



Summer Pockets Short Story [Naruse Kobato]

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A detailed illustration of an elderly man with white hair and a beard, wearing a dark blue tank top. He is shown from the chest up, turned slightly to his left, with his right arm bent and hand near his shoulder. The background is plain white.

# Summer Pockets

サマー ポケットツ

Amidst the Summer Brilliance

Chapter Kobato  
We are All Still the Same

One August day...

The calm waters of Torishirojima are in chaos tonight due to the coming storm. Looking down at the situation from the top of a cliff, three figures down below can be seen.

"God's anger has caused the sea to become stormy."

Said the man in the middle in a grave voice. He donned scars along his muscular body as proof of the countless battles he's seen in his lifetime. The men on both of his sides were not of a lesser breed with their sturdy physiques. As the three of them stared at the sea with a mysterious look, their faces surfaced amidst the darkness of the night, faces full of wrinkles, both of aging and of pain.

"An omen of an upcoming disaster?"

"How is the barrier holding up?"

"The barrier has been gone since long ago."

"Ever since Byakko's absence."

"How long will we be able to sustain it, I wonder..."

"Indeed..."

The man in the middle nodded.

"A new fourth king is needed, we must reestablish the barrier."

"Again with that? Our children have been poisoned by the needs of the modern world, they pay no attention to our efforts."

"If we talk to them about the disaster or the barrier, they'll see us as nothing but nuisances."

"Shall we look for younger folk then?"

"Younger...?"

"Someone the age of our grandchildren?"

"Then we should go for the grandson of Mitani, he looks like the most energetic of the bunch."

"I know that one, he roams through the city half naked, that weirdo."

"Well, isn't it fine? It's just an island."

"Indeed, that is not a problem in and of itself, but I've seen this kid completely stop in his tracks, fiddle with his nipples and muster some nonsense along the lines of 'Tomorrow will rain...' as if he was doing some sort of prediction."

"That's scary."

"Creepy!"

"... I can't allow such a guy to succeed the Seiryuu title! For my place to be occupied by a weirdo who plays with his nipples... I can't, I caaaan't."

"Stop crying."

"There's more youngsters on the island. Like that one who likes sports... table tennis was it?"

"The grandson of Kanou?"

"He bears the aura of a diligent young man."

"But he's a complete fool."

"... Is he really?"

"... I see."

"Is there any upright youngling around here?"

"I wonder about the future of this island."

"With how things are going, maybe we should consider a woman for the role."

"Has the most promising girl of this island awakened yet?"

"Sorakado Ai... Should she join us she could even get the rank of Kouryuu... but right now that's impossible for her."

"... There's one more candidate."

The man in the middle, who's been silent for a while, spoke with a solemn tone. The other two looked at him.

"What? There's another youngster we didn't know of?"

"Yes, a really determined young man."

"His name?"

"His name? If I'm not wrong it's... Takahara Hairi."

The man bursts out laughing as the waves break into the cliff and splash the trio.

Next to the island's town hall, there's a building for use of the Young Islanders' Association, although that's in name only since it's mostly used by the elderly as a relaxation place where third rate performers and enka musicians get invited to entertain them, sometimes small events take place there as well.





It's in that place where, first thing in the morning, a lone young man is brought by the three of us in an almost captive state, a youngster known on the island as a relative of Katou that goes by the name of Hairi. He looks at the three of us dauntingly standing in front of him and his face immediately darkens.

"So you have come."

"What, what is it?"

Suzaku and Seiryuu surround the young boy and stare at him with deep curiosity. They both start to examine his body through and through with their burly hands, which turns out to be too much for Hairi.

"He's got good eyesight and hearing ability!"

"He seems healthy!"

"His face has no anomalies either."

"A pretty average guy!"

"Please get off me. And how can you tell my eyesight and hearing just from that?"

"I think it's fine, he gets a pass!"

"Huh?"

"Takahara Hairi! You have been chosen as a candidate to challenge the Four Kings."

Hairi becomes dumbfounded by my declaration.

"I don't really understand."

"Like I said, you have been granted the right to challenge us in order to become a member of the Four Kings."

"What's the Four Kings?"

"The guardians who protect the island from disaster."

"Huh... Four Kings... Guardians... Something like the ceremony of the summer bird Shiroha performs?"

"Exactly, we're counting on you."

""Wait a minute! As soon as summer ends I'm leaving the island, there's no way I can do such a task."

"What... I didn't hear anything of that, Kobato."

"This is a first for me too. I thought you were going to settle on the island."

"Ahaha... I'm sorry, but I'm just here to help organizing my Grandma's storehouse."



"Hmmm, then what about this?"

"What?"

"Marry a woman of this place and become an islander."

"Eeeeeeeeh!?"

Hairi shakes violently.

"But, then... For example, it can be whoever?... Even Naruse-san's granddaughter... Is just a supposition, I mean..."

He throws a glimpse at me.

"Anyone but her!"

I immediately reject the idea.

"Ah, I thought so."

"What about someone from my household instead of Naruse's?"

"Uhm..."

"I'm Seiryuu."

"Seiryuu-san's grandchild?"

"Yes, my granddaughter."

"I'm sorry for the rudeness, but if I could ask her age..."

"She's around her 40s."

"Isn't that a bit too old!? She's around the age of my own mother, and 'in her 40s' is too broad."

"She's in her early 40s I believe."

"No way! I'm really sorry, but the age gap is too big."

"Don't worry, this is the countryside, so it's pretty normal."

"Stop saying weird stuff. Alright, I'll give you the privilege of meeting my granddaughter then."

Now it is Suzaku who takes a step forward.

"And her age is..."

"Ten years old."

"That's too low! Please, someone at least 18."

"That's what you're into?"

"I don't mean it like that..."

Hairi clears his throat for a moment, looks around the room and speaks to us in a lower tone.

"I mean, there's tons of obstacles, don't you think?"

"This kid's saying some strange stuff. What do you mean by obstacles?"

"I mean, when you think of all the possibilities... Gahhahaha..."

"what's gahhahaha?"

"Kobato, is this one right in the head?"

"I-I think so..."

And he looked like such a determined man when we fought on the sea...

"In any case, the talk about your future wife can be postponed, for now let's focus on how you're moving to the island."

As we start making plans for the future, Hairi breaks through the conversation.

"Please stop deciding things on your own!"

"Then what, will you come up with a plan B to prevent the disasters? If not, stop being so uncooperative."

"I'm the one who wants you all to make more sense, what's this disaster anyways?"

"That's... Ghaaaaaaaaaaah!"

At that moment Seiryuu falls to the floor in anguish.

"What is it!? Don't tell me the disaster is already..."

"My back, it hurts. This is too much for me to bear... I'm sorry, but I leave the rest to you"

"Senryuuuuuuuuuu!"

"Hoooooooooooooooooooooh!"

"Oh!? Suzaku!? Don't tell me you too!?"

I could be next at this pace.

"The Four Kings are falling one by one... We can't lose any more time."

Seiryuu groans in pain.

"He might be an idiot, but I don't care anymore if he plays with his nipples."

"Wait a minute there! I can't just pretend I didn't hear that."

Hairi strikes the table.

"!?"

Even I get startled by his threatening attitude.

"What's that about playing with his nipples, whose grandchild are you talking about!?"

"Don't get all fired up, we're talking about a boy, didn't you pay attention?"

"Oh I see... a dude... just what was I imagining..."

"Don't get all gloomy either."

"He's in that age after all."

"In any case, bring them both! The one who plays with his nipples, and the other idiot too."

My loud voice freezes the place, we all look at Hairi.

"I have to do it!?"

"Please!"

"I don't mind, but... just who are you talking about!? The one who plays with his nipples and the other idiot I mean..."

Some time passes...

"I brought them."

After an hour passes, Hairi comes back dragging two suspicious looking guys with him.

"When I thought about who the nipple guy and the idiot could be, I got an idea pretty fast."

"You really think of your own friends like that?"

"Yes."

"Welcome, you two! Rejoice! You have been granted a chance to succeed the title of one of the Four Kings."

Seiryuu and Suzaku, who've been suffering from back pain up until now, raise their voices.

"I don't really understand, but I respectfully decline."

"Why!?"

"Because it looks like a nuisance!"

The grandson of Mitani looks back at Hairi with a bored expression.



"Hairi, clearly you don't know since you're not from here, but it's best to not hang around these gramps too much."

"Hey, kid who plays with his nipples, what are you talking about?"

"Nothing in particular... Wait what!? Please don't call me that."

"That's right, we were already calling him nipples guy, since it's shorter."

Hairi butts in with a weird comment.

"Nipples guy!? I never had a pet name like that."

"It's because you were shaking and playing with your nipples that we call you that."

"I'd never do such a perverted thing! And I'm not shaking my nipples because I want to."

"Then why?"

"That's... the swing on the direction of the wind naturally, like the branches on a tree."

"Nonsense! Nipples don't work like that."

"No no seriously, my nipples are really sensitive to the wind, want to see?"

"I don't! And you've been exposing them from the start anyways!"

"Anyways, let's leave or this won't end."

Mitani and Kanou's grandkids where about to leave, leaving Hairi looking anxious and confused.

"But this seems really serious. Something about a disaster and a barrier, we can't leave it as is."

"That's some pretty shady talk. What's this barrier exactly?"

"Shut uuup!"

This nonsense was getting us nowhere, so I raised my voice.

"Shu!?"

"Listen you youngsters who have been seduced by the city life and have lost their harmony with nature, the gods of the sea are in anger!"

"Youngsters who have been influenced by foreign views and have become unable to feel the spirit of their own land."

"Didn't you just yell 'Shut up', though?"

"Silence!"

"Ah, he corrected himself."

"This is why we told you this wouldn't end if we didn't leave."

"I'm sorry, but I have training to do, so I'll be taking my leave."

Before I could say anything, Hairi was the one who stopped them.

"Please wait a moment. This could have to do with what Shiroha said."

"What?"

"Shiroha said that during the day of the festival, an unfortunate event will happen. Maybe that disaster you're talking about has something to do with it."

"I see, that's very likely."

"We can't rule it out."

Seems like the other two boys finally became interested.

"I understand. Kobato-san, should there be something we can do to help... then by all means."

Hairi stands up, his eyes are full of determination now. I wonder what he discussed with Shiroha, but I'll leave it at that for now.

"I like those eyes. Maybe you're up to the task of taking the intensive training to become one of the Four Kings."

"T-Training? Like the squats of the Four Kings?"

"Don't think it ends there."

I let out a bold laugh.

"Eh... What will you make us do?"

"You lot will go to a training camp to acquire the titles of the New Four Kings! Go grab your stuff and let us meet at the mountain, you'll stay there for two nights and three days!"

"Eeeeeeeeh!?"

"That much..."

"Did you think it'd be easy to acquire the title of one of the Kings?"

"I guess you're right."



And so, their strict training began. They get up from bed at 5 AM and sing the island's hymn, then comes a standard routine of running and lifting. We stimulated their pressure points with moxibustion in order to make their hidden potential come out. During the evening, once we made sure they were exhausted, the squat hell of the Four Kings would begin. And to put an end to the day, they would look at the sky and yell...

"Torishirojima is fun!"

"Torishirojima is a great place!"

That was for 2 nights and 3 days, but maybe for them it felt like an eternity.

"Say, Hairi, there's something I don't really get..."

Mitani's grandson murmured with a gloomy face.

"What is it?"

"Does the wind shake my nipples or do my nipples shake the air around them and create wind?"

"Both are impossible, but the latter seems even more unlikely. Nipples like that don't exist."

"Hm... What a coincidence."



"I was wondering something similar. Is the ping pong ball the one that hits my racket, or is the racket the one that hits the ball?"

"We're both troubled by this!"

"Hmm, seems like they are ready."

I nod with a satisfied expression. In truth, they surpassed all my expectations. Maybe they can...

"Well then, we're putting up the barrier!"

"Yes!"

The three youngsters join arms and let out an immense roar. At first I thought the blowing wind was shaking Mitani's nipples, but I was wrong, they really were moving on their own. Hairi, with a straight face, was praying. The mysterious power of words that led their yell was imbued with the result of their harsh training and the strong spirit they forged during that time.

"Oooooooooooooooooooooohhhh!!"

The mind of the four men become one. Their prayers become their strength, became the barrier that will protect this island from the approaching evil. This is the power of the four Taoist gods: Genbu, Seiryuu, Byakko and Suzaku.

"Wait a minute, four men...?"

"But the younglings are but three."

"Indeed. Who is the fourth one..."

"Uoooooooooooh... Tokuda's technique is best on the  
woooooooooorld!!"

Some weird chant got mixed in between!

"Uoooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooh!!"

...

"Alright."

The three of us older folk gather and look at the sky.

"The barrier is finally up, isn't it?"

Hairi asks with a refreshed look.

"Not at all, there's nothing up really."

"Eh!? What happened to the barrier then?"

"Well that's...that's a matter of mood."

"A matter of mood!?"

"Please do your best from now on."

"My best doing what?"

"During the time the island is most vulnerable to crime, we need you three to stand here on the lookout."

"For how long?"

"Probably the whole day."

"The whole day!? That's impossible!"

"I don't wanna!"

"I refuse."

The complaints of the three pile up, I can hear an additional voice yelling 'I'll show you Tokuda's true power' echoing somewhere.

"And what's this disaster we'll prevent by staying here anyways? You even just said 'crime' and not disaster..."

"Hmmm, this is the season where poachers appear."

"Poachers!?"

"They hide under the veil of night and fish for sea urchins, those scoundrels."

"Urchins... poachers... lame."

The three of them groan.

"What's that about lame!? Do you have any idea how expensive sea urchins are?"

"It's not about the price. We thought something more serious was going to happen, like a natural disaster."

"Whahaha. Of all things, you were expecting something so unrealistic."

"For several years now, Nomiki-chan's been the one preventing poachers from approaching this place. But she's been feeling a bit under the weather lately..."

"To have a sixth sense that alerts you to poachers... that's kinda scary."

"Scary?"

"In any case, we're counting on you, Byakko."

"Please don't go on giving me weird names."

"Weird names!? For you to mock the tittle of one of the Four Kings of all things... I let a lot of things slide since you are but young brats, but it seems I have to forge your pressure points a bit more... Haaaaaaa."

Suzaku takes a deep breath, a mysterious vapor starts to emanate from his body, which gradually swells up until his clothes tear apart. The Takahara brat looked like he was going to say something... but then he reconsidered.

"Eeeeeeeeh... Wait, you look completely healthy right now!"

"Haaaahaha! Seems like training alongside you, I regained my old strength."

Next is Seiryuu, who with another weird roar makes his muscles gain mass once again until his shirt is torn apart. I can't lose to them now.

"Haaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

My muscles start to destroy my own clothes.

"Why are even your jeans ripping apart... huh?"

"Gahaha! This is the result of tempering my butt cheeks!"

"They're getting too overboard!"

"I think... I can't look at these three the same way again..."

Hairi shudders.

"The butt cheeks... I forgot to train that part myself."

"Don't agree with them, Tenzen."

"Hey! The three honorable elders over there!"

We hear a loud voice in the distance, and it was...

"I seem to have caused you trouble, but everything is fine now."

The Nomura girl approaches us with a relaxed pace, while carrying a huge water riddle on her back. Paying no attention to us, she raises her rifle with a triumphant look.

"Nomiki? I thought you weren't feeling well."

Asks Hairi worriedly.

"I caught a cold, but nothing too serious."

"It might be kinda late to ask but, Nomiki, you used to stand here looking for poachers?"

"Yeah, sort of."



"Although even for myself there's places my eyes can't reach. For these people here to help me even in their retirement years goes to show you how much they care for the island and its people. I deeply respect them for that."

"How lively."

"More like, we became lively."

"Eh?"

"We're happy new winds are blowing through the island."

"New winds?"

"Don't you get it?"

"...Me?"

"That's right, with the wind you created, my nipples are shaking."

"Gross! How does that even work?"

"It's the same as people who can make their ears twitch."

"Huuh, no, I don't really get it."

"Enough of this nonsense. Disappear."

"Gyaaa!!"

"Hah, Kobato... This feels rather nostalgic."

Says Suzaku as he watches over the lively youngsters.

"What's nostalgic?"

"They look like us when we were younger."

"We weren't as idiotic, though."

"Fufu. Don't fool yourself, as we get older, we should stop being so arrogant."

"We were as foolish and reckless as them."

"Indeed."

"Yes... and so dazzling."

"What??"

Seiryuu looks back at me surprised, and I try to fool him right away.

"No, the sunlight is too bright..."

"Really?"

"I've made up my mind! I'll allow that Takahara Hairi boy to marry my granddaughter."

Suzaku declares suddenly.

"But your grandkid is 10."

"I'm telling you he should go for an older wife, considering how unreliable he looks."

"There's a limit to how much older, as your granddaughter could be the boy's mother."

"Ehen!"

I clear my throat loudly to catch the attention of those two.

"What matters is not the age, but the mutual feelings for each other."

"..."

Suzaku and Seiryuu look at me.

"Hoooh? The mutual feelings, you say..."

"In any case... You wouldn't allow him to wed your own granddaughter, since she's so precious to you."

"No... well... Maybe I can think about it, depending on his behavior from now on..."

I think for a moment. The image of my dear Shiroha receiving the boy while donning an apron. Her smile resembles my wife's from days long past...

"I can't after aaaaalll!!!!"

There's no way I can allow that pipsqueak to take Shiroha. Someone suitable for her should be, should be... I don't know yet, but I can't allow it right now!!!!

"Hey Seiryuu, I actually just remembered something."

"What is it?"

"Back when Kobato's lone daughter married, he was acting the same as right now."

"Now that you mention it..."

"Seems like nothing really has changed, after all."

"You may be right."

At that moment... The world was full of possibilities. Even on this tiny island, anything could happen... Playing everyday without rest...

That's right. Nothing has changed ever since. Not us, not this island, and certainly not this radiant sky.

