

TUINS CREATIVE WRITING ANTHOLOGY

# Small Worlds, Bright Voices

A Collection of Short Fiction in English

by Toyama University of International Studies Students

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富山国際大学学生による英語短編小説集

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## Introduction *Mark Frank*

This anthology presents a collection of short stories written by students in the Creative Writing course at Toyama University of International Studies (TUINS). Through the process of writing fiction in English, students explored how language can be used not only to communicate information, but also to express imagination, emotion, and personal perspectives.

The stories in this collection reflect a wide range of themes and settings. Some are grounded in everyday life in Toyama, while others explore memories, friendships, travel, fantasy, and the natural world. Each piece represents an individual student's attempt to experiment with storytelling, develop their voice in English, and share an original narrative with readers.

Writing creatively in a second language requires courage, patience, and curiosity. This anthology celebrates the effort of students who challenged themselves to think, imagine, and write beyond the limits of the classroom.

We hope that readers will enjoy these stories and appreciate the creativity and dedication that brought them to life.

## はじめに マーク・フランク

本書は、富山国際大学（TUINS）のCreative Writing授業で学生が英語で書いた短編小説をまとめた作品集です。学生たちは英語で物語を書く過程を通して、言語が単なる情報伝達的手段ではなく、想像力や感情、個人の視点を表現するための道具であることを体験しました。

この作品集には、さまざまなテーマや舞台の物語が収められています。富山の日常を描いたものもあれば、友情、旅、記憶、自然、そして空想の世界を描いたものもあります。それぞれの作品は、学生が英語で自分の声を探しながら、物語表現に挑戦した成果です。

第二言語で創作を書くことには、勇気、忍耐、そして好奇心が必要です。本書は、教室の枠を越えて考え、想像し、書くことに挑戦した学生たちの努力を記念するものです。

本作品集を通して、学生たちの創造性と熱意を感じながら、物語を楽しんでいただければ幸いです。

# The Beginning of Her Change



Chika is a college student in Toyama. She has long, soft brown hair and dreams of working in Toyama as a tour conductor. She loves Toyama because there are many festivals and beautiful natural places and also because the people are very kind and warm.

However, she had not realized these things before she had a certain experience.

At that time, she played saxophone in the brass band club at her high school in Toyama. She practiced very hard for brass band competitions. One day, her teacher, Mr. Ishizuka, spoke to the club members.

Mr. Ishizuka had short, straight black hair and always wore a suit. He asked everyone, “Do you want to play at the Toyama Marathon?”

All the members agreed, but Chika was against it.

“I just want to focus on the competition,” she thought. She felt this way because she had never gotten good results in past band competitions. Chika’s determination was strong.

When practice for the Toyama Marathon began, she couldn’t focus on her playing, and her heart felt clouded. All the members were looking forward to performing at the marathon, but her feelings had not changed.

Before she knew it, the day had arrived. She walked to the venue with footsteps as heavy as stone. The venue was filled with the runners’ energy and excitement. The sunlight shone brightly on the ground. She started playing the saxophone reluctantly.

After playing for a while, she saw a familiar face. It was her junior high school teacher, Mr. Terai. He had short brown hair and was wearing sportswear.

Chika was very happy to see him again.

She blew into the saxophone with all her strength. After that moment, she began enjoying the performance more because she could feel her teacher’s support. The runners’ sweat sparkled in the sunlight.

After the event, Chika quickly contacted Mr. Terai. She wrote, “Good job today! I realized you were running, Mr. Terai.”

Mr. Terai replied, “Long time no see, Chika. I’m glad to hear from you! Your performance was great!”

Chika felt her heart grow warm. At first, she had not wanted to take part in the event, but she realized the value of performing not just for herself, but for others.

“It’s surprisingly fun to do things for others,” she thought.

After that, she began receiving more compliments on her playing.

Mr. Ishizuka told her, “You’ve gotten better lately. I can feel your intention to be heard!”

Several months later, the day of the competition arrived. Chika was very nervous, and her mouth tasted salty from anxiety. There were many audience members in the seats, but she remembered everything she had done up to that moment. Fortunately, she won a gold prize. It was the best result she had ever achieved.

She thought, “This result is thanks to my teacher and the performance I gave at the Toyama Marathon.”

Now Chika dreams of working as a tour conductor in Toyama. She wants to give back to the community and its people. She loves Toyama and wants everyone to know about its many attractions. She studies Toyama tourism very diligently.

“I want to contribute to the community beyond music,” she thought.

She believes that her experience in the brass band club will support her in the future.

# First Mistake



In June, when Lina had gotten used to school, she came home as usual. However, she felt uneasy because it was her first day at her part-time job at a café. She had always dreamed of working in a beautiful café. However, when it actually came time to work there, she didn't feel as excited as she had expected. She slowly changed into her work clothes, checking the time again. After taking a deep breath, she decided to go.

After walking for about ten minutes from her house, she saw the café's sign. Stylish music was playing inside, and she realized that she was really going to work there. Two people stood behind the counter. One was Mirei, who was beautiful and a little mysterious.

Mirei smiled softly and said, "Nice to meet you. I'm Mirei." Her voice was calm, and it made Lina feel a little more relaxed. Standing next to Mirei was another worker named Kairi. He was tall, with short black hair and a serious expression. He looked quiet, but his eyes were kind.

"I'm Kairi," he said.

"I'm Lina. It's my first day," Lina replied nervously. Her hands felt cold, and her heart beat like a drum.

The café was filled with the smell of fresh coffee. Because of her nervousness, the sounds of cups and machines seemed louder than usual. Mirei showed Lina where everything was and explained the menu. It was filled with many stylish names for drinks and food. Lina nodded again and again, afraid she might forget something important. After a while, a customer with a serious face and a little gray hair came to the counter.

"Can I get a sandwich and a hot coffee?" he asked.

"Yes, of course!" Lina replied, forcing a smile.

But her hands trembled slightly, and she made a mistake. She gave the customer an iced coffee instead of a hot one. When the customer noticed, his expression changed.

"This isn't what I ordered," he said angrily.

"I'm sorry," Lina said. Her voice shook like a candle flame. Mirei quickly came over and apologized to the customer.

"It's her first day," Mirei explained kindly.

Kairi added, "We'll remake it right away."

Lina felt her face burn with embarrassment. After the customer left, she looked down at her hands.

"I'm really sorry," she said quietly.

“It’s okay,” Kairi said. “Everyone makes mistakes. You did your best. You’ll get used to it.”

Mirei smiled at her, and Lina’s eyes filled with tears at their kindness. When her shift ended, Lina stepped outside. The night air was cool and refreshing. She took a deep breath and thought about the day. It was difficult, but she had learned something important.

She looked up at the sky and saw a full moon.

The moon seemed to be smiling at her. Tomorrow, she decided, she would try again.

## Summer Vacation



After finishing all of her college admission procedures, Seoyeon began working at cafés. Before graduating from high school and moving to Japan, she had already worked in several cafés. Through those experiences, she met many wonderful coworkers. She still kept in touch with coworkers from a café in Korea that she had left a year earlier. During summer vacation, she had dinner with them whenever she returned home. At first, she thought it would be difficult to build such relationships in Japan. However, she was lucky and made many friends.

One of them was Momoko.

Momoko started her very first shift on the same day Seoyeon began working at a café near Kansui Park. Their first day of work was during Golden Week, so the café was extremely busy. They barely had time to talk, but by working together and helping each other, they became close very quickly.

When Seoyeon told Momoko she would return to Korea for summer vacation, Momoko said, “I want to go to Korea. I have never been to another country.” Seoyeon was happy that Momoko’s first overseas trip would be Korea.

“You can stay at my house while you are there,” she told her.

Momoko arrived in the afternoon and traveled from the airport to Uijeongbu, the city where Seoyeon lived. They ate budae-jjigae (sausage stew) for dinner and went to bed early, so the second day was their first full day together.

The second day was quite hot, but a refreshing breeze whispered through the air. Their first stop was Gwangjang Market to eat yukhoe, Korean beef tartare. It was one of the foods Momoko most wanted to try. The fresh yukhoe, sannakji (live octopus), and yukhoe bibimbap were all delicious.

“It’s really so good!” Momoko said after taking a bite. Seoyeon had been worried that foods like yukhoe and live octopus might be unfamiliar to a foreigner, but Momoko enjoyed them. After leaving the restaurant, they walked through the market and stopped at a hotteok stand. Hotteok is a chewy pancake filled with cinnamon sugar and crushed nuts.

“It’s usually a winter snack,” Seoyeon explained. “But since Gwangjang Market is so large, they sell it all year.” The freshly made hotteok was sweet and warm—the perfect dessert.

Later, they visited Changgyeonggung and Changdeokgung Palaces. Seoyeon had originally wanted to show Momoko Gyeongbokgung, the largest palace, but it was closed that day. It was Seoyeon’s first time visiting these palaces as well, so she worried about explaining them properly. However, there were information boards everywhere, and they read them together

or translated the Korean into Japanese. This helped them understand the history and stories of the palaces.

The sky that day was completely clear, without a single cloud. Seoyeon took many photos of Momoko, who wore a thin white cardigan and light blue denim jeans. Even now, Seoyeon's photo gallery is filled with images of Momoko smiling brightly.

After walking for a long time, they rested at a café and drank watermelon juice before heading to Myeongdong. There was a Korean barbecue restaurant there that Seoyeon's father, Inkwon, knew well.

"That place is the best Korean barbecue restaurant for me," he once said.

Although her father usually worked outside Seoul, he happened to be in the city that day for a conference. They met and ate samgyeopsal and moksal together. The meat was thick but very tender. After dinner, they went to a rooftop café overlooking Myeongdong Cathedral.

They had been thinking about visiting Namsan Tower but gave up because of time. However, her father suggested it. "If you want, we can go together by taxi," he said. Of course, they agreed.

Although they did not go up the tower itself, Namsan Mountain was high enough to see all of Seoul. The night view of the city was breathtaking. It was Seoyeon's first visit since 2023, and the city lights seemed even more beautiful than she remembered.

When Momoko said, "This trip was wonderful. Thank you," while waiting for the airport limousine, Seoyeon felt deeply happy.

This coming March, other coworkers from the same café are planning to visit Korea. Seoyeon feels very grateful because she knows how difficult it is to travel from Toyama, which does not even have direct flights. She realized that these friendships are treasures she wants to continue cherishing.

## Fishing Friendship



One day, Takumi and Johnny went camping deep in the mountains. The air was fresh, and they spent a peaceful afternoon by the campfire, listening to the chirping of birds while reading books. As the sun began to set, Johnny suddenly said that since it was autumn, he wanted to eat saury. So they decided to go to the nearby coast and fish. To the gentle sound of the waves, they prepared their fishing gear and cast their lines.

After a while, Johnny caught a horse mackerel. Takumi then suggested using the horse mackerel as bait. Johnny agreed and used it. To their surprise, as soon as they threw the horse mackerel into the sea, the line began to pull. When they reeled it in, they had caught a shiny saury. Excited, Johnny tried to use the saury as bait, hoping to catch an even bigger fish. However, Takumi became uneasy and told Johnny to stop and eat the saury.

Johnny responded in a firm tone, saying, “Don’t boss me around; you haven’t caught a single fish.” Takumi became angry at those words, and an argument began between them.

While the two were fighting, an old man who introduced himself as Kenji spoke to them. He said, “There are very big fish here, so why not go fishing and make up?”

The two pretended not to care about what Kenji said, since they had been fighting just a moment ago, but deep down they actually wanted to fish in order to reconcile. However, the quarrel soon started again. Takumi began heading back to the tent area when Johnny’s fishing line was suddenly yanked fiercely. Pulling with all his strength, Johnny found that the fish was so strong that he almost fell into the sea.

Seeing this, Takumi rushed over. Together they pulled as hard as they could and finally caught a gigantic fish. After catching it, they both laughed, out of breath, realizing how foolish their argument had been.

Night had fallen by then, and under the starry sky they cooked the gigantic fish over the campfire and enjoyed the meal together. In their hearts, they felt their friendship deepen.

Indeed, putting your all into something is truly wonderful.

Their bond was like the deep ocean—calm on the surface yet powerful beneath, like waves that never truly disappear.

## Memory on the Sea



When Ren, Takuma, Aoi, and Yui were in fourth grade, their school gave students a special opportunity to stay aboard a ship called the Kaiwo Maru. The Kaiwo Maru had sailed for about fifty-nine years and was now used for marine education and sailing experiences. Having heard exciting stories from older students for years, everyone was thrilled when their turn finally came.

Ren was a small boy with round glasses and slightly messy hair. He loved the ship. Stepping onto the deck, he whispered, “I can’t believe I’m actually boarding the Kaiwo Maru...”

Takuma, tall and sturdy with tanned skin and short black hair, laughed. “No problem! I’m climbing the mast first!”

Aoi, a natural leader with a ponytail and gentle eyes, smiled. “Don’t rush, Takuma. Let’s enjoy everything.”

Nearby, shy, short-haired Yui looked around excitedly. “Wow! It’s bigger than I imagined!”

Although the Kaiwo Maru no longer sailed the seas, to the children it felt like a real adventure. Early the next morning, they cleaned the deck together.

“My arms are already tired,” Ren said while wiping the floor.

“That’s the fun part!” Takuma laughed.

Later they faced the most challenging activity: climbing the mast. Yui looked up nervously. “It’s too high... I’m scared.”

Aoi encouraged her gently. “Yui, you can do it. Let’s climb together.” Taking a deep breath, Yui climbed step by step.

When she reached a high point, she shouted, “I did it! The view is amazing! I can see ships far out at sea!”

After a long day, they showered together and talked about their experiences. Takuma told Aoi and Yui how Ren slipped on the wet deck while cleaning and fell hard on his bottom.

Ren tried to stop him, blushing with embarrassment, but soon all four of them were laughing.

At dinner, the smell of curry filled the room.

“Curry on a ship tastes special,” Aoi said happily.

“I could eat three bowls,” Takuma said. “It’s like the curry is laughing.”

Ren smiled. “Today was the best day ever.”

That night, lying in bed, Yui whispered, “I’ll never forget this day.”

“Me neither,” the others agreed. One by one, they fell asleep.

Even today, the Kaiwo Maru stands quietly as a ship loved by many people. Yet within it, the voices of children’s adventures, laughter, and unforgettable memories still seem to linger.

## Autumn Has Come



In the quiet forest, the little fairy woke from her long summer sleep. Her name was Ava. She stretched her golden wings and smiled. “It’s time,” she said.

Flying softly above the trees, she waved her tiny magic wand, and sparks of orange light fell like rain. Wherever the lights touched, green leaves turned red, yellow, orange, and brown. However, her work was not finished yet. She flew around the forest, telling every animal that autumn had come.

“Good morning,” someone said. The first one to notice her was a bear named Lente. He slowly looked up at her and said, “So, autumn has come.” Then he yawned and fell back asleep.

Ava smiled gently. “He seems to sleep no matter what season it is,” she thought. She watched his calm breathing and said softly, “Sleep well, Lente.” She continued flying through the forest.

Next, she met a little squirrel named Arakel. “Autumn has come! Thank you for bringing the news,” he said brightly. He gave her a small acorn as a gift.

Ava was very happy because acorns were her favorite food. They talked for a while about the color of the leaves and how delicious the acorns were. Arakel said, “The higher the tree, the sweeter and tastier the acorns are. They get plenty of sunshine up there!”

Ava smiled and agreed. “That’s true, but the ones from the trees near the big river taste like honey. Those are my favorite.”

They laughed together as golden leaves fell gently around them.

After that, Ava found a little rabbit named Oryza resting under a tree. Her fur was as white as freshly fallen snow, and her ears moved softly in the cool breeze.

“Dear Oryza,” Ava said gently. “The wind is getting colder. It’s time to get ready for winter.”

Oryza nodded several times, her bright eyes filled with warmth. “Thank you, Ava. I’ll gather more leaves to make my house warm tonight,” she said. Then she hopped away lightly, her white tail disappearing among the golden leaves.

After flying through every corner of the forest, Ava landed on the tallest tree. She took out the small acorn that Arakel had given her, opened her mouth wide, and took a big bite. It was so sweet and delicious that her eyes sparkled with joy.

“Oh my, it’s truly delicious,” she whispered softly. Looking over the forest painted in autumn colors, she said quietly, “Autumn has come.”

## Let's Make a Cake



In autumn, when the leaves began to change color, the animals of the forest started gathering food to prepare for hibernation. However, the number of nuts had been decreasing year by year, so everyone was hungry.

On the edge of the forest lived two brother bears. The older bear was Tim, and the younger bear was Tam. There were very few nuts in the forest, so they were as hungry as the other animals. Just as they were almost out of energy, Tam suddenly had an idea.

“I know! Let's make a big cake using some nuts and share it with everyone in the forest.”

“Cake? That sounds delicious!” Tim said. “But there are too few ingredients to make it.”

“Hmm... what should we do?” Tam wondered. While they were thinking, a fox named Kon appeared. He was wearing a red muffler.

“What are you doing?” Kon asked. Tim explained the situation.

“There is a beehive near my house,” Kon said. “Shall I get a little honey from the bees?”

He greeted the bees politely and brought back some golden honey in a small jar  
“Thank you, Kon!” Tam said, his eyes sparkling.

Next came a squirrel named Chu-Kichi wearing a green sweater. “I'm good at cracking nuts,” he said. “I'll break them into small pieces for you.” Using his small teeth, he cracked acorns and walnuts. Tam watched the nuts turn into a fine powder.

“It looks like flour!” he said happily.

Then a raccoon named Ponta arrived wearing a yellow hat. “If we grind some clover from the field into powder, the cake will be soft,” he suggested. He brought back fluffy clover powder.

Little by little, everyone contributed what they had. The brothers went home and brought out a big bowl. They mixed the powders together and drizzled honey with wooden

spoons. Each time the spoons struck the bowl, a soft “clink, clink” echoed through the quiet forest. While mixing, they sometimes looked at each other.

Tam said anxiously, “I wonder if it will rise properly.”

Tim patted Tam’s head gently. “It will be fine. Everyone’s feelings are inside this cake.”

Soon the cake batter was ready.

“Okay, all we have to do is bake it,” Tim said. They placed it in a large stone oven and baked it slowly. Soon a sweet smell spread throughout the forest. The aroma wrapped around the forest like a warm blanket, warming the hearts of all the animals.

After several hours, the cake was finally ready. It was crispy on the outside and fluffy on the inside. They cut the cake with a knife and shared it with everyone, and the animals began eating all at once.

“It’s delicious!” everyone shouted. The cake was like a small sun, made with the warmth of togetherness.

Tam said happily to Tim, “It was possible because of everyone’s efforts.”

Tim nodded. “The cake rose not only because of nuts and honey, but also because of gratitude and kindness.”

They smiled quietly. As night fell, the trees rustled gently in the wind. The moonlight illuminated a small piece of cake, and the laughter of animals rose toward the stars.

That night, the forest air seemed a little sweeter, and even the leaves smelled faintly of honey.

# Happy Halloween



The doorbell rang sharply, cutting through the silence. Daniel slowly walked to the entrance and opened the door. Two boys stood there, their clothes dusty and their faces pale.

“Happy Halloween,” they said together.

Daniel blinked in surprise. It was the middle of the Australian outback, where houses were miles apart and neighbors were rare. The taller boy, Allan, had dark hair and serious eyes. The younger one, Eddy, was smaller, with messy blond hair and a crooked smile.

“Where did you come from?” Daniel asked.

Allan tilted his head. “From far away.”

Eddy giggled. “We walked.”

Daniel frowned. “You walked? In this heat?” The boys only stared at him, their eyes bright and distant. Hot air pressed against Daniel’s skin as insects buzzed loudly around them. He stepped aside.

“Come in. You must be thirsty.”

Inside, the air was cooler. The house smelled of dust and old wood, as if time itself had settled there. It was quiet—too quiet. Daniel realized he had not had guests for years, though he could not remember exactly why.

“Where’re your Halloween decorations?” Eddy asked, looking around the empty living room.

“I don’t celebrate it,” Daniel said.

Allan nodded. “Neither do we.” Their words felt heavy, like stones sinking into water.

“Well,” Daniel said with an uneasy smile, “I suppose I can find some sweets for you.”

He went to the kitchen. When he returned, the boys were gone.

“Allan? Eddy?” he called.

No answer.

Then he noticed two small shadows beneath the dining table. Four eyes stared back at him.

“What are you doing down there?” he laughed nervously. “Hiding from ghosts?”

They did not move. Outside, a car engine stopped. Gravel crunched beneath the tires.

Eddy whispered, “Mom’s here.”

Daniel froze. Through the window he saw a woman step out of the car. She had pale skin and tired eyes. Something about her felt painfully familiar. Suddenly, memories rushed into his mind like a storm.

Rain.

An accident.

A scream.

Then darkness.

Daniel turned back to the boys, who were no longer smiling.

“Who are you?” he whispered.

Allan answered calmly. “We just wanted to see you.”

Eddy added softly, “Mom said you forgot.”

“Forgot what?” Daniel asked.

“That it’s Halloween,” Allan said quietly.

“The day when the dead can come home.”

The front door opened. Warm light filled the room. Daniel knelt beside the boys, tears in his eyes.

“Then I suppose,” he said gently, “I’ve finally come home too.”

He reached out and smiled at them. “Happy Halloween.”

## Voices of the Snow and Mountains



Early spring came quietly to Toyama Prefecture. Winter was ending, and the Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route opened again. Along the narrow road, tall snow walls stood on both sides, shining white under the sunlight like giant mirrors. The light was so bright that people had to narrow their eyes. The cold air felt sharp on the skin, and each breath carried a clean, icy smell that still held the memory of deep winter.

Visitors walked slowly between the snow walls. Their footsteps made soft crunching sounds on the ground, mixing with the low sound of the wind. Some people spoke in small voices, while others looked up at the high walls in silence, listening carefully.

Among them was a woman named Haru, a tour guide. She was in her thirties and wore a simple knit hat and gloves. Her cheeks were red from the cold, and her movements were calm and careful. She grew up in a mountain town near this area, and she had learned from experience that the mountains were a quiet teacher—powerful and deserving of respect.

Before the tour began, Haru gently raised her hand. “Before we start,” she said quietly, “please stop and listen for a moment.”

The group became silent. Only the wind could be heard brushing against the snow walls.

“The mountains do not need us to praise them,” Haru said. “But if we walk with respect, they let us pass. That is enough.”

Near the back of the group stood a 13-year-old girl named Sakura. She was small for her age and had long black hair tied back. She was shy and usually did not speak much, but she liked listening carefully. Haru’s words stayed in her mind like a warm touch.

As they started walking, Sakura tried to walk as slowly as Haru. The tall snow walls seemed to press gently toward the narrow road. After a while, she spoke.

“Um... Haru,” she said softly. “Does the snow ever get tired?” Some people smiled, but Haru stopped walking.

“That’s a very good question,” Haru said. She bent down so she could look at Sakura’s face. “I think the snow remembers many winters,” she said. “So we should not hurry.”

Sakura nodded. She felt happy because an adult had listened to her seriously.

Later, the wind became stronger. Sakura held her scarf tightly and asked another question.

“Are you ever afraid of the mountains?”

Haru looked at the snow walls for a moment, listening to the sound of the wind.

“Yes,” she answered. “I am afraid sometimes. That feeling helps me stay careful. When you stop being afraid, you stop listening.”

Sakura remembered those words.

As Sakura walked beside the snow walls, the cold air touched her cheeks. Suddenly, the wind felt softer. Then she heard a small, quiet voice.

“Thank you for caring about us.” She stopped walking. Her heart was beating fast, but she felt calm, as if the mountains were watching over her.

After the tour, Sakura went to Haru. She played with the edge of her sleeve as she spoke. “Haru,” she said, “I heard the snow and the mountains say thank you.”

Haru looked surprised, but she did not laugh. She placed her hand on her chest.

“If that is true,” she said kindly, “it means you were really listening.”

Sakura looked up at her. “Can I become someone like you someday?”

Haru smiled gently. “You don’t have to be like me,” she said. “Just keep listening. That will help you find your way.”



Ten years later, spring came again. Sakura was now an adult and worked as a tour guide on the same route. She stood straight, but her movements were still gentle. When she spoke, people listened. “Please walk slowly,” she said. “The mountains are letting us use this road.”

From behind the group, a familiar voice answered. “You found your own words.”

Sakura turned and saw Haru. Her hair was a little gray now, but her smile was the same.

Together, they guided the visitors between the snow walls. Their voices mixed with the sound of the wind. Sakura smiled quietly. She knew that Haru had not only guided her through the mountains long ago, but had also helped her become the person she was now.

## Lily and Clown's Fantastic Amusement Plan



Lily was a snow cake who came to Toyama Prefecture eight months ago to conduct research. She especially wanted to see the Tateyama Alpine Route and its famous Snow Corridor, but because she had arrived from late summer to early autumn, she decided to explore other places in Toyama first.

One day, she visited Ainokura Gassho-style Village in Gokayama. There, at a museum, she met a curator named Itsuki. He taught her how to play the kokiriko, an instrument used in traditional performances. “If you vibrate it with both hands,” he explained, “it makes the kokiriko sound.” Lily was delighted by this encounter and felt that Toyama was even more mysterious and beautiful than she had imagined.

Later, Lily's friend Kelly came from Australia to visit Japan. After traveling through Tokyo and Osaka, Kelly arrived in Toyama. Since she already knew about the Owara Kaze no Bon festival, she invited Lily to watch the dances with her. Soon, they made a plan to visit the Tateyama Alpine Route together. Itsuki joined them, and he also brought his friend Yui.

The four of them traveled through Toyama while admiring the autumn landscape. Itsuki especially loved the red maples and yellow ginkgo leaves. He said that the leaves falling into the river looked like a beautiful red-and-yellow carpet. He took photos and sent them to Kelly and Lily. Kelly replied that the scene felt like the embodiment of Japanese aesthetics, while Lily became curious about why maples turned red in autumn.

After they visited the Snow Corridor, Kelly suggested something unexpected: a ghost investigation at Jike Tunnel. Lily became excited and added more places to the list, including the Hern Library, the underground passage of Minami-Toyama Station, and Ōkawadera Amusement Park. What had started as a sightseeing trip slowly became a paranormal adventure.

At Minami-Toyama's underground passage, a ghost suddenly appeared. Lily trembled with fear, but Itsuki used a mysterious curator's power to rewind time to when the ghost had still been alive. At the same moment, Lily transformed into a lily flower, and Kelly became a paulownia tree. Holding a maple leaf, Itsuki struggled to reverse the strange changes.

Then the clown appeared.

This clown was no ordinary clown. In fact, there were many immortal clowns, and they could rewrite the past, reverse the future, and turn the world upside down. The clown could see distant things, burn spirits into fire, and even transform reality itself into a story. Before anyone could resist, the clown took control of Ōkawadera Amusement Park.

The clown appointed Itsuki as the park's director and made Lily the president of its sponsoring company. Ghosts were inhaled, transformed into workers, and assigned jobs inside the park. The clown unlocked the powers of the maple, paulownia, and cherry trees planted there, allowing them to burst like fireworks, regenerate from sparks, and spread naturally. Soon, the park was no longer bound to one timeline and could move across different eras.

The clown expanded this strange empire further, acquiring amusement parks in other prefectures and introducing advanced technology gathered from around the world. The park became a place where ghosts, trees, machines, and impossible ideas all existed together.

Later, Schrödinger watched a television program about Lily's journey in Toyama and then prepared for a trip to another world. Theseus also watched mysterious programs and traveled through strange dimensions shaped by warped time and imagination. Meanwhile, the amusement park continued to grow under its new management philosophy, blending supernatural power with careful planning.

In the end, Lily's research trip to Toyama became something far greater than tourism. It became a fantastic journey through beauty, ghosts, transformation, and imagination—a story in which Toyama itself seemed to open the gate to another world.

## The One Who Carries the Stars



Yuzu was a nineteen-year-old university student living in Toyama Prefecture. Her name came from the yuzu tree that has grown in her family's garden. Every spring, the sound of snowmelt flowing gently into the rice fields calmed her heart. She grew up listening to that sound, watching the sky reflected on the water's surface, and feeling the slow change of the seasons. Toyama had always been her hometown. Yet since entering university, Yuzu had begun to ask herself: Is it enough to stay here?

She knew she loved this place—the mountains, the fields, and the people—but she could not clearly explain the reason for that love, not even to herself. While many of her classmates talked about studying abroad or moving to big cities, Yuzu felt torn between the wider world she had not yet seen and the land that had shaped her.

Yuzu entered university through a recommendation. During the interview, she talked about her high school activities in agriculture. One professor said to her, "I also work in rice fields. Let's go together." She was very happy to hear this. After entering university, Yuzu looked for the professor and was lucky to take his class. After the first lesson, Yuzu asked him, "How can I go to the rice fields with you?" He was surprised but agreed with a warm smile.

Later, Yuzu went to Nanto City with the professor and his family. They planted rice in a field owned by the Jomura family. Even though it was their first meeting, the family welcomed them warmly. They ate meals together and stayed at their home. After that, Yuzu visited their house many times to harvest rice and help with house repairs. Through these experiences, she learned the importance of trust and strong relationships in local communities.

One day in her Creative Writing class, Yuzu met Minji, a Korean exchange student with beautiful long black hair. Minji spoke fluent Japanese and was curious about everything, from local food to daily customs. She often asked Yuzu about life in Toyama, listening carefully to each answer.

One afternoon after class, Minji said quietly, "It's beautiful here, but it feels very calm. Sometimes I can't tell one town from another."

Her words were honest, not unkind, yet they stayed with Yuzu long after they were spoken. She realized that what felt natural and comforting to her might be difficult for someone from outside to notice.

A few weeks later, Yuzu invited Minji to an old folk house in Nanto City. Surrounded by mountains and rice fields, it was a place impossible to reach without a car. Yuzu wanted Minji to experience Toyama not as a visitor, but as someone stepping into everyday life. The family who owned the rice field welcomed Minji warmly, even though it was their first meeting. They handed her work gloves, and when Minji struggled to walk through the soft mud, the family laughed gently and offered encouragement.

In the afternoon, they walked through the town of Inami. The air was sharply cold, and the faint sound of woodcarving tools echoed from distant workshops.

Minji asked about the wood carvings, the craftsmen, and the people who lived there.

Then she turned to Yuzu and asked, “Why do you choose to stay in your hometown?” Yuzu stopped walking. She felt a strong connection to this place, but she had never tried to put that feeling into words.

In the evening, everyone prepared dinner together. Minji cooked a simple Korean grilled pork dish and kindly shared the recipe. The fragrant aroma of the sauce mixed with the sweet scent of fruit and quickly spread through the room. The conversation was awkward at times, filled with pauses and gestures, yet no one seemed uncomfortable. The family showed them how to cook local vegetables, and Yuzu saw a white eggplant for the first time. The basket filled with colorful vegetables looked so beautiful that she took many photos, hoping to remember the moment.

Late that night, they stepped outside into the biting cold air. Above them, the sky was filled with stars—more than Yuzu had ever truly noticed before. They were scattered across the darkness like quiet promises.

Minji stopped, looked up, and whispered, “I’ve never seen stars like this. It feels like the sky is closer here.” Hearing those words, Yuzu felt something inside her slowly shift. She felt like the surface of a rice field, quietly reflecting the wide sky above.

Toyama was neither small nor silent. It simply spoke in a gentle voice.

Staying here did not mean turning her back on the world. It meant opening this place to others and sharing its everyday beauty—water, soil, meals, and stars.

The next morning, on the way home, Minji smiled and said, “Thank you for bringing me here. I feel like I understand Toyama a little better now.”

Hearing that, Yuzu finally found her answer. She did not want to leave this place behind. She wanted to be someone who could share the quiet beauty of this land with others and connect Toyama with the wider world, starting from here.