.

Mickey's father rolled his eyes. "He's wearing makeup Keiko. You're telling me that it's fashionable in Japan for boys to wear makeup?"

Keiko huffed and left the room.

"What did I say?" he asked as she left.

Moments later she returned holding her computer tablet, which she placed in front of her husband, "Look! Look!" She pointed at the device. The screen showed images of Japanese boys in feminine clothing; "This is fashion."

She walked over to the boiling kettle and removed it from the burner while Eric scrolled through the images, frowning. He finally sighed and left the room altogether. Keiko glanced behind her to see if Mickey was watching as she poured the tea into two teacups. Seeing that neither was, she produced the small glass bottle from the cupboard, and using the eyedropper the bottle contained added a droplet of the bottle's contents to one of the cups. She then stirred the tea, replaced the brown bottle then brought the two cups to the table for the men to drink.

Mickey thanked her as they sipped the tea. Keiko watched with a smile.

"Honey?" she called for her husband, "Come, come, have some tea"

Eric begrudgingly took the teacup, but after glancing over at his son, he shook his head, looked at his wife, then grunted and left. Keiko shook her head in mock disappointment, but on the inside, she was smiling wide.



Contrary to what Keiko had expected, as time passed her husband's anger towards his son's changing appearance began to wane. He complained less and less. And in some instances, he was even complimentary of Mickey's ever-more 'trendy' look. Eric had decided that his son was acclimatizing to Japan's hyper-culture better than he could have hoped for. So when his son got his ears

pierced, he thought nothing of it. When he caught his son applying mascara and lip gloss, he thought nothing of it.

All part of being a trendy teenager in Japan, he believed.

Mickey's perspective however, was somewhat different.

He found himself under constant peer pressure by Yoshiko and her friends – now also his friends – who seemed determined to make him appear less and less masculine, and less and less American. Even though he went along with it, he wasn't convinced he liked it.

Take, for example, the wardrobe of trendy, vibrantly colored shorts worn with matching low-neck tops and frilly trim and/or midriff-bearing middles that she had accumulated for him. Or the wedge-heeled sandals and boots with platform soles that she had eased him into.

Sure, they were all super-trendy and got him lots of attention when they went out, but at what cost? He knew that fewer and fewer girls were looking his way – and more and more guys. Guys like the handsome Ryo.

Mickey was comfortable with calling him handsome – since it was true – and there was nothing wrong with one guy being truthful about another. Was there?

His pierced ears and waxed legs, arms and chest, and increasing use of foundation, gloss, mascara and eyeliner, were making it increasingly difficult to discern Mickey's true gender. At Yoshi's insistence, Mickey had continued to let his hair grow longer and longer, into a blunt-cut bob style, which in turn made him appear even less like a boy. As were his filed and polished nails, which had the effect of making his hands look more dainty and slender than before. He would glance at his hands and feel the anxiety of knowing that they looked great, whilst simultaneously knowing that it all looked wrong!

Why am I acting like this? He wondered. *Why aren't I freaking out about the way I'm being made to look?*

Look, yes, and also sound.

Yoshi and Nagomi had begun training him to speak Japanese, which – according to them – required him to start speaking more softly. “Japanese is a quiet language. It is not to be shouted like American English.” Soon, Mickey found his softly, quieter prose was spilling into his native tongue as well.

All in all, it was very confusing for the boy.

Add to that, his stepmother's ever-so-sweet attitude, and Mickey spent most days in a muddled haze, hanging out in shopping centers with Yoshi's friends, or sipping tea with Keiko, never sure of exactly what he was doing, or why, but feeling unable to question it.

And that was just the way that Keiko liked it.

She had watched Mickey's transformation into a docile, confused teenager with much glee. So much so that she aroused the curiosity of the old Japanese herbalist that had procured her tea for her.

"Back again?" he asked her in Japanese upon her entry to his shop.

"I increased his dosage," she replied.

"Use caution. This potion is very potent. What is your intent with this boy now that you have control of his mind?" the old man asked as he went to a small secret panel behind his desk to retrieve a bottle of the powerful serum.

"It was his father's doing," Keiko scoffed, "Typical American. He was trying to show off and introduced his son as his daughter instead. So I am correcting his problem for him."

"So you are using the serum to convince others that the boy is a girl?" the herbalist looked confused.

"No, no," Keiko scoffed again, "The boy is already well on his way to convincing them himself. The serum simply helps him not to question what is happening to him."

"Ha!" the old man laughed, then stopped abruptly, "Be careful. The mind controls the body. If the mind is changed to far, then the body will change with it. Playing with nature's balance is a dangerous game."



Mickey groaned as he rose from his bed, yawning. Keiko had just left his room after shouting her customary greeting at him "Get out of bed you lazy boy!"

He looked at his reflection in the mirror. He had certainly lost a lot of weight since he moved to Japan. *It must be all that lean chicken and fish*, he thought to himself. Yet if that were the case, it wouldn't explain why his hips and buttocks were starting to look rather thick. *That must be the fatty fish and starchy rice*, he tried to tell himself. Mickey knew that his reasoning made no logical sense, but as he didn't have any other suggestion at the time, he shrugged it off and prepared to get dressed.

He stripped out of his nightclothes (an oversized tee-shirt with an anime character on it) and went to his tiny closet. Keiko and Yoshi had replaced all of his underclothes with new 'trendy' variants, including the high-cut lacy panties he was now sliding over his plumped rear. It required that he 'shift' his 'junk' around up front – another word for tucking his penis and pressing his shrunken testes back into their tubes – to create a proper-looking smooth front.

Sure, it had been painful the first couple of times, but now that he was used to it, he didn't feel 'right' unless he was properly tucked. After the boy shorts, he

slipped a spaghetti strapped camisole top over his torso, followed by a ruffled, bell sleeved scoop-necked white shirt. A new pair of flared blue shorts followed by a matching blue vest ornately decorated with white ruffles finished off his look for the day.

Yoshiko had purchased the outfit for him several days ago, but he had resisted wearing it. He had argued that the look was way too girly, but Yoshi wouldn't relent in her insistence. So knowing that she would be at his doorstep in less than an hour, he figured it would be a good day to surprise her by wearing the clothes she had purchased for him. Mickey couldn't help but feel guilty for not doing as she had asked, so as he brushed his hair, inserted his stud earrings and affixed a matching blue choker around his neck, he felt a sense of relief that Yoshi would finally be pleased with him again.

He didn't understand why, but for some reason, pleasing Yoshi seemed very important to him, this morning more so than ever.

"Drink your tea," Keiko barked as he entered the room, pointing at the place setting on the table she had set for him. A steaming mug of tea, and plate of egg whites and fish awaited him.

"Mmmm," he smiled as he sat down to eat, "Thank you Keiko." He wasn't sure what he had thanked her for as the egg whites were bland and fish mushy – as it was every morning – but yet, he was unable to be anything but thankful to his stepmom.

His father had told him to be – so he was.

It was just like this stupid outfit he was wearing. His father had told him to blend in, so he was. His stepmother had told him to be friends with Yoshi, so he was. Yoshi told him that he must dress 'trendy,' so he did. It was all a vicious circle to the poor boy.

Why don't I get to do what I want to do? He wondered as he sipped his tea.

Keiko watched him intently. She was trying to discern if the old man's warning was showing signs of coming true. It had been nearly a month since she had spoken with him, and there weren't any noticeable changes yet – in her opinion, anyway. While it was true that he dressed in girl's shorts, wore wedge-heeled boots, pierced his ears, and wore light makeup on a daily basis, it wasn't enough for Keiko. She wanted to humiliate the boy completely. She needed to speed things up. So when Yoshiko arrived to pick Mickey up, she sent the boy off to 'finish his face' while she took her aside.

"But Yoshi said we were just going shopping," he whined. He had hoped to avoid going out in public wearing makeup.

"Miki!" Keiko commanded, "Kei o shimesu. Anata ga motomete iru yo ni shimasu!"

The boy hung his head and replied “okē, okē” in his best Japanese accent. He had learned enough of her native tongue to know when he was in trouble. Keiko had told him to ‘Show respect and do as you are asked!’ – in Japanese – which meant that he better get moving or there would be trouble. As soon as he was out of earshot, Keiko turned to Yoshiko, “The poor boy is distraught,” she said with a sad face, “He loves the pretty things that girls wear, and wishes he could be more like them.”

Yoshi looked a tad bit surprised. She had been playing along with what she thought was a cover-up to protect Mickey’s father from embarrassment. To hear that Mickey actually wanted to be more girly came to her as a bit of a shock. “Are you certain?” the young woman replied.

“Yes, yes,” Keiko nodded, “I have seen it. He pretends to fight it, but watch when he returns. His face will beam with radiant joy. We must help him, push him to find himself, to find his real self.”

Yoshiko paused for moment. She was by no means a silly girl. She had schooled at the finest institutions in the United States, and achieved very high marks. The American side of her knew that she was smarter than Mickey’s stepmother, and suspected that the woman was ‘up to something.’ But the Japanese side told her that she must be respectful to her elders, no matter how sinister the scheme. “What do you want me to do?” she asked finally.

“When the opportunity arises,” Keiko began, “You must be prepared, and help him through it.”

Yoshi shook her head briefly, confused by Keiko’s cryptic message. Did she want her to *force* him into a dress? Or did she want her to merely *suggest* it? The answer would never be fully discussed, as Mickey had already returned from his room, having donned a pair of fur-topped knee-high boots in a blue color that matched his outfit, with thick wedge heels and slight platform soles. The boots made him taller than he was used to, but also required that he walk in slow mincing steps with a slight shimmy to his stride – something he was still learning to do.

“What a wonderful choice in shoes” Keiko applauded, “Do you agree Yoshiko?” She asked the girl with knowing glance. And just as promised, Mickey was beaming with pride in his fashionable appearance.

Yoshi gave an unenthusiastic nod, “Yes,” knowing that Keiko now expected her to accelerate his transition to femininity. “But he needs something more I think,” she continued. Her comment surprised both Mickey and Keiko, who watched as she crossed the room to a vase on the counter, where she retrieved two flowers, one red, one pink. She removed her white chapeau and carefully pinned the red flower to it. The red matched her newly-colored hair almost perfectly. Then she motioned to Mickey to come over to her, which he did – cautiously.

Yoshi worked quickly, cutting and positioning the other flower above Mickey's pierced ear. The flower's pink tone matched Mickey's polished finger nails and tinted lips. Yoshi inspected his near-perfect mascara and was impressed by his smooth and evenly applied foundation.

"There," she said, standing back to see her work, "A beautiful flower for a beautiful boy."

Keiko smiled widely, almost unable to contain her excitement at seeing her plan come to fruition so quickly. Mickey's reaction, however, was somewhat different. He was partially horrified, partially embarrassed, and partially proud to know that he looked so... pretty.

"Come, come!" Yoshiko ordered, mimicking Keiko, "We have much to do today." And with that she led the befuddled boy out of the apartment.

They would spend the day window shopping, with each stop getting more and more feminine. Mickey didn't seem to be as interested as Keiko had let on. Instead of looking impressed, he seemed indifferent. "Don't you like any of these outfits Miki?" she finally asked, "I thought that surely something would appeal to you."

Just then, a vision of pink, purple and white caught Yoshiko's eye. It was a girl, about their age, dressed in a Lolita-style getup was approaching in a corseted, petticoated, pinafored outfit. Her hair – obviously a colored wig – was long and purple and tied at the top with a bow, and protected from the sun's rays by an ornately decorated parasol that matched the girl's outfit.

She had accessorized with multiple pink bows on her bodice and multiple skirts, short white lace-trimmed gloves, an elaborate pink and purple choker collar, pink hoop earrings that matched mostly open-topped ankle-strapped platform shoes, and smooth white stockings. Her makeup was heavy, but done in a minimalistic fashion to downplay her eyes and focus the attention on her stunningly plump pink lips. She was an enticing contradiction of reserved Victorian elegance and sexy modern exhibitionism.

Yoshi grabbed Mickey by the arm and pointed in the girl's direction, "Look at her!"

Mickey turned as the girl passed by, his eyes locking on the costumed Lolita, "Wow," he exclaimed, "That's quite the outfit!"

"You like it?" Yoshi asked. Keiko's comments earlier in the morning rang in her head as she watched Mickey's eyes glancing the girl over as she walked out of view. Was he interested in the girl's outfit? Was that curiosity she was seeing? Was this the 'opportunity' that Keiko had spoke of? "Well?" she prompted again, having not received an answer the first time. "It's very nice," the partially feminized boy remarked, "I've never seen anything like it before."

"It's very common here in Tokyo," Yoshi grinned, "It's referred to as 'Lolita' fashion. It's a little very trendy." She paused to read his body language. He ap-



peared to be engrossed by her words, as if what she was saying was of tantamount importance. Feeling confident of his interest, she continued to ‘reel him in.’

“Perhaps you’d like to try something that trendy?” she asked.

Mickey blinked and recoiled as if the suggestion had struck him physically, “Me?” he questioned.

“Sure,” Yoshiko smiled, “You’d look great in Lolita.”

She watched as the idea she had just planted took root and began to grow inside his mind. She didn’t know of Keiko’s suggestive serum treatments, which made it nearly impossible for him to disagree with something or someone once it had been suggested to him. Yet his psyche still tried to exert control over itself as he fought to agree with Yoshiko. “You think so?” he queried, “Don’t you think it’s a little girly? Don’t you think I’d look pretty ridiculous in something like that?”

Yoshiko giggled. It was just as Keiko had said. He was pretending to be against it, yet she believed she could see a deeper desire to accept it on his face. "This is Japan. We invented Lolita fashion." She took his hand and led him after the girl.

"Oh Yoshi," he resisted, "I'm not so sure. It's awfully dramatic. What will our friends think? What will my stepmother think?" He paused, gulping with nervousness. "What will my father think?"

"Oh don't be such a whiner," she answered dismissively, "they will be pleased to see you looking so trendy."

Trendy, he thought to himself, *and girly*.

But even though he was filled with trepidation, he remained unable to say no to Yoshi's suggestions. Soon, the two of them had caught up to the costumed girl, and Yoshi asked her in very polite Japanese, where she shopped for such an outfit.

The girl stopped, looking slightly indignant at the question, she replied, "Watashi wa akiraka ni takeshita dori de kaimono," then paused before continuing, "Sono riyu o tazuneru?"

Mickey had learned enough of the girl's language to know that she had told Yoshiko that she 'obviously shopped at Takeshita Doori' and had concluded by wondering 'Why you ask?'

"My friend wishes to dress in such a fashion," Yoshi replied in Japanese.

The girl smiled. "She would make an excellent Lolita!" she exclaimed, "Good luck to you both!"

Both Yoshi and Mickey nodded politely, as was customary to show appreciation, then turned to head towards the subway.

"Where is Takeshita Doori?" Mickey asked in broken Japanese as they entered the subway car, "I've never heard of that store."

Yoshiko smiled, acknowledging Mickey's valiant attempt at using her native tongue. "It is not a store, silly," she responded in Japanese, "It's a street in Harajuku. An entire street devoted to Lolita fashion. We will certainly find something there that you will find agreeable."

Mickey nodded. He was pleased with himself for having learned so much of her difficult language in such a short time, but concerned about her plans to outfit him in such an outlandish manner. He sighed quietly and contemplated his future as they rode the train to their destination.



Since arriving in Tokyo, Mickey had seen many different things that were over-the-top outrageous, at least as compared to what he had experienced back home in Texas. In a period of only a few months, he had gone from an out-of-place American teenaged boy to a trendy androgynous teen that seemed incapable to saying no to the suggestions of his new stepmother and friend.

He was thankful that Yoshiko hadn't asked him to dress in cosplay, like an anime or other cartoon character. He shuddered at the thought of being forced to dress like the many Sakura cat-girls or Sailor Moons he had seen. Or worse still, he could have been made to dress like a Yamanba girl with their bleached blonde hair, unnaturally tanned skin and white makeup around their eyes.

The worst that Yoshiko had done was to dress him in trendy shorts, frilly tops, heeled boots and a little makeup.

He paused for a moment in the change room of the boutique that Yoshi had hauled him into, and pondered that last thought. He realized that he had grown very acceptant of his new 'look,' and – by American standards – how girly a look it was. So by extension, jumping from frilly shorts and tops with high boots into a frilly dress with high boots wasn't such a gigantic leap after all. Was it?

"Here," Yoshi broke Mickey's train of thought as she tossed something under the door of the change stall, "Wear these too."

Mickey bent forward to pick the item up and paused. It was a pack of charcoal-black stay-up stockings. *What am I to do with these?* He wondered. Just then, the dress he was in the process of trying on slipped forward – a result of his inability to tie the bow on his back properly.

"How are you doing in there Miki?" Yoshiko called in.

Mickey felt a wave of emotion rush over him for a moment. Tears began to well up in his eyes as he felt completely overwhelmed by the situation. He wasn't in a good place, emotionally. He was a boy in a dress who had been handed a pair of stockings and expected to put them on.

He didn't know what to do.

"Miki?" Yoshi asked again, then knocked softly on the door as she pushed it open. Inside the stall, Mickey was half dressed, tears in his eyes, looking completely hopeless and forlorn. "Oh Miki," she cooed soothingly in Japanese as she gave the miserable looking boy a hug, "There, there, Miki-chan, I will help you. There is no need to look so sad."

Mickey had learned enough basic Japanese over the course of his stay to get the jest of what she was saying: don't be a sad girl, I will help you. Although he wasn't sure he liked the gender association she was using with regard to him, he certainly appreciated her comforting tone and offer to help. So he wiped his eyes and sniffed as he nodded and surrendered himself to her control.

Yoshi grinned and maneuvered behind him in the confined space and began to zip him back into the rather form-fitting dress. Mickey could feel it hugging snugly to his body, especially once she began to pull at the laces to tighten the mid-section. A built-in cincher constricted his already slim waist another inch inward as she tied the laces into a large bow at his mid-back. To the untrained eye, it would have appeared to be strictly ornamental. Only Mickey, who was now taking shallow breaths, knew of its true nature.

Yoshi then removed his footwear, and opened the package of gray-black stockings. She showed the boy how to roll them into a donut shape, then instructed him to point his toes and roll them upwards, over his smooth calves, dainty knees to the tops of his shapely thighs. She then helped him back into the new boots she had selected for him, which were just short of being knee-high in a shiny white leather-look material. They had bright blue laces at the bottom, a concealed zipper in the shaft, and were topped by a bright blue bow. The platform soles were nearly two inches thick before flaring up to a nearly six-inch wedge heel. It took Mickey a few minutes to find his new center of balance in the boots as they were much higher than anything he had worn before.

Yoshi added a thick banded choker of the same bright blue material of which the dress was constructed – complete with white lace trim – around Mickey's neck, and clipped an ornate white cameo to the centre of it, then helped the boy into a pair of over-the-elbow bright blue opera gloves.

She took a step back to admire her work, then scowled before opening her purse to fetch some cosmetics. Mickey had ruined his makeup with his tears, something she pointed out to him in Japanese, “*Orokana on’nanoko wa anata no kao o daishite ni shimashita!*”

Mickey only understood parts of her sentence, “Silly girl... Ruined face...” He sighed and looked up at the ceiling as she lifted his chin to repair his eyeliner and mascara, then puckered as she applied the same bright red lipstick that she was wearing to his lips. The irony of being upset that she referred to him more and more constantly as a girl, instead of a boy – while she was reapplying his makeup – made him feel sad and hopelessly without control.

But it was when he left the safety of the changing room to view his new reflection for the first time, that hopeless sense grew ten-fold. Mickey gasped loudly as he looked at himself in the mirror.

The dress was short, ending with multiple flared skirts well above the mid-thigh point, and thus, exposing the tops of his new stockings. His shoulders were covered by poofy short sleeves, but his shoulder-blades, collar bone and lower neck were left bare down to the scalloped top of the dress, which ended just above his chest. The top was obviously padded – creating the illusion of two small breasts. Even with his somewhat androgynous bob-cut hair, there was barely anything left of him being an American boy.

“Just wait until we get you a wig!” Yoshi beamed, pointing at the selection of brightly colored hairpieces on display behind him, “We’re going to have such fun with this look!”

Yoshiko was clearly more excited than Mickey was, but, unable to speak out against what she was doing, Mickey nodded and forced a smile regardless.

Maybe it was better that he simply agreed with whatever she suggested. After all, it wasn’t like he could do much better than to be taken on shopping trips in the best stores in Asia with someone who had studied fashion, could he?



Keiko’s reaction to her stepson’s return was joyful. She gushed and giggled over him as he shyly modeled his new outfit for her. Yoshiko handed Keiko’s debit card back to the jubilant stepmother with several garment bags full of new items for Mickey to wear.

Mickey’s reaction wasn’t quite as jubilant. He was feeling a quite stunned by the whole ordeal. From having been coerced into the outfit to being fitted with a wig and extra makeup – it had been exceedingly stressful on the boy to watch the last vestige of his manliness slowly slip away. Even more so on account of the little voice in the back of his head that seemed to be telling him that all of this change was somehow ‘good’ and ‘right’ because he was doing what he was being told – even as a much louder voice was screaming that it was all ‘Wrong!’

“Miki!” Keiko’s screeching voice broke him out of his stupor, “Miki! You put you clothes away now! Quit you being so lazy!” She then repeated her command in Japanese.

Mickey sighed, nodded, and headed to his room in his heavily skirted Lolita dress and wedge-heeled boots. He was hopeful that his father would be able to break him out of this circle of insanity when he got home.

But when Eric returned from work, his reaction was less than helpful to Mickey.

“Figures,” he muttered as Keiko introduced his ‘son’ to him for the first time since his Lolita makeover. She had added a long blonde wig to his ensemble, which made him appear even more unbelievably feminine than the outfit alone.

“Well, if that’s how he’s ‘acclimating’ to the crazy culture here,” Mickey’s father continued, using his fingers to highlight the quotations on ‘acclimating,’ “than I suppose he’s just doing what we asked him to do,” he paused for a moment as if fighting back any disgust that boiled below the surface, “and I guess I have to be fine with it. Right?”

Keiko grinned widely, “Yes Eric. You need to be fine with it.”



She couldn't have been more pleased. Although her plan of making her step-son beg to leave Japan hadn't exactly been a success, watching him turn ever more feminine – and more importantly watching her husband acting pleased with it, even though she knew he wasn't – was devilishly delicious to watch.



Time passed slowly for Mickey, at least in his mind. There wasn't much to differentiate the days from one another after Yoshi had begun to dress him in his 'Lolita Style' – as she put it. There was never any talk about the fact that he was a dude wearing a wig or big 'poofy' dress. Not from Yoshi or her friends, not from Keiko, not even from Mickey's Dad. Everyone had just accepted it as if it were normal.

He was glad that Kyle hadn't asked for pictures of anything that he was doing in Japan. Texting allowed him to put a different spin on his adventures in Tokyo.

I'm spending a lot of time with Yoshiko. We're really close. She's showing me lots. He texted Kyle one morning as he was dressing. Each day was now a different variation of Lolita attire. A short Victorian-inspired, heavily skirted, petticoated dress. Lacy socks or stockings – or sometimes complete tights. High-heeled boots or cute shoes. A moderate amount of makeup, including some blush, mascara and lipgloss to accentuate his features, and lastly a blonde wig. The process completely changed him from Mickey the young American to Miki the cute Japanese girl – and not one person made a comment about it.

U R SO lucky Mick! Kyle texted back, I bet where ever U look there are cute Japanese girls!

Mickey looked up into the mirror and blushed, then texted back, *U have no idea.*



Later in the week, Yoshi's group of friends were going to meet up at the old movie theatre near the mall that ran retro Japanese movies from the eighties. Yoshi had arrived at Mickey's father's apartment early to help him prepare. She had purchased some new accessories for Mickey to wear, and was anxious to help him get him ready.

She began by producing a new pair of snug fitting boy-cut styled panties, in powder blue, with a matching padded bra. The new brassiere, along with the slight swelling in Mickey's chest over the last week, created the illusion of a modest bosom that made Yoshiko giggle with excitement.

The dress was added next. It was crisp white with powder blue trim with a built-in corset, and very wide umbrella shaped skirts. The corset, as all of his dresses now had, required Mickey to be laced in.

Yoshiko accessorized the dress with powder blue pinstriped tights and short matching gloves, and a wide lacy choker collar and matching headpiece that was reminiscent of something a maid would wear. She completed the outfit with a matching purse and cute platformed mary-jane heels. Powder blue earrings, bright pink lip gloss and dark mascara finished off Mickey's face, before

Yoshi gently lowered his blonde wig (complete with headpiece) over his brown hair.

Mickey felt as if he was in someone else's body as he looked at his reflection for the first time. Even though he had been dressing like this for weeks, he still couldn't believe it was him looking back, and not some cute Japanese girl.

When the group converged at the theatre, Ryo's reaction was largely the same.

"Kore wa daredesu? Mikki?" he asked as Mickey and Yoshi approached, which translated to 'Who is this? Mikki?'

Yoshiko smiled upon hearing his question, proud of her work in Mickey's transformation. "Yes," she replied in English, "Do you like her look?"

Mickey's eyes jolted open when he realized that they were talking about him, but using words like *'her.'*

Ryo smiled and walked over to a stunned-looking Mickey where he opened up his arms as if he was showing Mickey off to the others. "In fact," he began with a smile, "I do. I really like her look. I'm glad to see Miki getting more comfortable with her life here in Tokyo."

Mickey remained motionless, looking to Yoshi as if unable to know what to say or think. He was very aware that Ryo had emphasized the word *'her'* when he spoke of him.

Yoshi giggled, "You sure wouldn't see her dressed like that back in Texas," she said, "Isn't that right Miki?"

Mickey nodded silently. *This was certainly nothing that I'd ever have been caught wearing back home*, he thought to himself. A guy like him in an outfit like this would be beaten to within an inch of his life in certain parts of his home state – but here, it was different. Here, he could dress in the laciest, girliest, most ridiculous outfits and no would so much as batt an eyelash. He pondered that fact for a moment then smiled at Ryo, who was still eyeing him over like a buzzard eyes a carcass.

Mickey blushed heavily under Ryo's gaze. He could practically feel heat coming from the boy's eyes, and it made him feel very strange. *What's wrong with me?* He wondered. Ryo gently took Mickey's hand and escorted him into the theatre with the other's following. *Why is this happening to me?* His mind raced as he sat next to the boy, his anxiety stiffening his muscles, quickening his heart-rate. *But wait – is this anxiety I'm feeling, or something else?*

Ryo stretched out his right arm and wrapped it around Mickey's slender shoulder, his hand resting on Mickey's tightly corseted ribcage. Mickey shuddered and blushed, feeling a strange warmth come over him. He realized that his muscles weren't the only thing that had stiffened as his manhood began to strain against its confines beneath his layered skirt.

He was... Aroused?



Mickey gasped loudly at the realization that what he was experiencing was turning him on.

“Are you okay?” Ryo asked in Japanese, a concerned look crossing his chiseled features.

Mickey nodded and forced a smile. He tried not to look at Ryo for too long, for fear his strange new feelings would continue to grow. Surely Yoshi must have slipped me something on the way, he reasoned, It isn’t natural for boy to behave like this.

He kept second guessing his feelings as they entered the theatre and found their seats. All the while, Ryo would smile warmly at Mickey, and Mickey would blush. Mickey was starting to feel dizzy as the theatre lights darkened. His body was tingling, particularly his groin, and oddly his chest. His breathing was labored and shallow – almost in a pant. *What the hell is wrong with me?* He thought to himself.

The movie, which was in Japanese, began. Mickey lay back in his seat, trying to calm himself down. But Ryo's actions would soon have the opposite effect. He felt the boy's arm reach over his dainty shoulder. He blushed again and looked over at him. This time, Ryo wasn't looking at him, but rather at the screen. Mickey paused for a moment, studying the other boy's chiseled facial features. He realized how masculine that he looked, and by contrast how un-masculine he looked.

I'm barely a man, he thought to himself, *and certainly not a man like Ryo*. He nuzzled his small head against Ryo's hulking frame and placed his delicate-looking hand atop Ryo's. Even his hand didn't look worthy to be called a man's when in contrast to Ryo.

Maybe I'm not worthy of being called a boy? He wondered. *Maybe I should leave the boy-stuff up to boys like Ryo. He's much better at it than I am. Like Mamahaha Keiko and Yoshi-Chan keep saying, I'm too pretty to be much good as a boy.*

He chuckled to himself as he realized that his inner monologue was now in Japanese. A feeling of comfort began to wash over him. He was losing his boy-ness and his American-ness – and he didn't even care. *Why should try to be something I'm not?* He smiled as he gently nuzzled even closer to Ryo.

Why pretend to be Mickey anymore – when I can be Miki with no effort at all? That seemed to be what everyone wanted, and he liked to do what people wanted him to do.



Mickey's first 'date' at the movies proved to be a turning point for the freshly-effeminate American boy. That night, he had essentially 'given up' trying to fight for his identity. He finally gave in to allowing a new identity come over him.

When he returned home that night, Keiko could sense the change almost immediately. Mickey smiled at her instead of rolling his eyes and scowling. He spoke to her in Japanese, even though he wasn't one-hundred-percent fluent in it yet. But most importantly, he seemed to be at ease with his new situation. It was as if a switch had suddenly been turned inside him.

The anxiety and anger that he had exuded since Keiko had first tried to feminize him had vanished almost overnight. There was a strange sense of peace about him that initially caught Keiko off-guard.

After all, she had never intended to make the boy into a girl. Her intent had been to embarrass Mickey to the point of begging his father to leave. Keiko realized that it was going to be harder than she thought, as she had been all too convincing with her husband, leading him to believe that his son's dressing en-femme was somehow normal teen behavior.

She needed to try something different. "Miki!" she called in Japanese, "Come here!"

Moments later, a pyjama-clothed Mickey yawned and stretched as he entered the kitchen, "Yes Keiko?" he answered in English as he scratched his behind in a very boyish way.

Keiko frowned. She wondered if maybe she had been wrong a moment ago. Maybe Mickey wasn't as ready as she had thought.

She paused and took a deep breath, forcing a smile, "Try again in Japanese please, dear."

Mickey looked confused, but nodded his head willingly, "Watashi wa hijo ni zan'nen Keikodesu. Anata wa watashi no tame ni denwa shita," which translated to 'I am very sorry Keiko. Did you call for me?'

He lowered his eyes obediently and spoke softly, much like 'girl' his age would be expected to do in the presence of an elder and waited for Keiko's answer.

She paused a moment more, relishing the power she had over him, then answered in Japanese,

"You will not speak in English anymore, only in Japanese. Do you understand?"

Mickey looked shocked, "But Keiko," he began in English, then after seeing a flash of anger in her eyes, he switched back to her native language, "My Japanese is imperfect. I have much learning to do."

Keiko nodded. "Than I shall help you to learn, little one. You have no need for vulgar English here. Even your father speaks Japanese with basic fluency. Do you understand?"

Mickey sighed and indicated his agreement. "Yes Keiko." He knew it was futile to argue. Besides, he was learning the language rather well, so the offer from his stepmom to improve his skills was welcomed.

"You shall also dress in only your finest clothes from this point on," she pointed at his ratty pjs. "These rags are not worthy of a homeless vagrant," she said, "There are fine robes and underthings in your closet from your shopping trips with Yoshiko. Only these things shall be worn from now on, understood."

Mickey nodded again, “Sore ga rikai sa re,” which meant ‘It is understood.’

“And this is to include your face and feet as well. You must always be presentable, even when you think that no one is watching, you must be ready as if the Royal family were to arrive at any time. Is this understood?”

Mickey nodded a third time, “It is understood Keiko,” he said in near-perfect Japanese.

Keiko smiled. “Very good, my little flower. Now go and get prepared as I have asked, and when you return I shall help you practice your language and manners.”

Mickey bowed quickly before leaving the room. He had butterflies in his stomach as he piled his old ‘rags’ in the hall for disposal before changing into a powder-blue camisole, followed by a delicate blue robe. He was excited by the prospect of learning to be more well-mannered and fluent in Japanese. He knew it was make Keiko proud, and maybe even his father. What’s more, he was certain that his friends would be impressed – especially Ryo.

He blushed at the thought as he rolled pale-blue stockings up over his smooth hairless legs, clipping the garter straps into the belt that was hidden by the camisole and robe combination, just as Yoshi had shown him to do. A pair of blue ankle strap platform high-heels followed next, hugging the boy’s feet as he buckled them in. Keiko met him in the hallway with a trash bag that contained all of the clothes he had arrived here with. They were to be tossed out in the trash with his other old things, the last vestige of his former self. He paused and sighed as the realization washed over him that he was a different person now. He dumped the bag in the garbage chute.

He tried to remember what it was like back ‘home’ in his former life. He recalled hanging out with Kyle – his former best friend – playing video games, occasionally smoking pot and getting high. Even though he was an idiot, Kyle had been his closest comrade. He wondered what Kyle might be doing now. *He probably thinks I’m hanging out with some cute Japanese girls*, he thought to himself as he looked in the mirror after applying a coat of lipstick over his lips.

He giggled as he realized that in a way, he was.

He wondered what Kyle would say if he could be here now. *I would probably bring him much excitement*, he thought to himself in Japanese.

“Miki!” he heard Keiko calling from the other room, “You have much to practice!”

“Hai, ikimasu!” he called back, as he steadied himself in his new four-inch heels.

Keiko handed him a book and instructed him to practice walking with it balanced precariously on his head, warning him not to let it fall, lest she would have to ‘punish’ him.

She had instructed him earlier on the proper way to walk in such tall heels. He needed to take small mincing steps and swivel his hips with each tiny stride, all while keeping himself perfectly balanced in the towering shoes with his wrists delicately out turned.

Needless to say, that first day saw him stumble and fall many times, triggering different punishments ranging from a spanking on his rear, to the loss of his phone for a week. By week's end however, he was walking with the confidence and style of a fashion model, while maintaining the demure presence of a shy Japanese teen.

His friends noticed the change in his deportment right away – especially Yoshi – who convinced him to dress in ever more racy outfits in an attempt to get the attention of the boys in their group.

Well, of *one* boy in particular.

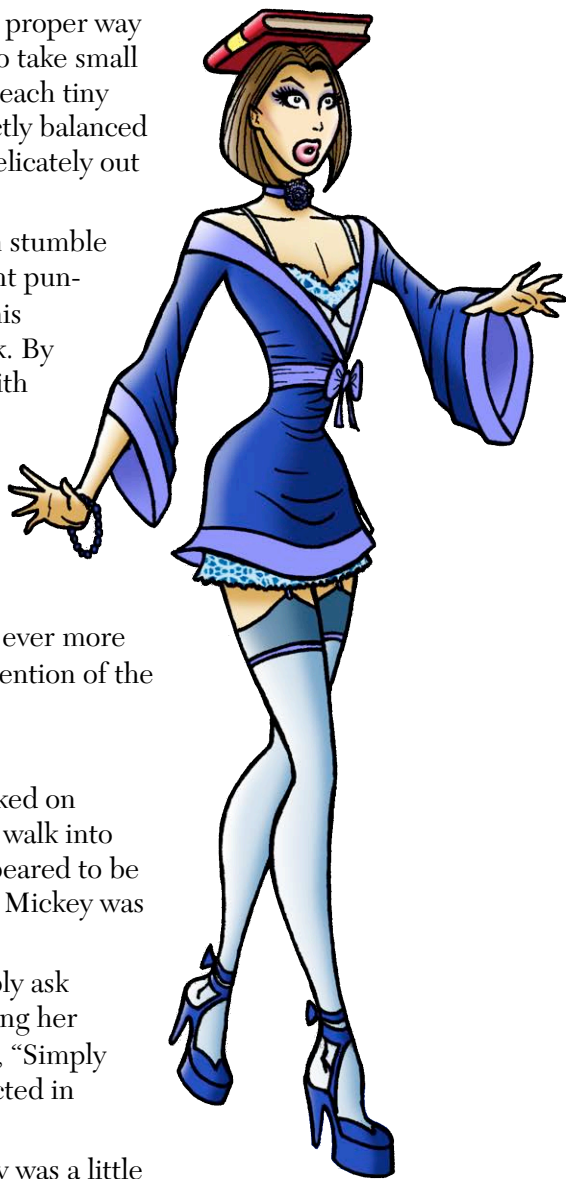
Ryo's eyes were almost constantly locked on Mickey. It was a wonder that he didn't walk into walls or other obstacles, as the boy appeared to be in more and more of a 'daze' the more Mickey was around.

Yoshi finally demanded that Ryo simply ask Miki for another date. "You are following her around like a little lost dog," she joked, "Simply ask the girl for another date," she directed in Japanese, "Be a man!"

Overhearing the conversation, Mickey was a little confused by what she was saying, as his Japanese was still a work-in-progress. He could have sworn that Yoshiko had referred to him as a 'girl,' which he supposed made sense, as there was no way that Ryo would be interested in him if he were a boy, would he?

A tingle of panic started in Mickey's stomach as he realized that Ryo might only think of him as girl. He knew he had better act the part properly, or risk being humiliated.

But wasn't that what he had been practicing so hard to be in the last few weeks? Wasn't he *trying* to be a girl? Wasn't he becoming a sweet, demure



Japanese girl? Wasn't that what all this was about? Wasn't that what people wanted him to be? Wasn't that his new purpose?

Mickey's head was clouded with confusion as Ryo approached him with a smile, "So how about it?" he asked in English with a macho tone, "Would you go on another date with me?"

Mickey blushed unsure how to answer, "Ask me again in Japanese," he giggled, his English taking on mild hint of an accent.

Ryo chuckled, then repeated the question in his native tongue. "O tsukiai sa sete kudasai?"

Mickey felt a chill go up his spine as he heard the words in Japanese. He didn't know why, but there was something about the language that made everything seem better. It was like a warm sweater, covering him, embracing him, comforting him. The way he imagined that Ryo could or would comfort and embrace him if he allowed him to.

Mickey shivered. There was something going on with him. These feelings were not normal – yet he was powerless to stop them.

Ryo watched Miki shiver, with what he interpreted to be anticipation. "I will see you again next week then? Eight o'clock."

Mickey said nothing, but instead nodded shyly. He kept his eyes towards the ground, in deference.

Why did I do that? He wondered to himself.

Yoshi grabbed her friend's arm before he could finish the thought. "Now we need to go shopping!" she gushed, "We will make you the perfect princess for your handsome prince charming."

Mickey blushed again, wondering, is that what I'm becoming... Ryo's pretty Japanese Princess?

He paused than wondered again in Japanese, *isn't that wrong?*

He looked down at his smooth stocking-covered legs, and pointed platform heels. He was no longer sure of what 'wrong' was any more, since all of this felt so very right.

At least he thought it was supposed to.

I am such a confused person! He thought to himself as he followed Yoshi off to another boutique.



Two days later, Keiko's voice filled Mickey's ears, "Hurry up you lazy girl!" she cried, "Your guest will be here soon. You will bring much shame upon him and yourself if you are tardy."

Mickey was seated at the mirror, applying his mascara with slow steady precision. He had already painstakingly attached and curled his long feathery fake lashes to his upper and lower eyelids and was now coating them in thick blackness for a perfect doll-like Lolita look.

He glanced up from the mirror to look at Keiko, still hold his mascara brush in one hand. “*Watashi wa taida na on’nanoko de wa nai desu,*” he complained in Japanese. He said that he was not a lazy girl.

Keiko tapped her dainty silver watch impatiently, “*Anata wa okurete iru on’nanoko dearu koto o okonatte iru,*” she scowled, “*Anata no kao o isoide shi-age!*” Mickey scoffed back at her as he returned to his makeup application. She had warned that he was going to be a ‘delayed’ girl and that he had better hurry and complete his face.

He glanced at his reflection. He was almost done. His face was nearly white with thick concealing foundation. His red lips carefully drawn in as perfect cupid’s bows. His eyes were lined with black and drawn out at the corners to appear more Asian, then massed with his long feathery fake lashes. His nails were now over a half inch long and painted bright pink – which made it ever-so-difficult to maneuver his way through his now-ritual makeup application – but he did. He was proud of himself for having gotten so good at it. He had dusted his cheeks with rose-colored blush before grabbing the mascara to touch up his false lashes.

He had pulled his hair back with a hairband before beginning his transformation, to accommodate the darling new wig he and Yoshi had purchased. It was bright pink, with the strands of hair brushed into two cute pony tails.

He had already slipped into a new form-fitting camisole with a high ruffled hem, seamed pink stockings and red platforms. The top of the cami was heavily padded with silicone breast forms that made him look like he had a D-cup bosom.

“Hurry, hurry, Miki!” Keiko shouted as he finished touching up his face. She watched her stepson carefully apply his warpaint with pride. Just a few short months ago, this useless slug had been an ugly eyesore on her honor and reputation. Tonight, all would be restored.

Yoshiko had promised that she would take the new and improved ‘Miki’ to her flat to reintroduce ‘her’ to Yoshi’s father, thus restoring his faith in her husband, Eric. As an added bonus, when Keiko learned of the date with Ryo, she found out that Ryo’s family was extremely well respected and wealthy, and being seen in his company would be very beneficial to Mickey, and by extension Keiko. Of course there was the whole issue of them both technically being boys – but she was certain that would never even come up. Because when Ryo returned Mickey home that evening, Keiko would make sure that Eric saw them together, arm in arm.

Keiko was convinced that the sight of Eric's son, dressed like teenaged Japanese tart, in the arm of a handsome boy would be enough to make her husband would lose his mind. She could almost guarantee that Mickey would be on a plane back to Texas by tomorrow, if not sooner. If it did not happen that way, she wasn't sure what else she could do. This was really her last chance to get rid of her stepson for good.

But what if my husband fails to become angry? She worried. She lamented her initial pleading with Eric to allow the boy to enrich himself in Japanese culture, and how he had agreed to let Mickey act and look as girly and 'cultured' as possible without consequences. *I hope that I have not sabotaged myself*, she said to herself.

A buzzing sound on the vanity counter disturbed her daydream.

It was Mickey's new phone, a new Android-type in a pink hello-kitty case. She saw Mickey glance down from his makeup application, but he didn't touch it. Instead he asked Keiko, in Japanese, who it was.

Keiko read him the number on the display, which Mickey didn't recognize. "Must be a wrong number," she heard him shrug it off. As he continued to coat his lashes in thick dark mascara.

Feeling an odd sense of pride towards the boy, she turned to the bed and retrieved the new wig that they had purchased for tonight and approached her stepson, preparing to lower it onto his pretty head. With it's glowing pink color and oversized pigtails, it would make Miki look like the perfect Lolita princess.

Mickey finished dressing in the sassy outfit that he and Yoshiko had picked out earlier in the week. It was form-fitting minidress, with puffy short sleeves, a built in corset, built in padded bra, and an elaborate-but-brief skirt. It was pink with red-printed hearts, ruffles and lovely red bows attentively places about it. Mickey had picked out special matching pink stockings with red topped garters to attach up under the miniscule skirt. The high hem gave view of the creamy skin atop his stockings.

Red strappy platforms with a four-and-half-inch heel adorned his feet, a matching pink and red purse adorned his arm, pretty pink gloves adorned his hands, a pair of red hoop earrings adorned his ears, and a cute decorative 'top hat' in white and pink topped things off above the flowing pink tresses of his lovely wig.

Keiko gushed compliments and took pictures until Ryo's arrival.

When he arrived, Ryo had brought a huge bouquet of pink and red roses, "Your favorite," he said. Miki nodded, unsure of it that was correct or not, but too nervous and confused to question it.

Here he was, dressed as a teenaged Japanese hottie, getting ready for dinner and drinks with an intensely handsome boy. He remembered his conversation with his best friend Kyle from before he left, about 'getting it on' with a cute



Japanese girl. As he looked over at his reflection in the mirror by the door, he realized that that was exactly what he had become!

How would he explain this to his friend?

Mickey's thoughts of Kyle made him realize that he had left his phone in his room, "Excuse please a moment," he smiled at Ryo, "I will return briefly."

The sound of his heels clicked on the tile as he returned to his room and retrieved his pink cased phone. He checked the display and found that a voice-

mail was waiting for him. *That is strange*, he thought to himself, *so few people have this number. I am curious to know who it is from.*

He touched the screen, his longer sharp fingernails clicking against it as he accessed the message. His jaw fell open as he realized who it was: "Hi! I'm not sure if I've got the right person or not. I'm looking for my son Mickey Jones. It's his momma. I just wanted to let him know what we're in the Orient, and wanted to drop on by and say hi to him, so if you could make sure he gets the message we'll see him in a bit. Thanks y'all."

A small wave of panic washed over him. He realized that he couldn't be seen by his mother like this. She just wouldn't understand! He placed the phone in his purse and scurried back to Ryo, "We must go!" he exclaimed in a rushed voice as he put his dainty gloved hand around the macho Japanese boy's.

"What is the rush?" Ryo asked.

"I will explain on the way," Mickey replied in his soft, sweet Japanese voice, "But for now, we must go fast, before it is too late!"

But it already was.

Keiko had heard a knock at the door, and was already opening it.

"Howdy there," a loud Texan twang rang out, "You must be Kiki, Eric's new wife. I'm Annabelle, the old model." Mickey's mom giggled nervously, "And this is my new husband, Buford."

"Howdy Ma'am" Mickey heard his stepfather's voice as the door closed behind them, allowing them full view of him and his 'date.'

"Oh," Annabelle said with a surprised expression seeing Mickey for the first time, "Is this your daughter?" she asked politely.

Keiko turned towards her stepson and paused. She realized that Annabelle's unexpected entrance could actually be the moment she had been waiting for, to finally get rid of Eric's intrusive son and return normalcy to her home.

"Oh no, Miss Annabelle," she smiled, "this is your son."

Annabelle gasped, feeling faint as she took a step backwards to regain her balance. Buff was also visually stunned, throwing one hand up in surprise as he helped balance his wife with the other.

"Mickey?" they panted together.

"Mama?" Mickey exclaimed.

His mother looked over at him in horror as she entered her ex-husband's home, "Mickey?" she gasped, "My dear lord son, what have they *done* to you?"

"Momma," he exclaimed again, "I am so sorry. I could not help myself. It is not my fault!" his voice remained soft and was tainted by a thick accent he couldn't shake.



Annabelle gasped again. Her son, dressed as a Japanese girl, had developed a Japanese accent and was in the arms of a Japanese boy! “Mickey!” she cried, “What the hell’s gotten into you? Why are you dressed like that? Why are you talking like that?”

Mickey covered his mouth in shock. “I...” he tried to speak in his old voice, but was unable. He realized that he didn’t know how to speak like an American boy anymore. “I can’t. I can’t help it! I am so sorry!” His ‘r’s in sorry came out sounding like ‘l’s, making sound like ‘solly.’ It only added insult to injury.

“Stop that right now young man!” his mother commanded. “Now you explain yourself this instance, or...or...” She stomped her foot in anger, unable to come up with a suitable consequence. “Or you’re going to be grounded for the rest of your life! Do you head me?”

Mickey nodded and lowered his head, as a polite demure Japanese girl would be expected to do.

“I am sorry Miss Annabelle,” Keiko piped up with a cheshire cat grin, “But he has insisted to become like this. He said it was his dream in life.”

"What?" Mickey coughed, "No, no! It is not true momma! She tricked me! This is not my idea!"

The last comment made Ryo turn and look at him with a surprised expression, "Not your idea?" he said in Japanese, "I don't understand."

"And who, may I ask, is this?" Annabelle motioned at Ryo.

"That's his boyfriend Ryo!" Keiko shouted before anyone could answer otherwise, "They were just about to go on a hot date."

Mickey's mother looked as if she might pass out, but shook her head and recovered quickly. "Buford," she said turning to her bewildered-looking husband, "Cancel the bus trip, we're goin home." She then turned to Mickey with a forlorn expression, as if she somehow felt responsible for what had happened to him, "Oh my darlin' baby-boy," she said soothingly, "Don't you worry about a thing. We are goin to get you out of this ungodly country and back home where your momma can make you all better." She gently stroked his face, "Now let's go get you changed outta these things and get you all packed up." She smiled a withering smile. "Buford," she called back Buff, "Don't just stand there, get the boy's bag, and get his passport."

Keiko reached over to the counter beside her and retrieved Mickey's travel documents, handing them to Annabelle with a smile, "he has no other clothes," she said, "only more like this."

Annabelle took the passport one hand and her son's gloved hand in the other, as she turned and walked towards the door muttering. "Just wait until I get my hands on your father," she mumbled as Buff opened the door for her, "He thinks our divorce was ugly? I'll show him ugly!"

She let the door close behind her as she left a smiling Keiko and flabbergasted Ryo behind.

Ryo, still unsure of what had transpired, looked at Keiko, "Did she say that Miki was her boy?" he asked in English.

Keiko scowled and pointed at the door, "Out!" she shouted.

The boy slumped his shoulders and proceeded to exit the apartment, at the exact time that Eric was making his return home from work.

"You want to hear something funny?" he asked, as he closed the door and hung up his coat. "I could have sworn I just saw my ex-wife and her husband getting of an elevator as I was getting on. Isn't that weird? They had one of those weird girls with them, you know the ones," he paused to find the word, "Lolitas," he exclaimed, "one of those lolita girls. Strange huh?"

Keiko smiled widely and nodded approvingly.

"So where's Mickey?" he chuckled, "I want to tell him about it..."

Keiko's smile grew wider. "Well dear husband," she began, "It has been a very eventful day here. I'll make some tea and we'll discuss it." She pointed at the table, then went to counter, where she found her tiny glass bottle, and proceeded to fill the eyedropper with the fluid contained within it.



Annabelle said little as she rode next to her son in the taxicab. Buff, who was too large to fit in the cab with them, was riding in another car behind. She would occasionally turn and glance at Mickey, but instead of saying anything, would simply shake her head and mutter or sigh. Mickey, as a result, began to feel as if he had somehow failed her as a son.

How could I have allowed myself to become like this? He wondered to himself as tears began to well up in his eyes. He looked over at his mother. *How could I have brought such incredible pride to my stepmother, but such incredible shame to my mother?*

Upon arriving at the hotel, Annabelle ordered her effeminate son into the shower to wash his face and hair. She then dressed him in some of his stepfather's clothes before gathering their things to head to the airport. Buff had arranged seats on a last-minute flight to New York that left night. Once there, they would transfer to connecting flight back to Texas, and be home before the end of the second day.

"And not a minute too soon!" Annabelle exclaimed, "I can't spend another minute in this evil place." She hugged her boy – who now actually looked more like a boy than he had in months – taking his hand as they left for the airport.

The flight home was quiet. Mickey listened to music on his phone for the duration of the trip. It was all Japanese pop music and techno, as he had completely deleted his old playlists only a few weeks ago. But it was better than nothing.

He smiled at his mother, who assumed he was listening to the same type of music he had when he had left the U.S. She smiled back, happy to see him returning to his old self.

If only she knew what music I am listening to, he giggled to himself. *It would greatly upset her.*

There was a sudden wave of deviance that washed over him, as he realized that he was going to miss his friends and his newly-adopted culture and style tremendously. He was determined to retain whatever he could of Miki, even though he knew his Mom would not approve.



The week that followed his return to America was a flurry of activity. Annabelle and Buff had liquidated their home and placed their belongings in storage, or sold them off. Naturally their first priority was to find a new place to live and to make themselves as comfortable as possible, whilst also taking Mickey's to the many various appointments with Doctors, Psychologists, and even the Pastor of her church, to figure out exactly what those damned Japanese had done to him. Most important was knowing what needed to be done to bring him back to being the boy that she once known.

Mickey's waist had been shrunk by the corsets of the clothes he had worn, and his feet and toes had reformed into a slight 'en-pointe' or tip-toe position through the daily use of his towering heels. Worse still, his chest had become puffy and flabby, and without the support of bra, two very discernible budding breasts were noticeable below his t-shirts.

A fevered and rushed visit to a doctor was necessary. "Are you sure you didn't take any hormone supplements while you were there?" The doctor asked.

"I... I don't believe so," Mickey had replied, unsure what he truly meant.

"Why is that important Doc?" Annabelle asked.

"I can't otherwise explain how he would start to grow breasts like this without some kind of supplement. And even at that, it's only been six months – this kind of growth usually take a lot longer." He pointed at Mickey's swollen pectoral muscles.

"Luckily," the Doctor continued, "I'm pretty certain they'll go away with time. We just need to keep an eye on them. As for his feet and waist, I'm pretty certain he'd have permanent damage to them too, if you hadn't gotten there when you did. We'd have had to break his feet in order to get them back into the correct shape if that had been the case"

"What?" Annabelle and Mickey both exclaimed at the same time.

"Luckily you did get him out of there at the exact right time," the doctor continued, "So he'll be walking normal in a few weeks. Just don't freak out if you see him looking like he's walking on his toes. It's just muscle memory. It'll go away soon enough. Just like his waist will start to fill out again once his body shape returns to normal, and puts some meat back on his bones."

Annabelle was overjoyed at the news, hugging her son and the doctor as she gathered her things to go. "Well, I'm so relieved! That's just the best news ever!" she exclaimed, "Isn't it Mickey?"

Mickey nodded and faintly smiled. He knew he needed to agree with his mother, even if he himself wasn't sure.

The psychologist echoed the first doctor's opinion that Annabelle's timing had been perfect, and that his quirky behavior of talking with an accent and speaking softly and girlish was only temporary and would fade away with time.

"A classic case of Stockholm syndrome," the psychologist said.

"But he was in Tokyo, doctor!" Annabelle said. "He never even went near Stockholm!"

"Yes..." The man replied with a grimace of mental discomfort. "But the boy should be just fine, given time."

Mickey forced a smile again as his mother again exclaimed jubilation when the Psychologist made his prognostication. He put his earphones in and listened to his J-Pop music on the way home, fighting back feelings that he was wrong to listen it when he knew his mother would be unhappy.



Sometime later in the week, when she discovered her son laying on the couch listening to music on his pink Hello Kitty phone, Annabelle asked, "Why don't you and Kyle go see a movie or something?"

Mickey shrugged. "I dunno" he muttered, "Maybe."

Annabelle put her hands on her hips and scowled, "All you've done since we got home is mope around and drown out the outside world with your music. Things are never going to get better if you don't get out and see the world, young man!"

Micky paid no notice to her.

"Are you even listening to me?" she growled, as she grabbed the earphones out his ears.

"Hey!" Mickey exclaimed.

Annabelle placed one earbud in her own ear and listened for a minute. "What the hell is this?" she shouted, "More of that Devilish Japanese Brainwashing? I thought you were trying to get better?"

"But Momma," he protested, "It's only music. It's not brainwashing anyone."

"I'll be the judge of that!" she replied, as she grabbed the phone from his clutches and stuffed it into her purse. "I'm gonna go talk to Pastor Gordon, see what he thinks about all of this."

Mickey rolled his eyes, knowing that Pastor Gordon's answer for everything was that anything that wasn't American wasn't Christian, and anything that wasn't Christian wasn't allowed.

He slumped down in his chair as he heard his mother grab her keys and head out the door.

Great, he thought to himself, Now I've got nothing.

He shuffled in his seat for moment, wondering what he should do. His mother was determined to ‘detoxify’ him from everything Japanese, and now with her having his phone, it seemed that he had little choice but to let her.

A knock at the door interrupted his thought.

That’s weird, he thought, *Did mom forget her house key?*

He opened the door expecting to see the frustrated face of this Mother. Instead, he saw Ryo.

“What are you doing here?” he gasped loudly.

“I would have been here sooner, but it seems you had no address listed here in United States until just a few days ago.”

“Yeah, we just moved in on Tuesday. But seriously, why are you here?”

Ryo motioned towards the inside of the house, “May I come in?”

Mickey paused for a moment. Given his mother’s outburst over Japanese songs, he wasn’t sure if he should let an actual Japanese person – let alone the boy he had been caught arm-in-arm with – into the house.

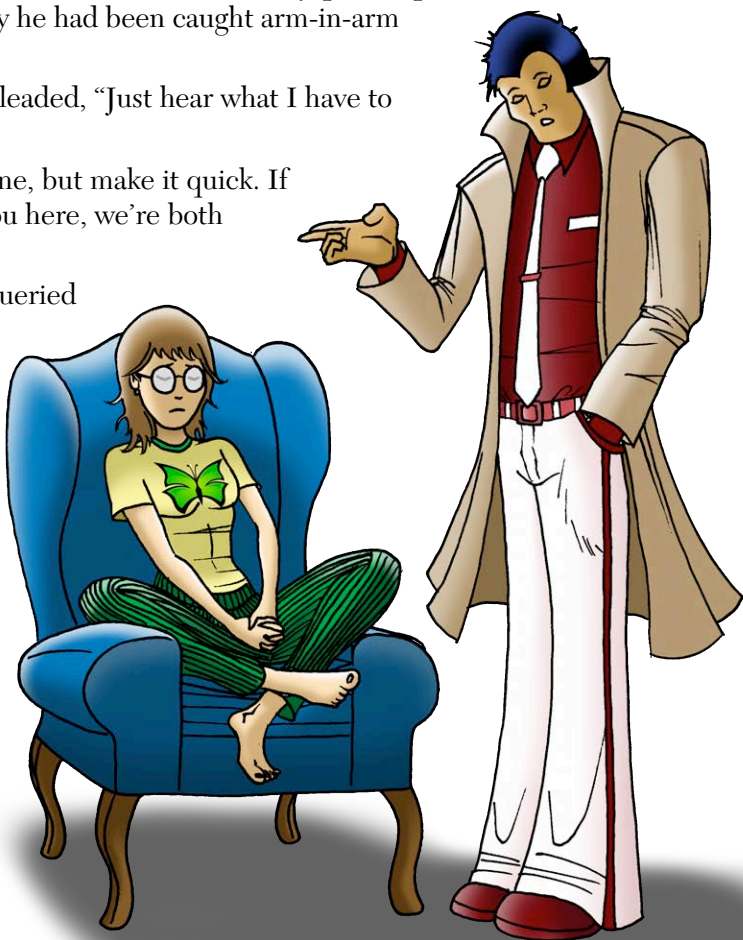
“Please Miki,” Ryo pleaded, “Just hear what I have to say.”

Mickey groaned. “Fine, but make it quick. If my mother catches you here, we’re both dead meat.”

“Dead meat?” Ryo queried as he followed Mickey into the house, “She intends to kill and eat us?”

“It’s just an expression” he said as he sat down in the chair he had been lounging in earlier. “So say what you need to say. Let’s get it over with”

“I miss you,” Ryo began, “And I think you being here is a mistake.”



Mickey sighed and looked down as the Japanese boy tried to articulate his feelings.

"I know that you aren't really girl," he said, "But I'm okay with that. I hope that you would still consider coming back to Japan, where you belong."

Mickey felt a wash of emotion overtake him, but he knew he had to be strong. "I am sorry Ryo-san," Mickey replied in perfect Japanese, "but this is my home. This is where I belong."

"But what of Yoshiko, and Nagomi and the others?" Ryo pleaded, "What about me?"

"I'm sorry Ryo," Mickey looked down at his striped green pants and butterfly top. He had picked them out himself, against his mother's wishes. He knew that his time in Japan had changed him, but he also knew that it had broken his mother's heart to witness the change, "I cannot" he said finally.

Ryo sighed and slumped his shoulders. He had flown half-way around the world to convince Miki to return with him, and he had failed. He wondered how he was going to face his friends when he returned.

"At least keep this," he said as he reached into his overcoat and retrieved an envelope, which he dropped onto Mickey's lap. "For later, if you should change your mind." Then with one final sigh, he turned and left the house.

Mickey ran to his room, throwing himself onto his bed, he planted his face in his pillow and sobbed uncontrollably.



The weeks that followed Ryo's visit saw Mickey's gradual return to his old routine. He and Kyle started texting and hanging out again. He quit moping around the house, and actually started to talking about things like 'going off to college' and other such things that convinced his mother that things were getting better.

Of course, he was still thin as a rail, especially in his waist, and he still walked 'oddly' for a boy. And there was the strange amount of time he spent on his personal grooming – an ungodly amount for a teenaged boy, by Annabelle's estimations anyhow.

But all-in-all, she was satisfied that Mickey was already back to being just like he was prior to his 'troubles' in Japan.

On one particular day, she had left the house to join the support group at her church that had been formed for parents of gay teenagers. Though there was no evidence to suggest that Mickey had actually turned gay, "Mickey's close enough to being gay," the pastor had said when she asked to join.

“There’s food in the fridge,” Annabelle had said before she left, “I’m going for tea with some of the other mothers after the meeting is over, so you won’t see me for a few hours.”

Mickey’s smile was unusually wide, as he nodded to his mother. “Okay. No problem.”

Moments after she left, Mickey tiptoed out of his room, and into the master bedroom, where he stayed for over an hour.



Kyle texted his friend three times before finally giving up on him. “Mom?” he called to his mother across the house, “I’m going to Mickey’s. I’ll be home later.”

The bike ride from Kyle’s to Mickey’s new house was short, as his mother and stepfather’s new home was only a few blocks away from Kyle. It was, in fact, even closer than Mickey had been to Kyle’s before his trip to Japan. Within a few minutes of his last text, Kyle was standing at his friend’s front door.

He’s probably sleeping, Kyle thought to himself as he tried the front door. It was locked. Kyle looked for the doorbell to discover it was missing. He contemplated knocking, but knowing that his friend’s room was located in the back of the house, he instead thought he would try the back door first.

To Kyle’s delight, the rear entrance was unlocked. He decided that he wouldn’t waste the opportunity to sneak up on his friend and therefore tiptoed across the kitchen floor quietly towards Mickey’s room. He could hear music coming from it, though it wasn’t like anything that he had heard Mickey listen to before. It sounded like techno. Kyle paused a moment to try and listen to the lyrics – were they even in English?

He barged into the room without so much as a knock – but to Kyle’s surprise, the room was empty.

Where the heck is he? Kyle asked himself. He saw his phone was here, so he must have been home.

He turned back towards the hallway and followed the sound of the strange techno music. It was coming from the room at the end of the hall – what Kyle presumed was the master bedroom. The door was slightly ajar, though neither open or closed, as Kyle slowly pushed it open, then gasped loudly, “Mickey?”

An equally surprised Mickey gasped even louder as he swiveled on his seat to face his friend. “K... K... kyle?” he whispered softly, clearly in shock.

The two boys stared at each other for a moment until Kyle finally spoke. “What are you *doing?*” he said.



Mickey was seated on the stool in front of his mother's vanity, lipstick in hand after having just applied a thick coat of gloss pink to his puckered lips. The rest of his face was made up with pale foundation, bold blush and thickly lined eyes, drawn out to an Asian almond shape before being framed by long feathery lashes, all under his usual coke-bottle glasses.

He was wearing an impossibly short pink denim miniskirt with a black midriff baring halter top that was stuffed with padding to accent his already swollen chest. Pale nude pantyhose shone over his still-smooth hairless legs. His hair had been straightened and styled in an effeminate style while his feet were adorned in a pair of his mother's highest platform heels.

"Kyle!" he exclaimed, "I... I couldn't help myself. I just don't think I can ever go back to being the Mickey you used to know."

He looked over at his purse and suitcase by the door. "I need to go back."

Kyle said nothing, his eyes following his friend's eyes to the luggage by the door. His mouth hung open. "You're going back?" he said finally, "But..." he left the sentence go unfinished.

"Can you be sure that mother gets this?" he asked as he handed his friend an unmarked envelope.

Kyle nodded silently, still dumfounded by what he was seeing. Mickey rose up from his chair and with graceful skill, minced across the floor in his intimidating heels to where his luggage was waiting. Kyle was bothered by how easy he made the whole thing look. At first, he hadn't believed those rumors he had heard at church about Mickey cross-dressing. Even if that were true, he was convinced that his best friend would have been brainwashed into wanting to dress like a girl, and that he hated it all the time he was doing it.

But after seeing it for himself – how comfortable he looked as his feminine self – he had his doubts.

"I'll see ya," Mickey said softly as he grabbed his bags and left Kyle standing in the empty room.



Kyle woke up in a start. He had just had that dream again. The one where his best friend turned into a girl and left to go to Japan. He wiped the sweat from his brow and looked around his room. He picked up his phone and checked the date, as his sleepy haze began to lift and reality began to pour back in.

That was no dream, it was a memory.

It had actually happened, though many months had passed. Kyle had dreamt about that strange day several times since then, and every time he did – the same results occurred; he awoke in a start, questioning if it had all been real. He had once made it all the way to noon before his mother corrected him on the subject, saying "Honey, you can't go to Mickey's – he's gone."

From that point on, whenever he woke, Kyle checked the date to see if he wasn't still dreaming, and that what had happened had actually happened.

As requested, Kyle had delivered the envelope to his friend's mother, and subsequently watched her collapse in heap after reading the contents. The note contained inside had basically said that the half-year Mickey had spent in Japan had redefined who he was, and he wished to continue to allow that process to continue.

Buff summed it up far less eloquently. "He's decided to go be a goddamn nipper fruitcake?" his politically incorrect version escaped his mouth after rushing to his wife's aide. "Goddammit!" he added for effect.

Kyle hoped that somehow this was all a big mistake, and that Mickey would return shortly and apologetically. But as the days turned into weeks, and the weeks into months, he began to lose hope.

Until...

Kyle looked back at the screen of this phone that most recent morning. There was a notification on it that he had received a new text message overnight. The number was strange, and seemed to contain too many digits, starting with 81-3. He opened the message and gasped as he read it:

Hai!

It's Mickey. How R U?

So sorry about how I left.

I hope U can forgive me.

Things here are good.

I have many friends now

But I miss U much

Can I send U a ticket?

Will U come visit me?

Talk soon!

Kyle stared at the screen of his phone. He couldn't believe that Mickey had texted him. He thought back to the last time he had seen his friend in person, how he was dressed in a skirt and heels. He wondered if time in Japan would have mellowed him out. Maybe he was back to being the old Mickey again? Kyle looked around his room again. There wasn't much for him here. He didn't have a job. He wasn't going to school. His best friend had left him for another country. It wasn't like there was anything to prevent him from going, especially if Mick was going to pay for the ticket.

He is paying for the ticket, right? He wondered to himself as he re-read the text.

Yep, it clearly asks if he can send a ticket.

Kyle smiled at the thought of seeing his 'bro' again. Only this time, maybe he could introduce him to some hot Chinese chicks, or whatever they were called in Japan. He began to type his reply to Mickey:

I'm in.

Send me a ticket.



The flight to Tokyo was much longer than Kyle had expected, even though he thought he knew what to expect. He was extremely happy to finally be off the plane and on solid land. But he wasn't happy to be surrounded by thousands of frantic travelers, none of whom spoke English. Thankfully Mickey had arranged for a somewhat familiar face to pick him up outside of the airport.

"Mr. Jones?" the semi-clueless boy said as he approached Eric, suitcase in hand, "It's been a long time, huh?"

Mickey's dad chuffed. "Heh, I suppose it has been," he tried to remember the last time he had seen Kyle – probably eight, possibly ten years ago, "Let's hurry, traffic will be bad." He turned and walked towards the train station.

Same old Mr. Jones, Kyle thought to himself as he chased after Eric, Not much a conversationalist.

Mickey's father continued to be a non-conversationalist all the way to his new apartment downtown. He did mention that having Mickey move back had forced him to find a slightly bigger place to live, and – lucky for Kyle – there was even an extra room for guests.

"This is Keiko," Eric introduced the boy to his wife as they entered the apartment, "Mickey's stepmother." Keiko scowled, but bowed politely as she eyed Kyle up.

"She'll take you to meet Mickey," he continued, "She's just at work right now."

Kyle nodded, though he wasn't sure he had heard his friend's Dad right. *Did he just say 'she' was at work?* He wondered.

"So Mick's got a job?" Kyle asked.

"Yes," Keiko replied, even though the question had been asked to her husband. "A good job in a popular fashion store. We will go meet there."

A fashion store? Kyle wondered. *My friend?*

All would be revealed quickly, as Keiko took Kyle through the busy streets of Harajuku to a very modern, popular store. Kyle assumed its popularity due to the number of people, mostly young Japanese girls, streaming into it.

Keiko went straight to the counter, where an elaborately dressed girl smiled and greeted them both. The girl conversed in Japanese with Keiko for a few

minutes, pointing at the pink clock on the wall, all the while glancing over at Kyle with a smile.

“She shall join us in a moment” Keiko said as she turned to Kyle finally.

“Who?” Kyle asked, his confusion showing through.

“Miki,” she replied, then began to browse the store shelves. Kyle turned back to where the girl had been standing a moment ago, but she had already left. He searched the room, realizing that all of the girls in the store were wearing similar outfits – pastel-colored Victorian dresses with short skirts and high heels. They looked like fetishistic doll costumes. He wondered if Mickey had one of them for a girlfriend. He wondered still, if Mickey could introduce him to one who was looking.

“Hai!” a familiar voice rang out behind him and he spun around to see – the girl from behind the counter, only now dressed in casual jeans and a plain top, “It is so good to see you old friend!”

Kyle recoiled slightly as his brain slowly caught up. “*Mickey?*”

The girl smiled as Kyle’s memory flashed back to the last time he had seen his friend, made up like a girl. He stared blankly at her, then stuttered, “But, I... I thought that...”

Mickey giggled girlishly. “You look surprised Kylie,” he, or she, said, “Is this not what you were expecting?”

Honesty finally pushed through Kyle’s frozen voicebox, “No!” he shouted.

Mickey looked disappointed. “Awwww, old friend. It is okay. The culture here is very different that what you are used to. But I know that you will grow accustomed to it,” he said with a bright, effervescent smile.

“Accustomed?” Kyle recoiled, “Mick – you look like fucking chick! How can I grow accustomed to that?”

Keiko interjected. “You need a drink!” she said, as she pulled a reusable water bottle from her purse, “It is tea. It will help you relax.” She had anticipated Kyle’s reaction to seeing his old friend would be less than cheerful, and prepared a batch of tea infused with her herbalist’s special solution, to help the boy to be a more willing participant in the plan that Miki and her had developed in anticipation of his arrival.

“I don’t need anything,” Kyle said angrily, his antics attracting the attention of many of the store’s shoppers, “What I need is a plane ticket home. This is fucking ridiculous!”

“Please Kyle,” Mickey pleaded, “Don’t offend Keiko, she is just trying to be helpful. I was once like you and acted very rude towards her. Please do not make the same mistakes as I did.”

“Jesus,” Kyle shook his head, “You even sound like you’re Japanese.” He referenced his friend’s slow and proper English, which had developed a much more noticeable accent since his return to Tokyo.

“You say that as if it is a bad thing,” Mickey said looking concerned.

Kyle slumped his shoulders and sighed. “I’m sorry man. I know I’m being insensitive and everything. It’s just hard to wrap my head around everything, you know?”

Mickey nodded, taking the water bottle from his stepmother and handing it to his friend, oblivious to the fact that he was about to submit Kyle to the same unwitting mind-altering treatment as he had been subjected to earlier. “Drink some,” Keiko said, “You relax. Please.”

Kyle sighed, taking the water bottle from his friend’s hand. He opened the container and sniffed the contents. It was tea – just as had been claimed, and while it wasn’t the most exciting thing he had ever been offered to drink, it could have been much worse. So he took a big gulp before handing the bottle back to Keiko with a ‘Thank You.’

Keiko smiled. “You are most welcome,” she said.

“Now,” Mickey continued, “are you ready to do some shopping?”

Kyle looked at his friend with a suspicious expression. “What do you mean? What are going to shop for?”

“For you, silly!” Mickey chimed, “You can’t stay in Japan looking like that.” He pointed at his friend’s tank top and jean shorts combo. “And certainly not if you are staying with us. But don’t worry, you will love the outfits that we find for you – just be patient and obedient and everything will be fine. Okay?”

Kyle sighed, slumping his shoulders forward as he took another sip of the tea that Keiko had prepared for him. He felt his anger subsiding and his resistance breaking down as a highly concentrated mix of the old medicine man’s potion began to course through his veins. He wanted to leave, and knew that he should, but for some reason he simply couldn’t. Instead, he handed the bottle back to Mickey’s stepmother and said, “What do you have in mind?”

“Banzai!” Mickey exclaimed, “Hooray! We will have so much fun together here Kylie, you shall see!”

Kyle forced a smile. “I hope you’re right,” he muttered quietly, with the voice inside his head adding, *but I doubt it.*



Eric Jones returned home after a busy work day to find his new abode in a state of disarray.

Keiko had convinced him that with Mickey living with them full-time now, they needed a bigger room for him, or her, and a spare room was also required. He had begrudgingly agreed, as the cost of a larger apartment in the city's core was quite staggering. He hadn't been able to say no to Keiko in months, thanks to his daily injection of her special 'additive' in his tea. Likewise, he hadn't been able to say no to his effeminate son when he informed him that his friend from the U.S. would be joining them for a while as well.

He sighed as he looked around the apartment at the various bags and packages that had been scattered about. *I get a bigger place and this is how she looks after it?* He wondered angrily.

The sound of heels from a back room distracted him sufficiently from his anger, as he looked up to see his son and wife emerging with wide smiles on their faces.

"Hai! Chichi!" Mickey gushed as he rushed to his father's side and hugged him. Eric smiled uncomfortably, wishing that he was still called by his English title of 'Dad' instead of the strange sounding 'Chichi.'

"We had such a productive day. Kylie is fitting in even better than expected!" Mickey jabbered.

"Of course she did," Keiko piped in, "Miki is so talented in fashion now. Kylie is so very lucky to have you," she said to her feminized stepson.

"Oh thank you Mamahaha," Miki replied with an appreciative smile.

"Um," Eric interrupted the conversation, "I don't mean to sound like an idiot here," he began, "But who is Kylie?"

"Kylie!" Keiko shouted, "Anata ga koko ni aru koto ga yokyu sa reru!"

Mickey nudged his stepmother, "She does not know Japanese haha," he said before calling again in English, "Kylie, come here!"

A shuffling sound was heard as another figure appeared from the spare room at the back of the apartment. Eric had to do a double take, as the person standing before him in no way resembled the boy he had met at the airport – except for the freckles on the person's cheeks.

He gasped as he realized that the person before him was in fact Mickey's old American friend Kyle. "Oh god, not again," he whispered.

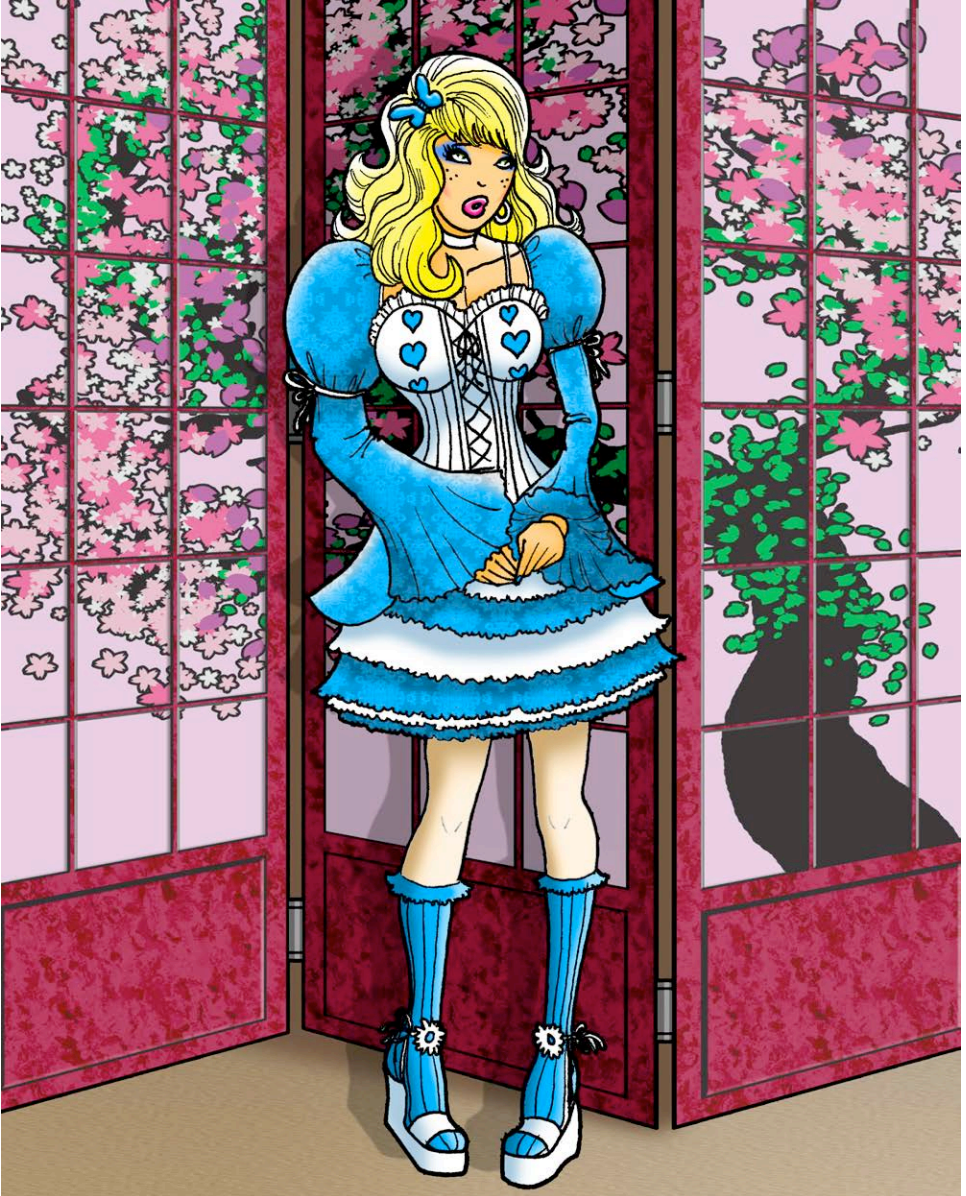
Kyle felt his friend's father's eyes on him, which caused him to blush heavily and nervously fidget with his fingers. He knew that to Eric his appearance must be shocking.

It was still a little shocking to him that Mickey had somehow gotten him into the powder blue bell-sleeved mini-dress. With layers of ruffled taffeta skirts and a built-in corset that shrunk his waist by at least two sizes, while creating the illusion of B-cupped chest, the outfit was more a torture device than clothing. The creamy white pantyhose and blue knee-high socks served to help Kyle

forget that he was in a dress. He was convinced that if he had been bare-legged, it would have been worse.

Worse than that ramped, wedge-heeled platform sandals he had be forced to wear. Worse than the clip-on hoop earrings and banded white choker collar. Worse than the blue nail polish and certainly worse than the long blonde wig that had been affixed over his hair.

Being bare-legged would have even been worse than the layers of makeup they had applied over his face, cheeks, eyes and lips. He had seen his reflection



in the mirror as they prepared to leave the boutique where Mickey worked, and had wanted to protest. But just as now his voice seemed to elude him, so too then, he found it impossible to object.

“Chichi,” Mickey smiled at his father, “Meet Kylie.”

Eric offered an awkward smile to the boy, sensing how uncomfortable this must have been for him. “Kylie, welcome to our home,” he said politely.

“To your new home!” Keiko exclaimed excitedly.

Kyle just blushed and looked around the room, feeling deeply humiliated, but equally unable to do anything about it.

“I must admit,” Eric continued, “I never figured that I would see you...” He paused, searching for a sensitive way to say what he wanted to. “That is to say, that Mickey always described you as being rather...” he paused again letting his voice trail off, “traditional.”

“Oh she’s going to be a very traditional girl when we’re done with her!” Keiko blurted out. Mickey nodded his head in agreement smiling widely. Kyle just stood quietly, his feet awkwardly positioned as he nervously played with the cuff of his flared sleeve.

“It was never our intention to have gone this far Chichi.” Mickey began to explain his friend’s makeover but was interrupted by Keiko who huffed loudly, as if to say, ‘speak for yourself.’

“I was just going to buy him some trendy new clothes,” Mickey continued, “But he was so insistent on talking about how I became a girl and how it was such a wrong-headed decision. It was actually Keiko who said, how would...”

Keiko took over the conversation. “How would you know? You’ve never even tried.”

Mickey picked it back up. “And I had to admit that at first, I thought the idea was,” he paused for another moment, “How did I used to say... nuts?”

“But then I thought it would be a good chance for him, to experience our popular culture, Japanese popular culture, through different eyes. I fully expected him to refuse. I thought that he would say no. But when I led him to the back of the store to begin, he went along with it. So I supposed that deep down inside, his protests were unfounded.”

Mickey paused to see if his father was still paying attention, which surprisingly, he was.

“I thought I would just apply a little makeup to him, which would make him look girly enough, but Keiko was insistent that we do more.”

Keiko was eager to explain. “I told him to remove his clothes. I had a razor from a vending machine, and I shaved him bare below his neck. Lucky for him,

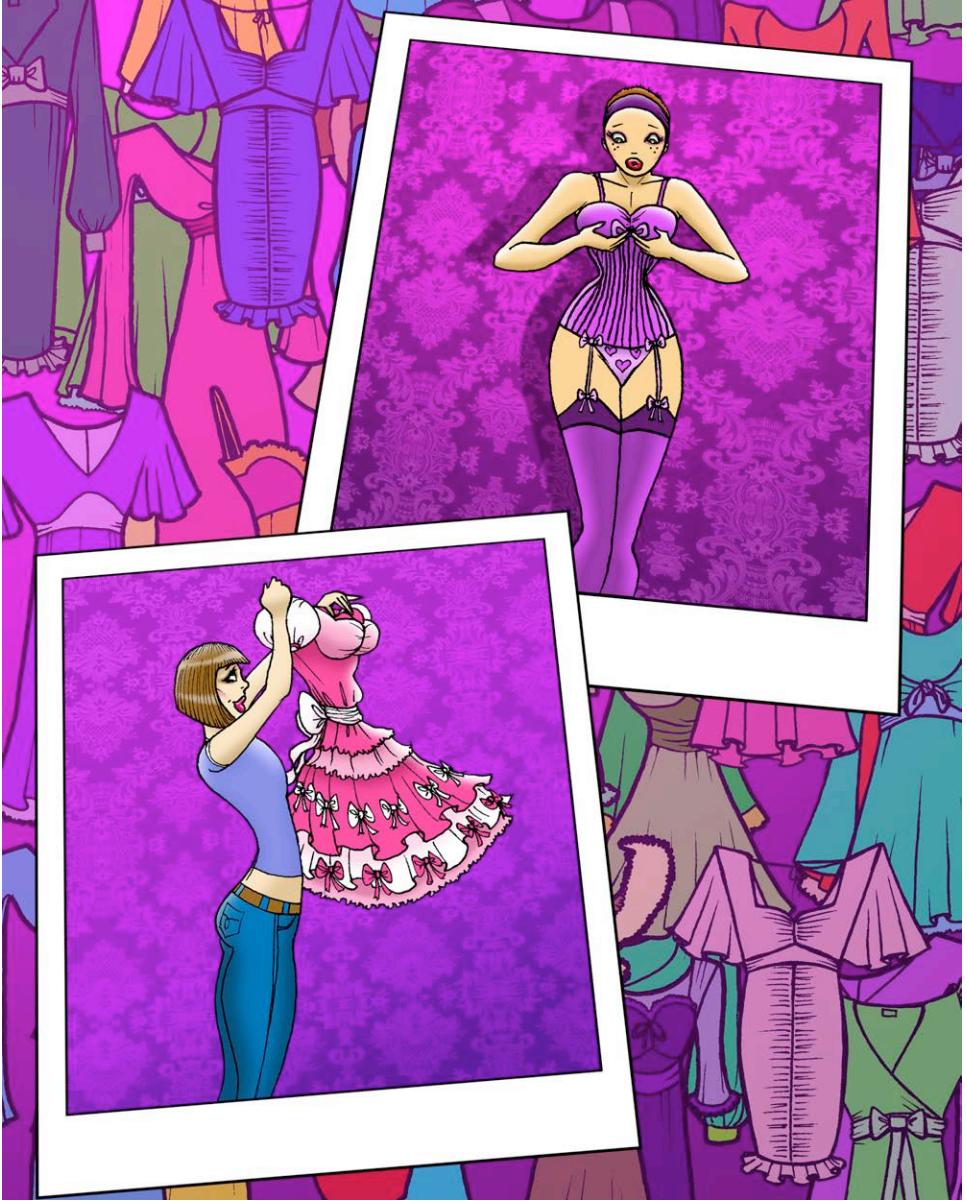


he is not a hairy boy, so it came off quite easy. Then I purchased a pair of purple panties for him to wear. I still expected him to fight us, but he didn't."

Miki giggled, covering his smiling mouth with the tips of his fingers. "He even let Keiko tuck his boy-parts away so his crotch looked smooth and girlish. I don't know where she learned to do that, it is quite the skill."

Eric looked over at his wife with a surprised expression. Keiko just smirked.

"Anyhow," Miki continued, "we washed his face and placed a band around his hair to hold it out of the way. I remember thinking that he had such a nice complexion and good structure to his face, just as Yoshiko had said about mine when she first helped me with my makeup. I showed him where his best fea-



tures were in the mirror, but Keiko became impatient and demanded that I get to work.”

“I dusted him with foundation, just enough to even his tone, but not to hide his freckles, then swept some pink blush up his cheeks. I carefully lined his eyes with liquid pencil to make them look wider than they are, and then attached a set of false lashes to his eyelids. Keiko said I could have used longer ones, but it was his first time. I added some purple shadow over his eyes, then

finished with a dark pink lipstick on his lips. I had to redo his makeup later-on, as the blue dress we chose did not match his makeup.”

“We had him try on different corsets and stockings and dresses in purples and pinks, but decided that baby blue was definitely his color. Especially when we added the blonde wig. It really makes the blue ‘pop’ as they say on TV.”

Kyle’s head looked like it was about to pop, as he recalled his transformation hours ago.

Eric removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes. Having a son turning into a daughter was one thing, but having a second boy under his roof going through the same change, was quite another. He took a deep breath and asked the question that had formed in his mind halfway through Mickey’s story, “So now what?”



It had been almost two full years since Mickey had first arrived in Japan, and six months since Kyle’s arrival. Shortly after having given his friend his first makeover, Ryo had asked for his hand in marriage, which Mickey naturally accepted without question, and the rest had been a blur.

First there were a few minor details to work out with regards to Mickey’s gender and citizenship, as Japanese law prohibited the marriage of two people of the same gender. So Mickey was sent to a very special clinic in Thailand for a two-week stay. There, his genitals were surgically modified to make ‘him’ into ‘her.’ While there, at the suggestion of ‘her’ fiancé, she elected to have some additional facial reconstruction, to make her face look more feminine – and more Japanese. Ryo also arranged for breast augmentation, much to her surprise. She awoke from the procedure with massive-looking pert globes on her chest, which was completely unexpected and somewhat upsetting that her husband-to-be had made the choice without consulting her first.

Miki learned that day that Japanese men will often do whatever they please, without consulting their wives first. “Besides,” Ryo argued, defending his decision, “Real Japanese girls have extremely small breasts. But having a bride with ‘D’ cup bra will make me the most fortunate groom in the city!”

Miki had scoffed indignantly.

Keiko informed her that she better get used to it, as a woman’s place in Japan was often far less influential than in America if she happened to have a ‘traditional’ Japanese husband. “Why do you think I married an American?” she chided.

Once the matter of Mickey’s corrected gender had sufficiently healed there was one more decision that Ryo would have to make without her consultation in order for them to be married.

She needed to turn Japanese – completely.

While it had been Keiko who planted the idea in Ryo for Mickey to become a girl officially, it was his father who had insisted that her citizenship change. He had forbidden Ryo to marry a foreign girl, due to his favored status as a government officer. He was concerned about his image being tarnished if his son were marrying someone who wasn't Japanese. Normally, the process to become a Japanese citizen would have taken up to five years, as a person is investigated, screened, tested and forced to wait. But with his assistance, Miki was granted citizenship papers in just two months! It had required her birthday to be falsely changed to be a year earlier than it was, because no one under the age of twenty can be granted Japanese citizenship. That didn't concern anyone at all – in fact Ryo joked that he enjoyed marrying an 'older' woman.

Everyone chuckled at the comment after the wedding ceremony had concluded. Everyone, that is, except Miki's mother Annabelle.

She had initially refused to attend the ceremony, but after learning that no other members of her son's family would be in attendance, save for his father, she reconsidered. She hadn't taken Mickey's abrupt departure well, and the description of him by Kyle had been cause for even more grief.

"Good God almighty," she had exclaimed when she had returned home to find Kyle holding Mickey's note, a dumbfounded look on his face, "He's lost his damned mind!"

She had hoped that Kyle's trip to Japan to bring his friend back would have panned out as planned, but all it seemed to do was cause Kyle to want to stay there too!

When she arrived in Japan to see that Mickey had completely transitioned from American boy to Japanese girl, she broke down. "How could this have happened to me?" she said, as she looked up to the sky and cried dramatically. Buff tried his best to console her as the photographer began to take pictures of the newlyweds with Miki's family, but the best she could do was to look down and take a deep breath.

Keiko, by comparison, had a very large smile. Her original plan to disrupt her husband's son's life just enough to make him leave the country, had by all accounts failed. Instead, however, she had managed to inadvertently change him into a girl, who had married into a very prominent and influential family, which would thusly cause her own status to be elevated accordingly.

Add to that, Miki's friend Kyle had entered the fold and was being modified in a similar fashion, though not entirely willingly – she had already used an entire bottle of her medicine man's special elixir on the boy. But she was fairly confident that within the next few months, she could begin shopping 'Kylie' around to potential suitors, hopefully to friends and associates of Ryo's esteemed family, which were now by extension, her family too.

Her smile grew another centimeter wider as the photographer clicked another frame.

Kyle's smile, however, was nearly non-existent.

He glanced over at his old friend with an ambivalent expression, and then looked down towards himself for the fourth time that day. He truly couldn't believe that any of this was going on. It seemed like only yesterday that Mickey had returned from Japan, escorted by his mother and stepfather under accusations of some kind of Japanese voodoo magic that had somehow turned him gay.

In retrospect, he should have seen the warning signs right there. Especially after he had barged in on Mickey dressed in a skirt and heels and full makeup, moments before he left the U.S. to retreat back to Tokyo. And then there was the offer of a trip to Japan that came a few months after that – one he should have refused.

But how could he? Mickey was his best friend, and it had sounded like he had turned things around upon his return to Tokyo. How was Kyle supposed to know that when Mickey had told him 'he had found someone' that he meant he had reacquainted with a man?

Kyle shuddered at the thought. He had Mickey had always been close, and he wondered if he had ever had 'those' kind of thoughts for him back in the U.S.

But then again, back in the U.S., both of them had just been average teenaged slackers. Here, with the help of Yoshiko – who seemed to be behind nearly every one of Mickey and Kyle's wardrobe designs – Kyle had to admit that they had become pretty hot in their current forms. Boys like Ryo were helpless to resist, *kawaii on'nanoko* like them.

Kyle shuddered again. He had been having those thoughts more and more as of late, and as much as he tried and tried to dispel them – they seemed to be becoming part of his basic programming. He knew that every morning, he needed to get up and get dressed to look pretty, so that boys would gawk over him.

He didn't know why, and he was certain that it was wrong to feel the way that he did, but ever since his first day in Japan he had felt a strange compulsion to agree with whatever he was told. And someone, somewhere must have told him that he needed to be a pretty Japanese girl – because that is what he felt. Much to his dismay.

He glanced down at his outfit and sighed in an overly dramatic, pouty way.

His Yoshiko-designed bridesmaid dress was an explosion of pink and white lace and frill, that made him look more like pretty Lolita doll than a young American man. With puffed shoulders and bell-shaped three-quarter sleeves, an open neck that exposed his upper chest bone - save for the ribbon emblazoned choker around his neck, a corset-based torso that crushed his waist to

nearly twenty inches while displaying a well-padded set of faux breasts; the dress left little to any man's imagination. Especially when its short, petticoated skirts barely covered the tops of his soft pink, garter-topped stockings. Thankfully he had been allowed to wear his tall pink boots with a modest heel instead of the towering platform ankle-mashing heels that he had been paraded around in since his second day as 'Kylie,' Miki's shy-but-willing friend.

At least that's what he had been introduced as several times already. So many times, in fact, that he had started to believe that it might be true.

Kyle sighed again as the photographer barked a command to him in Japanese. His grasp of the language was not yet strong, but he knew enough to understand the 'jist' of what he was being told to do.

Put your hand on one hip and pout sexy for the camera, he translated in his head. He obliged the photographer's command, placing a gloved hand on his hip and pouting his delicately painted and highly glossed pink lips on command.

How could he not? It was his place to obey – wasn't it?

He felt the weight of the extraordinarily-long pink-colored wig, tied into two cute pig-tails, cascading down his back. He knew that his real hair would soon be long enough to color and style. Keiko had informed him that she would retire him from wearing headpieces just as soon as he returned from his visit from the clinic in Thailand next month.

Sorekara watashi wa, kanzen'na on'nanoko ni naru mono, Kylie thought to herself in her soon-to-be native-tongue, which meant 'Then I shall become a full girl.' She looked over to Ryo, who was wearing a loud white tux with pink shirt – and a wide smile – and wondered if a man would ever be as enthralled with her as Ryo was with Miki.

And it was true – that Ryo had become completely and absolutely enthralled with Miki since her return to Japan. He had been the perfect gentleman, dotting on her hand and foot, catering to her every want and need. To Ryo, even though he knew how his lovely bride had started, as an uncouth American boy, he now thought of her as his perfect Harajuku princess.

Knowing that she had been made anatomically correct for her gender, and sufficiently healed since her trip to the clinic in Thailand, he was planning on consummating their marriage that evening in the posh Thai beach resort that he was taking her to for their honeymoon. The thought caused an almost-permanent grin on the boy's face as the photographer clicked his camera.

The face of Eric Jones, father of the bride, was not nearly as jovial. He wasn't sad or distraught like his ex-wife was, but he certainly wasn't as elated as his new son-in-law. Truth was, Eric really didn't know how he felt. In the course of just under two years, he had regained a son, then lost a son and gained a daughter, and then gained a son-in-law. It was all very confusing. He thought

that he should be more upset, enraged even, but the emotion simply wouldn't materialize. It was like something was preventing him from being angry about the whole situation.

He stared straight ahead at the camera as the photographer clicked another frame. He knew that his wife Keiko was happy – especially now that she had Kylie to look after – and wasn't that what was important? Happy wife, happy life? Isn't that what they say?

As for Miki, she was a very happy wife, that much she knew for sure. The details of everything else was left up to her new husband Ryo. He was such a strong and smart man, and she wished she could bear him a son to show her gratitude. But unfortunately that could not happen, as she had been born without a uterus, the only defect that the doctors in Thailand could not fix for her.

That's what she referred to when she remembered her days as a boy in the United States. She had been defective – but now she was fixed, and she was whole.

They would likely adopt an orphaned baby, but the child would never reach the same status as a child of their blood would. It was just the way things worked in their culture... their *Japanese* culture.

She smiled at the thought. The Japanese were so vastly superior to the Americans in every way. Her birth mother had done her such a huge favor by sending her here to live. If it not for her, she would never have attained her current status. Still, it was hard to see her birth mother looking so forlorn.

She turned her head from right to left, from birth mother to stepmother – or as she had begun to call Keiko, Haha. The Japanese word for stepmother was Mamahaha, but she had shortened it just 'haha' – which meant 'mother.' She did so because of her love for Keiko as a mentor and parent. And because her birthmother had treated her so poorly when she was first discovering her true self. She felt a tinge of shame from having an American mother, and once Anabelle left to return to the U.S., Miki was certain she would never see nor hear from her again.

She looked past Keiko to her friend Kylie with a smile. She was so happy that she was becoming a natural Japanese girl like her. It was truly exciting to see! She loved her bridesmaid outfit too – chosen by Miki's other best friend, Yoshiko.

Yoshi had helped Miki to design her own wedding gown as well, a short pink and white minidress with a wide flared skirt, ornately decorated with red hearts, ribbon and bows. The built-in corset crushed her already surgically-reduced nineteen inch waist down to a stunning eighteen inches, and lifted up her augmented breasts into two perfectly round orbs. Pale pink stockings, the tops of which were clearly shown beneath her too-short skirt, ended in strappy red platform heels with bow-wrapped ankle straps. Her regular hair was hidden



beneath an extravagant blonde wig that cascaded a golden mane of hair through the back of a dainty tiara and over her shoulders. Her makeup had been carefully applied over her blanch skin to look tasteful and sexy without looking trampy or tawdry.

In her mind, Miki had become the perfect Japanese princess that she had always be meant to become.

The End

Upcoming in James J. Craft's Stepmother Series:

A Family Femmed

Jake is trying to be supportive of his Father's choice to marry Deborah. But there is something very 'different' about her. She's getting his younger brothers to act and dress very different, and even he is feeling a little different himself.

He needs to figure out his stepmother's ulterior motive quick, before his family changes completely and permanently.

The final book in the Stepmother Series.

Illustrated by sortmid



Titles by Sick Puppy Press

Sick Puppy Comics

Making Friends

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. Three college students sign up for a six-month isolation experiment. Things start to get a little strange, and they begin to lose their masculinity day by day. Yet, they don't seem to even notice...

Full Color Comic Book / 38 pages

The Pet Sitter

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. Asked to look after a supermodel's pet for a while, James finds himself thrust out of his own apartment and into hers. Day by day, it seems like circumstances adapt James to become the resident of a supermodel's lifestyle. Full Color Comic Book / 29 pages

A Curious Curse

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. When teen goth Brandyn gets his drivers' license, he thinks it's a ticket to adulthood. Unfortunately, he's already cashed a ticket in the opposite direction. Full Color Comic Book / 27 pages

Boys Will Be Girls

Story & Art by Fraylim, Script by KK, Ink & Color by Joe Six-Pack. The "Summer Blossom" camp welcomes anew group of young men. But although it may be an all-boys camp when they arrive, it's girls-only when they leave. Full Color Comic Book / 100 pages

Teens Transformed

She Made Me Into My Sister

"A Little Too Clever" by Joe Six-Pack. Wyatt wanted to help his girlfriend get revenge, but at what cost? As it turns out, a cost greater than any boy could have imagined. Book / 88 pages / 20 illustrations

Gone Girly for Good

"Big in Japan" by James J Craft. Mike and Ken were one-hit-wonder rock stars. Then they discovered they had fans in Japan, so they left to become famous. Then they discovered that the Japanese didn't know they were guys. Book / 77 pages / 26 illustrations

Students, Exchanged

"French Dupe" by Joe Six-Pack. Kelley Sue's convinced a French exchange student to disguise himself as a girl. What happens when she realizes he has no intention of returning back home? Book / 57 pages / 15 illustrations

He's a Valley Girl, Fer Sure

From the files of TGStories.com: "Corey Taylor's Big Bodacious Adventure" by Joe Six-Pack. For Corey, the only way he can get into college is to pretend to be a girl. But when does it stop being pretend? When he's cheerleader? A girlfriend? A beauty queen? Book / 78 pages / 17 illustrations

From Boys to Bridesmaids

"Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Groom" by James J Craft. Two spoiled and privileged boys are about to be put in their place by their new step-mother. And their place is by her side as her bridesmaids and daughters. Book / 77 Pages / 16 illustrations

Little Mis-ter Popular

"My Two Moms" by James J Craft, illustrations by rock-etxpert. Thanks to his aunt's "Confidence Club," Leon will find a way to become popular, and to get over all his hang-ups... Including his masculinity. Book / 77 Pages / 17 illustrations

Bride to Be

By Joe Six-Pack. Derek and Cole grew up together as kids. One year, though, Cole has to start pitching in at the family wedding business. His life will never be the same. Book / 63 pages / 25 illustrations

Tales of Transformation

He's the Wrong Girl

"Office Chemistry" by Joe Six-Pack. James had to fill in at the reception desk. Problem is, the business is a bio-genetics company. And all of the sudden the coffee tastes funny. Book / 53 pages / 14 illustrations

City Boy, Country Girl

By Joe Six-Pack. Richard's long-forgotten aunt is sick, and he goes to care for her. His calls back home leave his wife Janice confused and unsure about his return. So she goes to find him. But is there much left to be found? Book / 64 pages / 25 illustrations

Thames Greene

By James J Craft. Ira wanted something better for his family. A new start. But in Thames Greene, everyone's getting a new start, whether they want it or not. Book / 77 pages / 26 illustrations

Hiding in High Heels

"How Not to be a Sissy" By Joe Six-Pack. Vince was on the run from people who wanted their millions back. Howard was a friend with a funny little idea and a knack for making subliminal CDs. Mini-Pix / 48 pages / 15 illustrations

I'm Your Dolly

"Barbie-in-a-Box" By Joe Six-Pack. Tyler wasn't much of a boyfriend anymore. Jessica wanted to throw him out, but then a better idea came to her, in the form of the Barbie-in-a-Box service. Tyler better get used to pink. Book / 103 pages / 20 illustrations

His Life as a Trophy Wife

"The Puppy Mill" by Joe Six-Pack. Nick had a great life, but then it evaporated. Now he's down on his luck. In steps a wealthy executive willing to pay him handsomely to pretend to be his wife. What can it hurt? Book / 210 pages / 16 illustrations

Male Monday, Girl Friday

"Hey, Cutie!" by James J Craft. Daniel is going to be promoted from his average life to an exciting executive position. At least, that's what his bosses are telling him. They may not be telling him everything. Book / 58 pages / 20 illustrations

The Happiest Place on Earth

From the files of TGStories.com: "The Fairest One of All" By Joe Six-Pack. Will is a kid looking for a job. He gets one, performing as Snow White at a theme park. For Will, he doesn't suspect that playing the role and wearing the costume is slowly changing him, day by day. Book / 51 pages / 21 illustrations

Hello, Nurse

From the files of TGStories.com: "Quality Health Care" Dane is filling in as a nurse for his pal Jimmy at his new office. Although both are doctors, Dane begins to take to his new role as a nurse. Soon, he feels compelled to be the ideal nurse. Book / 44 pages / 15 illustrations

My Boss, The Bimbo

"If I Were a Betting (Wo)Man" By James J Craft, illustrations by blackshirtboy. CEO Lucas has a superiority complex. When his long-suffering secretary is able to feed into Lucas' competitive nature, he'll make any bet to prove his dominance over women. Book / 38 pages / 10 illustrations

He's the Girl They Want

"Rallies" by Joe Six-Pack. Spencer has a great new executive job in the food service industry, but first he's got to learn the ropes of the business by waiting on tables. He just doesn't quite fit in with the cheerleader theme. Yet. Book / 63 pages / 22 illustrations

Demoted and Degraded

"Trixie the Secretary" by Angela J. Cindy didn't much like Tom Jones attitude and his advances, so when she has the opportunity to help take the wind out of his sails, she takes it. But she had no idea that it was all designed to make Tom into Trixie the secretary. Book / 87 pages / 17 illustrations

I, Candy

"Sissy Sweets" by James J Craft, illustrations by rock-etxpert. Inheriting his family's bakery requires this young man to become the new face of the business. A female face. Book / 45 pages / 15 illustrations

Boyz II Girlz

"The Making of the Ballroom Brats" by Joe Six-Pack. The Ballroom Brats become the newest worldwide celebrity sensation. How did four unsuspecting guys at a fast food joint become the hottest girl group in music? Book / 113 pages / 34 illustrations

His Strangest Desire

"Employee of the Month" by Joe Six-Pack. Mick is declared Employee of the Month, and he's going to find himself hurtling headlong into facing his weirdest inner desire. Book / 59 pages / 19 illustrations

Hard Time or High Heels

"I'm Turning into My Mother" by James J Craft, illustrations by rocketxpert. Colby got deep into debt to a local gangster. Before long, he's on the arm of that very same gangster as his reluctant girlfriend. Book / 75 pages / 20 illustrations

Seriously Skirted

"The Show Piece" by KK. Illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Mel finds work at a clinic as a secretary. He slowly begins to fit to role. Book / 75 pages / 19 illustrations

Stories of the Supernatural

Changed and Rearranged

"Wrongs Make Wright" By Joe Six-Pack. Chris and Matt were rivals. Then, Matt decided to show everyone how smart he truly was by impersonating a teacher. But the disguise becomes more and more real, much to Chris' dismay. Book / 74 pages / 19 illustrations

From Pals to Gals

From the files of TGStories.com: "Mandate of the People" By Joe Six-Pack. Teens Jeremy and Stewart are good friends, but a bit thick in the noggin. When they jokingly nominate each other for Prom Queen, they slowly become the perfect candidates, thanks to some magic. Book / 45 pages / 16 illustrations

Crossed Fiction

Sisters for the Summer

"Camp Counseling" By Joe Six-Pack. Brock McCade always thought of himself as a real man, or at least he would be one, someday. After summer camp, he's no longer so sure. Book / 76 pages / 17 illustrations

They're the Girls for the Job

"Peace and Harmony" By James J Craft. Illustrations by blackshirtboy. Pete and Harmon need jobs bad. How far would they have to go to get them? Book / 64 pages / 19 illustrations

Blondie's Lost Summer

By KK. Illustrations by Fraylim. Carl's dream summer was about to become three months of dresses, heels and makeup. Book / 159 pages / 48 illustrations

I Never Wanted to be a Woman

"Politically Corrected" By Cheryl Lynn. Illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Michael's politically active mother has decided she's going to make her hippie son over into the daughter she always wanted. Book / 64 pages / 19 illustrations

Seriously Sissified

Revenge of the Cheerleaders

"Pansy Cheers" By Angela J. Patrick Sears was a football player trying to sleep with every cheerleader at his small college. He'd have to pay for his conquests. Book / 116 pages / 19 illustrations

He's Got His Mind Made Up

By James J. Craft. Illustrations by kinkyrocket. Corey has just a sliver of a chance to get into college, but that chance involves becoming his stepmother's maid. And she wants him to fit both the role and the dress. Book / 68 pages / 16 illustrations

Web Classics Revisited

Two Forms of ID

By Joe Six-Pack. Harvey had the unusual ability to convincingly imitate a teenage girl. In desperation, he has to use that talent to make some money. But when is enough enough? Paperback / 194 pages / text only



Reading is Fun de Mental!