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Fairy Tales: A Compilation - The Bonsai Tree in the Bento Box

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The Bonsai Tree in the Bento Box

An Exploration of Food and Politics in Okinawa

KIANA FAIRBANKS

Languages and Literatures of Europe and the Americas 353 (20th Century Russian Arts and Culture)

Mentor: Dr. Anastasia Kostetskaya

Artist Statement

This fairytale is inspired by the tales I have read in LLEA 353. Having gained the knowledge of the structures and elements of a fairytale immensely helped in creating my own. “The Bonsai Tree in the Bento Box” is significant to my Japanese heritage and celebrates cultural differences. This tale also calls attention to the value of friendship and loved ones especially in times of hardship and change. Life is mysterious and unpredictable in nature; yet beauty can always grow from difficult situations.

Once upon a time there was a young girl named Sayaka. She and her mother had just moved from Japan to America over the summer. The weather had turned cooler as it was the onset of September. Soon she would be starting her first day of school at Norcrest Elementary. This school was just a couple of blocks down from where she lives. Sayaka was very excited for school, yet a bit nervous as she was a new student.

“Sayaka come here! Baba and Gigi want to talk to you on the phone.” her mother called out. Sayaka took a hold of the telephone and told her grandparents about America, her new backyard and how thrilled she was to go to school.

“How great to hear Sayaka, have you made any friends yet?”

“No, I haven’t made any friends but I’m hoping to make friends in class.” After this brief conversation, Sayaka handed back the phone to her mother and said goodbye to her grandparents.

Sayaka sprinted immediately into the backyard to explore. There were small lemon trees with budding flowers planted around her backyard. Tomato plants were growing in the back-

yard, presumably left by the previous owners of her house. Sayaka squatted next to the tomato plants and observed them closely. Suddenly, out of the corner of her eyes, she noticed a blue blur move swiftly across the yard. Oddly, the figure appeared to be shaped like a feline, but she couldn’t figure out quite exactly what she saw. She followed the strange figure in the direction she saw it run, but ended up in the corner of her backyard, facing the old wooden fence. Sayaka quickly forgot about the incident and she continued wandering about in her backyard.

“Sayaka, dinner is ready,” she heard her mother call out. Sayaka made her way into the house and was greeted with the aroma of miso soup and roasted salmon. Her mother looked at her expectantly and Sayaka took a seat at the dining table. “Are you hungry?” Sayaka nodded her head quickly as she became aware of her grumbling stomach. Her mother served her a steaming bowl of rice along with the homemade meal. “Are you ready for school tomorrow?” Her mother smiled at her.

“Yeah, I can’t wait to go to school! But...I do miss my friends from my old school.”



I am currently an undergraduate student of both Russian and theatre. In the Russian fairytale class, I was able to use the knowledge of the structures and elements that make up a fairytale whilst delving into my own creativity to create my piece. Writing this fairytale aligns with the strengths I wish to improve in my academic career; to expand my expression and to understand Russian art and literature more profoundly.

Sayaka looked down, swirling her spoon in the miso soup. “Don’t worry, we’ll visit Japan every summer and you’ll be able to see your friends then.” After eating dinner, Sayaka started to feel drowsy. Her mother tucked her into her bed and before she knew it, she was fast asleep.

The next morning, the light was shining through the blinds and Sayaka could hear the consistent ringing of her alarm clock grow increasingly louder. Sayaka quickly jumped out of bed and opened her closet to choose her favorite outfit. She pulled out a white top and a blue polka-dot skirt. She grabbed her bright red leather backpack that was gifted by her grandparents during the New Year. Before leaving, Sayaka called out to her mother, “Ittekimasu!” Her mother looked up and waved at Sayaka. “Itterasshai!” her mother called back. She brought her umbrella just in case it was going to rain because it was starting to get cloudy outside. On her walk to school she saw other children her age with their parents holding their hands. Sayaka thought this was unusual as all of her old classmates in Japan typically walked with each other.

Upon arriving at school, she saw an assembly of children being assigned to their new teachers. The principal walked up to Sayaka noticing her confused expression.

“Hello dear, who is your teacher?” Sayaka had written down her teacher’s name on a small sheet of paper and pulled it out of her backpack.

“My teacher’s name is...” Sayaka had difficulty trying to pronounce her teacher’s name. “Miss Clementine?” She handed the principal the crumpled note.

“Oh Miss Clementine! Come right this way.” She was brought to her classmates and was eventually led to her new classroom.

As she entered the classroom, Sayaka immediately noticed the colorful construction paper decorating the white walls of the medium sized classroom. *These must be for our future arts and crafts*, Sayaka thought to herself. After taking their seats and getting settled down, the students turned their attention to the front of the classroom, where a young woman stands. She had her light brown hair tied up in a neat ponytail and her face was graced with a gentle smile.

“Hello all, welcome to your first day of second grade. We will be learning a lot of interesting topics this year. Next class, we are having a ‘show and tell’ so be sure to think about what you want to bring.” Miss Clementine took notice of the soundless classroom. “You all seem very quiet today but I’m sure that will change throughout the year.”

The lessons flew by quickly and eventually the lunch bell sounded. A mass of students ran out of class to the lunch line to buy food. *That line is way too long*, Sayaka thought inwardly. Luckily, Sayaka had a bento box her mother packed for her. Children sat in groups with their friends at the lunch tables. Sayaka cautiously sat at the end of the table where a couple of children were sitting, trying to avoid attracting any attention to herself. She opened her bento to find that her mom had packed

her curry and rice with sweet corn. Sayaka smiled happily and breathed in the savory scent of the curry mixed with its sweet spices. As she was about to dig into her delicious meal, the young girl noticed a group of kids whispering and pointing at her, their faces scrunched up. Whispers of “ew what is that?” and “that smells so gross” echoed through Sayaka’s mind. The children got up and left the table leaving the new girl to sit alone. Sayaka felt her face burn up and tried to cover her face as she felt tears prick her eyes. She slammed the lid of her bento box back on and tucked it away in her backpack, trying to bury the scent with the items inside. For the remainder of lunch, Sayaka sat alone, thinking about the cruel words her new schoolmates said about the lunch her mother made. Eventually the bell rang, signaling the end of lunch and Sayaka dragged her feet to class, her head hanging low and her cheeks flushed.

The second half of class went by quickly and soon enough, it was the end of the day. Sayaka ran home, wanting to escape experiencing further embarrassment. She immediately retreated to her backyard upon her arrival home. She opened up her backpack and brought out her unfinished lunch. She cried as she ate, her tears dripping into her bento box.

“How was your first day of school?” She heard her mother call from the house. Leaving her bento box aside, Sayaka went indoors with hot tears running down her face.

Sayaka explained her whole day from start to finish. She described the harsh words of her classmates, the feeling of intense embarrassment she felt.

“I love the food you make me Mama, but I don’t want to bring it to school” Sayaka cried out to her mother. Sayaka’s mother stayed silent and calm, listening to her, and Sayaka caught her breath. Eventually she provided her crying daughter with a gentle hug and uplifting words of sympathy.

“Sayaka, sometimes people can be cruel, but you must understand that not everyone is like that”.

Sayaka looked at her mother, “Were they mean because I was different?” Hearing this from her own daughter clearly affected her mother.

“Maybe, but being different is a good thing. Life would be boring if everyone was the same Sayaka-chan”.

The sun went down and the sky turned dark blue with stars shining through as if the sky was punctured with toothpicks. Sayaka laid in her bed looking out the window when her mother came in to tell her about the fairy tale of *The Bamboo cutter and the Moon Child*. Sometimes her mother would tell Sayaka fairy tales before going to sleep, especially when she had a rough day. “Sweet stories for a sweet dream,” Sayaka’s mother always told her before plopping herself onto Sayaka’s bed and telling her a fairytale filled with positive thoughts. As Sayaka’s mother continued the story, her eyes felt heavy and she drifted off to sleep.

A bright blue light woke Sayaka from her deep sleep. She glanced over and saw it was the cat that she had seen before in her backyard. “Meow,” the cat looked up at her with eyes

just like the galaxy. Sayaka was startled yet fascinated by this glowing blue cat. She knew this was a sign of good luck. The cat had a collar with a tag engraved, "Aoui." Sayaka laughed to herself, "Oh, I like the color!" The cat ran out of her room and into the hallway. Sayaka threw the sheets off herself and ran after the cat. The blue feline then jumped onto the living room couch and slipped right through the sliding glass door leading to the backyard. Sayaka tried to go through the glass like the cat did but was unable to. She quietly slid the door open and was surprised by how magical her entire backyard looked compared to how it does in the daytime. There were vibrant flowers of various colors in the backyard. Her tomato plants were as large as tennis balls and were reflecting an orange red hue. The grass glistened like diamonds from the dew that had settled on its blades. Aoui stopped near where Sayaka was sitting earlier in the day. Sayaka realized that it was her bento box. She picked it up and saw that a small bonsai tree had sprouted from one of the leftover corn kernels in her rice. She couldn't believe her eyes.

The cat climbed onto one of the trees which transformed into a bamboo shoot. It was the same as what Sayaka had pictured in the fairy tale that her mother had read to her last night. Sayaka walked around the shoot and noticed a small red door on the side. She crawled inside and saw that it was a huge library with collections of books. She saw a glistening gold book from the shelf and picked it up and realized that the title was her name. Sayaka opened up the book and found that the book was written about her whole life from beginning to present. The chapters were divided into years. She flipped to the last page and saw an illustration of her smiling with her bento box next to a boy holding a tin thermos. Without notice a black hole, formed under her feet and she fell being enveloped by darkness.

Sayaka opened her eyes and found herself back in her bedroom. The morning rays were shining through the window and she sat up stretching her arms above her head. She hopped out of bed excitedly. The bonsai tree from last night was on her desk as if it had been placed there. Sayaka admired her little tree and thought of how it reminded her of her grandmother's collection of bonsai trees. She knew exactly what she wanted to bring to her show and tell.

The tables were set up in a line in the classroom so that all the students could display their item of significance. There were small glass figurines, baseballs and dolls dressed in quilted fabric. Sayaka placed her bonsai tree carefully on the table.

"Okay class it's time to present your item of significance. David you go first." A familiar boy with curly hair got up from his desk.

"Hi, my name is David, and today I will be presenting my item of significance." He held up a tin thermos with a large yel-

low rose blooming from it. "I moved from Bulgaria to America a few years ago. On my first day of school, I was made fun of by some children during lunch because of my accent. I was sad but a flower grew from my thermos and since then I have kept it. David showed his rose to the class proudly. The students were awed by the vibrant yellow rose. "My parents were so surprised when I showed them. They told me to keep the rose as a reminder of my heritage. Back in Bulgaria, we would go to the rose festival every summer.

Sayaka was surprised at how similar their stories were and became even more eager to share her own. *Maybe the cat was trying to connect me with Japan even though I am far away*, Sayaka thought. After David finished her presentation, Sayaka shot her hand up to go next.

"Hi, my name is Sayaka, and I actually have a similar story". Everyone in the classroom leaned in with shock and anticipation as she told her story. Dozens of hands flew up in the air at the end of her story. "Was the cat real?" "Tell us more about Japan!" "I want a bonsai tree too!". Sayaka couldn't keep from smiling as she answered her schoolmates' questions.

After the presentation, the students packed up their bags to leave for home. Sayaka noticed that David was about to walk out the door and approached him excitedly, "Hi, I'm Sayaka!". David smiled and said "Hi Sayaka, I'm David." "I really thought you had such a cool story".

"Do you want to walk home together?" David looked back at Sayaka in surprise, but eventually nodded his head with a giant grin on his face.

Sayaka and David began their walk home. Unlike the day before, the sun was shining and the flowers bordering the sidewalk were peppered with honeybees and orange butterflies. They talked about their lives growing up in other countries.

"Isn't it strange how this happened to both of us?" David looked at her.

"I think that it's a sign or something".

"Yeah I think so too", Sayaka nodded in agreement as they arrived at her neighborhood.

"Well, this is where I live. Maybe next time you can come over for dinner, my mother makes really good food!"

"Really? That would be so fun!" David looked around the neighborhood.

"Hey, I live just across the street from you."

"We can walk to school together!" Sayaka agreed, feeling pure joy that she had finally made a new friend. They smiled at each other for a moment.

"See you tomorrow!" Sayaka and David waved before she ran inside her house, eager to tell her mother about her day at school.

The End.