

## Oyama's Kitchen – Renee Furtado

The sound of his beat-up Converse shoes squeaking echoed past every shop window. He yawned and looked around the still and quiet shopping mall. As he fumbled around in the pocket of his jacket, he heard a small sound from behind.

“Eh, what took you so long, huh. I’ve been waiting here for over two minutes, where have you been?” He turned to face the voice and looked down at a short woman staring at him with one thin eyebrow raised.

“Okaasan, I was ju-” he explained.

“Ah, ah, ah, I don’t want to hear any excuses.” she said, pushing him aside. “Give me the keys, Koji.” Finally pulling his hand out of his pocket and handing over a scratched-up key, he responded, “Mum, you asked me where I was, and I was only a minute la-” “Two minutes late.” she interrupted.

The lady’s hand slowly shoved in the silver key as she pushed open the door. The pair entered a small and cramped kitchen, only big enough for two countertops, a fridge, a stove, and a sink. The lady flipped on a switch and the fluorescent lights flickered on. “At least you’re not as tardy as your father, God knows how that man can get lost driving to his own shop. I’m basically running this place. Now, have you eaten yet, Koji?”

“I had half a protein bar on my way here so I’m full.” he replied. The woman burst out laughing saying “Ha, see you got that sense of humor from me. Come, come. How you supposed to study for university if you haven’t eaten?” She walked over to a big, metal freezer and started pulling out container after container. Koji took a seat next to the big pile of Tupperware that looked at him dauntingly.

Just as Koji’s mother was shoving fried rice onto a plate, a knock came from the back door. She put down her serving spoon and unlocked the door. A girl walked in and placed her bag on the counter. She was wearing a cropped dusky-green hoodie with her hair tied up in a messy bun. The girl gave a polite bow and greeted her saying “Ohayo gozai masu, Mrs. Oyama!” “See, Imari is still here earlier than your father, Koji.” replied the lady.

Koji stuffed his plate full of food in the microwave and grabbed a pair of chopsticks out of the cupboard. He looked out through the store front and saw the other shop owners slowly

get ready for another day. Mrs. Oyama had already started pulling out all types of woks and saucepans while Imari helped carry all the meat out of the huge freezer. Soon there was another noise of keys jingling from the back door. The handle turned and a tall man with dark black hair stood in the doorway. He was wearing a big puffy jacket and jeans that were a deep blue.

“Hi all. Hello Imari.” he spoke. The man went over to hug Mrs. Oyama, but she slapped his shoulder and said, “Where were you? So late!” The man replied, “I was bu-” “I don’t need any of you boys' excuses.” she snapped. “But you asked!” he exclaimed. Imari giggled and greeted him as well saying “How are you Mr. Oyama?” “My shoulder’s hurting now” he mumbled. Mrs. Oyama then said, “You better stop unless you want your other one to hurt too.”

The microwave beeped as Koji took out the heap of rice and carried it to the table. He could hear the sound of shoppers making their way into the shopping center and the smell of his family’s cooking filled the air. Imari started taking out spices and vegetables from the drawers to start making food for the lunch rush. Soon there was an array of noodles and stir-fries, accompanied by the sounds of sizzle and crackles.

Mr. Oyama added all different kinds of spices and herbs into the dish. The food court was soon buzzing with people coming to sit down for a meal after their morning shopping. Imari was busy at work packing take-away orders while Mrs. Oyama was cooking a variety of different noodles.

Koji stood at the register and looked at the line of hungry customers. He glanced in disgust at the fast-food stores with dozens of people ordering and picking up greasy brown paper bags with giant sugary milkshakes. The noise of the shoppers became louder as everyone started to find a table.

Koji took in a deep breath of air and asked, “Can I take your order?”