



SAN

written and illustrated by

IORI KIKUCHI

I am a Japanese girl.

I don't have any confidence.

I'm a child, but my arms and legs are long,
like those of an adult.

If I walk around, others stare at me.

I hate my name and my personality.

I don't like myself.

I compare myself to others.

This is my story of SAN,

who is like the sunshine and

changed this weakling, who is me.

A large yellow circle is partially covered by a red ring, creating a stylized background. The red ring is thick and follows the curve of the yellow circle, leaving a portion of the yellow circle visible on the right side.

Dear SAN,

Lots of love to you.

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1

One day when the cherry blossoms
were in full bloom in the park,
a very beautiful looking boy
was playing by himself.
He was practicing something.

ME: "What are you doing?"

I spoke to him without thinking.

BOY: "Practicing to be 'REAL.'"

I'm trying to be 'REAL.'"

ME: "'REAL?'"

BOY: "Yeah. And you? What do you want to be?"


ME: "I'm ... I don't have dreams."

I cannot answer now.

I'm only six years old.

I don't know.





BOY: "No? Hmm. What's your favorite thing to do?"

Umm, also what do you not like to do?"

ME: "What I like ... I don't know ... But I hate me!"

BOY: "I see. It's good you are aware of that.

But why don't you love yourself?"

ME: "Wait ... But ...

What does it profit me to love myself?"

This is my bad habit.

I do not give thought to my words before I say them.

I must learn to see them in my mind first,
before I let them out.

BOY: “If you don't love yourself,
you can't love the people around you. So if you're... Ah!
First of all, what's your name? How old are you?”

ME: “... I'm YO, and I am six years old. ... How about you?”

BOY: “Hey! YO. I'm six too! Nice to meet you! I'm SAN.
It is hard to write my name in Kanji. Please watch.”

Then, he wrote his Kanji in the sandbox.

YO: “... 燦 (SAN). I never saw this before.
This character is really cool!”

SAN: “Yeah! Isn't it cool! Call me SAN!
This is nice right? I like my name a lot.”

I am jealous of him.

He is bright and brilliant like the Sun.

SAN is a perfect name for him.

But he doesn't know my name.

He didn't ask me for the KANJI of my name.

I think I look too gloomy.

SAN: “YO. If you hate yourself so much,
you would hate your friends, too.”

YO: “... wait ... what do you mean?”

SAN: “Because then they are friends with YO who hates herself.

Can you like those who'd have a friend like you?

It is so sad carrying such hate from hating yourself.”

YO: “... Certainly. ... I see.”



SAN: "So why don't you just change?

It's not weird or anything to love yourself.

The more you understand yourself,

and study and work hard,

the more you can be understanding and kind to others.

Otherwise you will waste your time.

You are talking to me.

You want to be with people, don't you?

I want to be friends with you."

I was very happy.

This is my first time to give thought

to my words before I say something.

Why do I want to answer

his words so much?

YO: "Yeah... Yeah, I guess so. Thank you.

... I want to... I want to change!"



Naturally my mind spoke out.

SAN is amazing.

I feel that my heart and soul are becoming
more and more beautiful.

I want to be like SAN,
who is very powerful and cool!

I want to be able to face someone directly,
just like SAN, and make them smile like the Sun.

YO: "I wonder if I can love myself like you do.

I wonder if I can be confident."

SAN: "You are already a nice and straightforward girl."

After this, he was impatient to ask a question.

SAN: “Hey, is it ok to ask you more? Are you Japanese?”

YO: “Yeah, sure. I am a Japanese girl.”

I guess SAN has never met such a tall girl like me.

But he is tall, too. His beautiful face is like a girl.

SAN: “Ok. I am Japanese too.

And ... does it mean that you are a straight girl?”

YO: “Oh wait... I cannot understand ... what do you mean?”

SAN: “Well, people I got to know told me about how there are various people in the world. Just as there is such a variety of skin colors, genders and sexual preferences can also vary widely. For example, there is a boy who will have his girlfriend, and a boy who will have his boyfriend. Also, there is a child who was born as a boy but he wants to be a girl. I don't want to hurt someone just by judging his or her appearance.

I am a straight boy. But some people are confused, because they think I am a girl, because of my pretty face.”

I am sorry, SAN, if I may have offended you by doing the same thing as other people who have misread what and who you are.

SAN: “I am just trying to get to know YO properly in complete honesty. So, if possible, can you tell me what thoughts you have about this? And what type of person you were born as?”

I am happy. No one has ever treated me so politely.

SAN makes me to realize the important things.

YO: “Okay. Thank you for asking. Now I see what you mean. Well, I am a girl and also straight, but due to my height and face, people tend to misunderstand my gender, as they do for you. There is no one to confirm my feelings. That is why it is nice to meet you. Thank you. Ah! I wish I could be as cool as you.”

SAN: “Thank you for telling me.

Nice to meet you, YO!”

SAN gave me a gentle smile and a hug. This was a wonderful meeting with him.



2

Then I used to play with him in the park after school, though not every day.

It had been almost a year since we first met.

We were chatting more than playing.

I loved the time I spent with him.

SAN had talked about the first day we met.

We talked about being 'REAL' today.

YO: "... Hey. You said that you want to be 'REAL' before.

What does this 'REAL' mean?"

SAN: "Hmmm. It's hard to put into words.

What I'm about to say is just my way of thinking.

Don't think of it as if I know everything."



YO: “Yeah. Still, I'd like to know. ... Tell me!”

SAN: “Before I explain that, let me tell you about my dream.

My dream is to be an actor. I'm already working as a child actor.

But the reason why I have this dream is ...

a little hard to understand. I did not want to be an actor

because I loved it. I was like you.”

It seems he doesn't shame his past

for not having his dream.

SAN: “I just wanted to have ‘my axis’ as soon as possible.

‘My axis’ ?

SAN: “When I was three, I needed to decide something

I could do in my life: ‘my axis.’ It is almost impossible for

children to know such things at that age. But I'm different.”

YO: “... I see. I believe your dream. But why did you have

to decide ... ‘your axis’ or your dream so soon?”

SAN: “Because... I just felt like I had to because if I did not,

then I would lose the reason to live in this world...”

SAN : “My parents died soon after I was born, and I grew up in an orphanage because of that. I don't know why but I grew up so quickly that I would start to speak faster than other children. Then, I understood that my parents were not there when I was a young child. I somehow felt that I had to learn to live by myself. At the time, all of the adults around me recommended me to become a child actor because I had a more beautiful face than the other children and that I could make money. Then I just tried to work as an actor at first.

I could feel that I could tell someone something through my acting, without words. As I told you, I was too young to know so many words yet. But I learned to enjoy my job.

Not only did I enjoy my work, but more importantly, it surprised me in a good way, because there was something I could do through my performance because it was me.

I was happy to see people who saw me performing and that I was able to express myself through it.

It made me feel like I belonged in this world.

It was something that ... It was my reason to live.

And now I'm really enjoying this form of expression.”

This is my first time to hear about the dreams
from my friend. Why do I feel that a boy
who has his very own dreams is amazing?

I hope his dream comes true.

I am happy as his friend.

I smiled naturally. But I cried.

I learned that I was moved or impressed by him.

When he saw me with a smile that
was sunnier than mine.



SAN : “Was that a little too cool?

I have never really accomplished anything.

If I can become the ‘REAL,’ you will cry even harder.”

He is kidding me yet he continues
to talk about the ‘REAL.’

SAN: “Here is the answer to your question.

When I thought about what is important for me to do as an actor
and what I feel strongly about,

I wanted to have something that only I could do.

It is important to have a cool face
and good looks as an actor.

But before that, I thought about
what kind of performance

I wanted to do.

That's when I knew

I wanted to be ‘REAL.’”





YO: “You mean you can't really become the person in your role, but you can get as close as possible?

But SAN is still SAN, no matter how you act, right?

Is it impossible to be perfectly ‘REAL’ as an actor?”

A stylized, abstract illustration of two people in a close embrace. The person on top has dark, short hair and is wearing a white shirt. The person on the bottom has dark hair and is wearing a dark blue or black garment. The background consists of soft, blended colors of orange, pink, and light blue. The overall style is modern and minimalist, with large, flat areas of color and soft gradients.

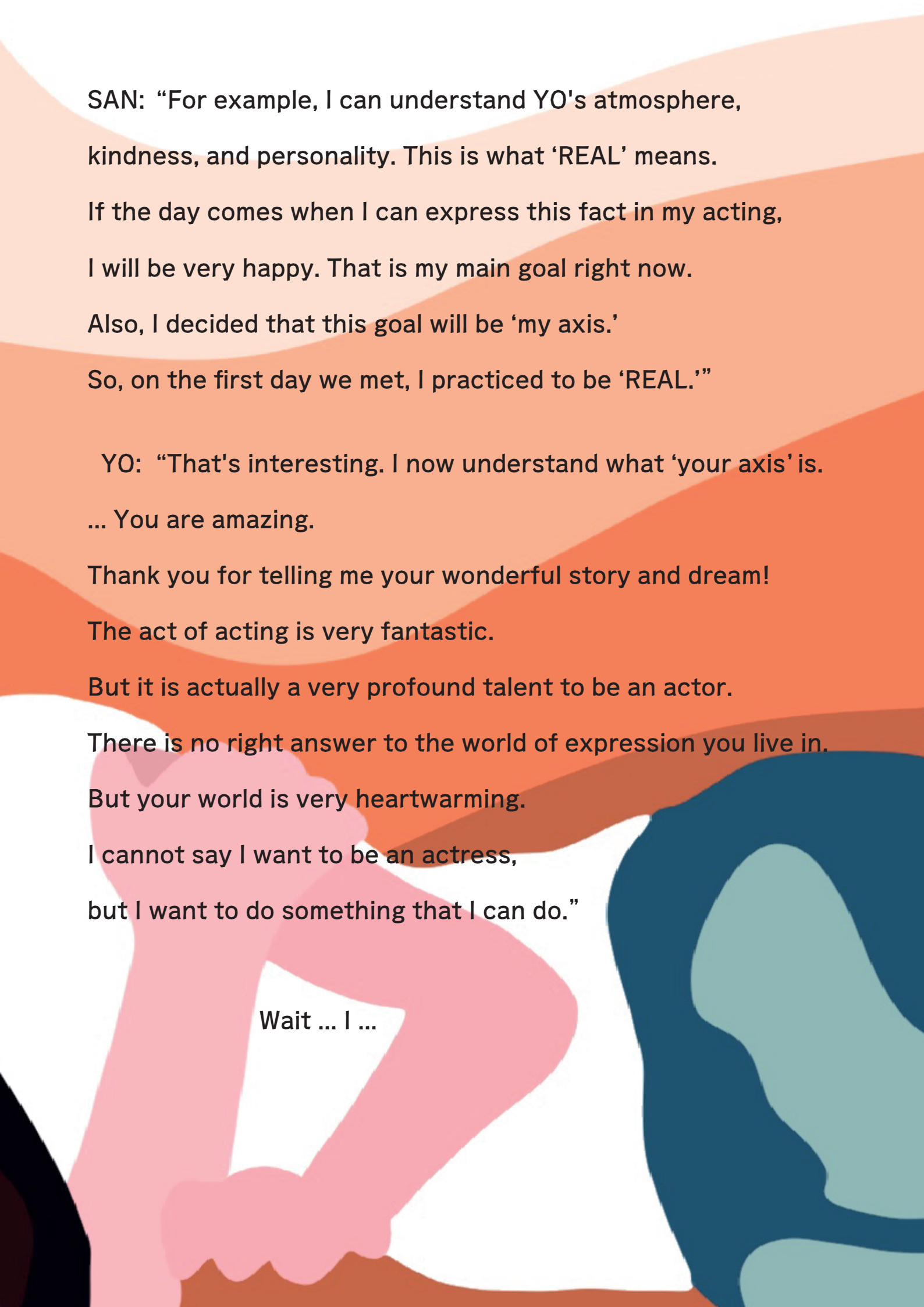
SAN: "I've thought about that too.

There is a word 'PERFECT,' but it's not really like that.

But it is 'REAL.'

... It is 'REAL' that YO is here, isn't it?

I wonder how I can express this fact as an actor.



SAN: "For example, I can understand YO's atmosphere, kindness, and personality. This is what 'REAL' means. If the day comes when I can express this fact in my acting, I will be very happy. That is my main goal right now. Also, I decided that this goal will be 'my axis.' So, on the first day we met, I practiced to be 'REAL.'"

YO: "That's interesting. I now understand what 'your axis' is. ... You are amazing.

Thank you for telling me your wonderful story and dream!

The act of acting is very fantastic.

But it is actually a very profound talent to be an actor.

There is no right answer to the world of expression you live in.

But your world is very heartwarming.

I cannot say I want to be an actress, but I want to do something that I can do."


Wait ... I ...

SAN: “YO. I'm sure that is your dream.”

SAN looked me in the eye
and talked to me seriously.

SAN: “Oh, but don't ever think
I've influenced you or anything,
I know YO has spent a lot of time with me,
but it is a great feeling to know that
YO has noticed things by yourself.
If your emotion is more about running wild,
if you can enjoy
your life,
I will be
very happy
as your friend.”





Fluffy thoughts
were
gradually
taking shape.
I was
naturally
able to face myself.

YO: "Thank you, SAN.

But it was you who gave me a lot of things to think about.

Thank you...! I think I'll start from what I can do now."

SAN: "If there is something you are interested in and you
can do it because of you, this is a wonderful thing to have.

Also, whenever you get an opportunity,
you should definitely experience it.

YO: "That is wonderful. I will try my best."

3

It's been a year since I've known SAN.

The cherry blossoms season will be coming soon.

SAN had an acting job and I was seeing him less

and less. I was scouted by a modeling agency,

but I still wasn't sure if I should start modelling now.

Today, we would meet for the first time in a while.

SAN: "This is so sudden, I know.

But I'm moving to the USA tomorrow.

I don't know the address where I will move to yet.

So, I don't know when I'll see you again."

YO: "Oh no ... I see.

So we cannot get in touch.

But we will meet again, right?"

SAN: "Yeah. I believe we will.

I'm going to be the top actor in the world.

I'll be on TV and in movies.

And then you'll find me.

I'll do my best. So please wait for me."

YO: "Yeah, I'm looking forward to it. I am sure you are going to be a great actor. I've changed since I met you. Thank you for everything, SAN."

SAN: "YO. Tell me one last thing. What's your dream?"

YO: "I don't even know.

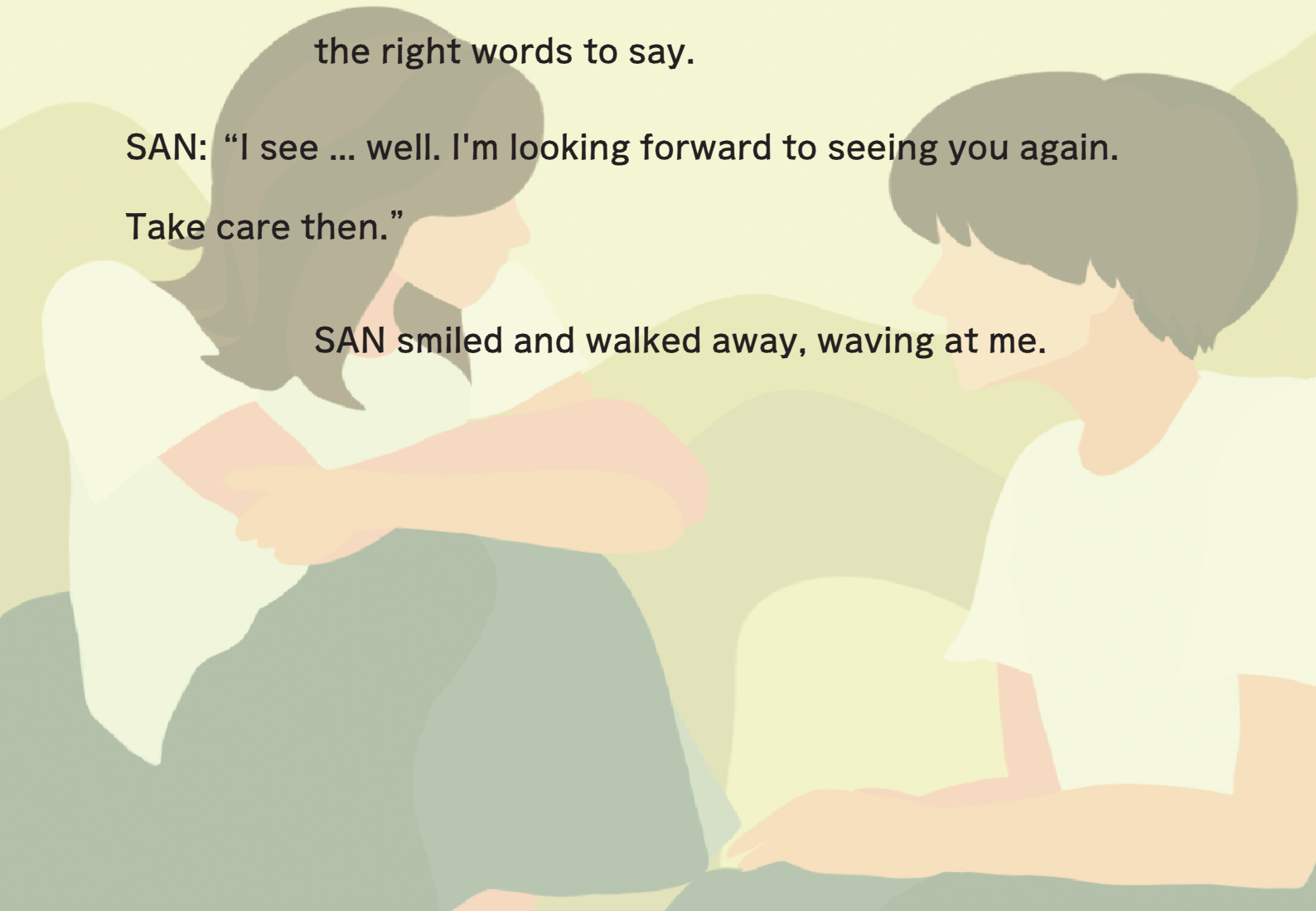
I often hear I have longer limbs than most,
so maybe I'd be good with modeling for clothes?
But I don't even know if I want to be a model right now."

No. This isn't what I want to tell him.

I don't know why I can't find
the right words to say.

SAN: "I see ... well. I'm looking forward to seeing you again.
Take care then."

SAN smiled and walked away, waving at me.





I don't want this to be the last time.

I have to tell SAN right away.

YO: "SAN!!"

I grabbed his arm without a second thought.

YO: "I'm not as sure as SAN about what I want to be,
but I know the person I want to be like!

It is you, SAN.

I want to be an amazing person who can express myself like SAN,
and be kind,
and honest to my dreams,
with a strong and cool center in me,
as bright and summery as the Sun."

I don't know why I can't stop crying.

Will we never meet up again?

Why are you going away?

SAN gave me a hug.

SAN: "... YO. Thank you.

We have the strength to create a life for ourselves.

You can have confidence in your past and future."

SAN continued to tell me a wonderful story.

SAN: "Recently I was taught a good word

by my old gentleman who's going to take care of me
at the place I'm moving to.

He said that:

'Life may be full of hardships,

but one person's smile can save you.

I'm sure the person will be pleased that you were born.

It would be nice to meet that person.

If you find that person,

you must be strong to protect her or him.

And then you should turn that strength into your own power.'"

SAN: "When I heard this, I thought of you, YO.

When we meet again one day, let's meet in the world of our expression like the one we talked about.

YO recognized me as the Sun, but you are also the same.

Every day I talk to you about myself,

I get clearer about what I want to be.

You are the Sun to me, just like your name in Kanji '陽.'"

YO: "... Huh? ... wait, now you said.... wait what?

Why ... you know my Kanji ...?"

SAN: "I've known it for a long time.

You are 'HARU,' right?

I've seen your name plate before.

It said 'HARU.'

There is probably some reason you want to hide the fact.

But you don't have to pretend to be 'YO' anymore in front of me.

I won't ever judge you on whatever your real name is."

YO: “Thank you. ... surprised.

... It's not like I was lying. I just hid it.

I thought my name ‘HARU’ was the opposite of myself,
my personality, because it is like the Sun.*

And I didn't think it was a good fit for me.

Then, I told myself that ‘I am YO.’**

... I never had the courage to say it as my name as ‘HARU.’

But I'm different now.

That's all thanks to you.

I'm sorry I kept it a secret for so long,

but I didn't know when to tell you.

I'm sorry.”

*: In Japanese, “HARETEIRU” means, “it’s sunny.” HARU sounds like HARETERU, therefore “like sunny.” When actually, HARU really means “shiny” or “bright” but more like spring than summer. That is why HARU who does not have confidence in herself felt that YO is more fitting to her.

** : The Kanji 陽 has several ways to be read in Japanese. This character can be read as either YO, HARU or AKI. But generally, Japanese people feel that HARU and AKI are used for a girl’s name, while YO is used for a boy’s name. Since the narrator of this story, whose actual name is HARU, felt she was someone with little confidence, she wanted to hide this fact of her real name. So according to the above explanation, HARU can be seen as having a connotation of something not as highly regarded, or less bright than HARETEIRU (sunny). To hide her actual name, HARU used YO as the alternate.





4

Then I was accepted by a modeling agency
that had approached me before.

I started my career as a model for a small magazine.

There are things I can do and express
by using my unique figure and style.

It's thanks to SAN that I realized this.

I'm going to meet him again in the future for sure.





I am now nineteen years old.

I am over six feet tall.

I became famous in Japan for my un-Japanese like body and style.

I began to be recognized as a world class top model.

There are 'Fashion Weeks' all over the world.

This is the most famous and influential fashion show held in major cities such as New York and Paris.

I want to be recognized there.

Among them,

if I can participate in the New York Fashion Week,

I can go to the USA where SAN is living.

This is what I'm trying to do.

The modeling profession starts in earnest
as early as the teens, but the career and
the average length for the model life is so brief.

I am different.

I want to be in full swing until I am thirty.

I love this job.

I love this world of expression.

I continued to walk, training every day
with enough momentum to change that
limited time, maybe even that notion.

Dressing. Charming.

Posture. Manners.

Expressions. The body.

Being admired by people,
and admiring myself not just by looks.

I want to be a model who can inspire someone
or inspire someone's confidence.



I felt like the harder I worked,
the more I met the SAN I admired.

I haven't seen him since we were seven.

I have a lot of social networking applications
and other ways to contact him,
but I haven't been able to find him yet.

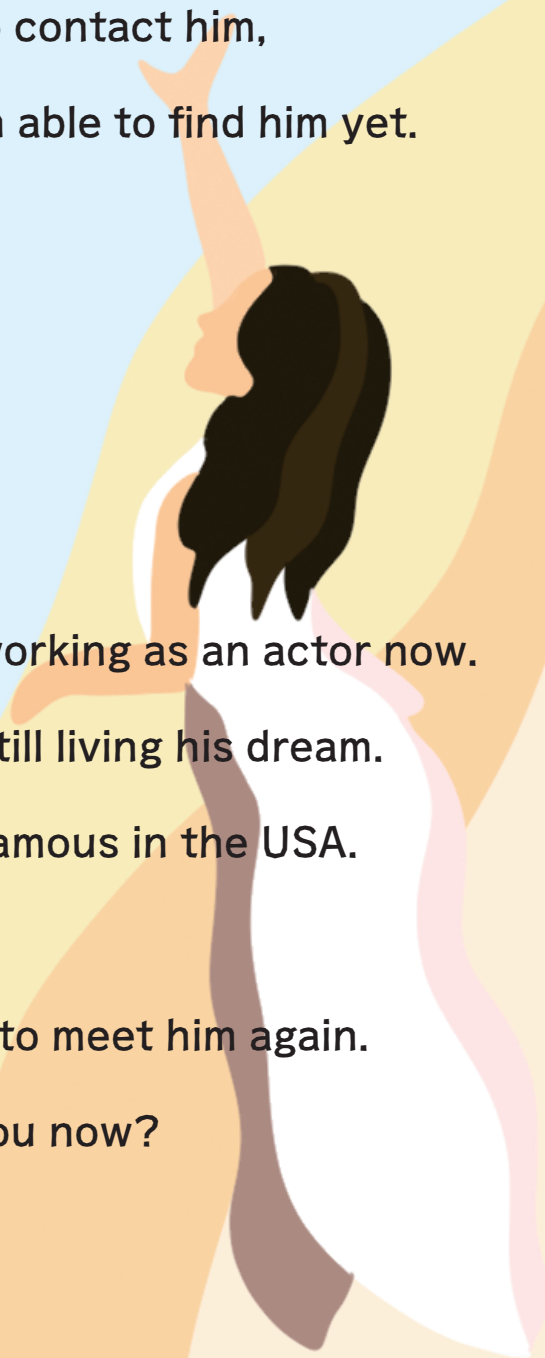
I wonder if he is working as an actor now.

I wonder if he is still living his dream.

I wonder if he is famous in the USA.

I would really like to meet him again.

SAN, where are you now?



5

It was the first time I got a ticket to go abroad.

I successfully passed an audition for
a famous fashion brand in New York City.

This time, I'll definitely succeed.

If I do, I might be able to meet SAN.

I'm very excited.

Even after more than 10 years,
I remember him.

This is not a love affair,
but rather I want to see him again to thank him
for helping me find my place in the world
and giving me confidence.

Today, I'm leaving for New York.

Suddenly, a young man approached me,
and started to talk to me.



A Young Man: “Excuse me, are you HARU?”

HARU: “...? Yes, I am”

A Young Man: “Really?! .. Finally! uh... My name is RYO.

I'm an actor. I'm hoping you know me.

I'm so sorry to stop you like this, but... I'm SAN's friend.”

He was RYO, the most popular young
handsome actor in Japan right now.

HARU: “... wait, what?”

I froze, more surprised at how he knew
about SAN than why he happened to be here
and speaking to me now.

RYO: “Oh, I know you are working now.

But please take my card. I would like you to contact me
when you have time. I have something to tell you about him.

It's a pleasure to meet you.

I hope we can work together sometime.”

I was skeptical at first.

RYO is a celebrity, but I was surprised that
he knew the name, SAN.

I was very curious.

In the midst of this encounter,
I headed to New York City.

This was my first time visiting.

I had a meeting for the fashion show but
there were still a few days until the show.

I am so impatient for calling RYO,
who I met at the airport.

But then I called him anyway.



HARU: "Hello ...?"

RYO: "... Hello, RYO speaking."

HARU: "Hello. I'm HARU."

RYO: "Oh, HARU! Thanks for the call."

HARU: "Sorry for calling you suddenly
but I have an important show in a few days,
so, can you tell me about SAN?"

I'd like to meet him.


If it's possible, I'd like to send him the tickets to the show.

Um... Where is he now?"

RYO: "... before I talk about him, let me confirm,
the last time you ever met SAN was
when you both were seven?"

HARU: "?? No, we haven't met again yet."

RYO: "Oh I see. ... "



RYO: “This is really tough for me to say,
but SAN is no longer with us. ... He is dead.”


HARU: “... what ...??”

RYO: “He died in an accident when he was fifteen.
He was able to save his friend. But not himself.
SAN was taken to the hospital and recovered once,
but eventually... He tried to stay alive until the end, but ...”

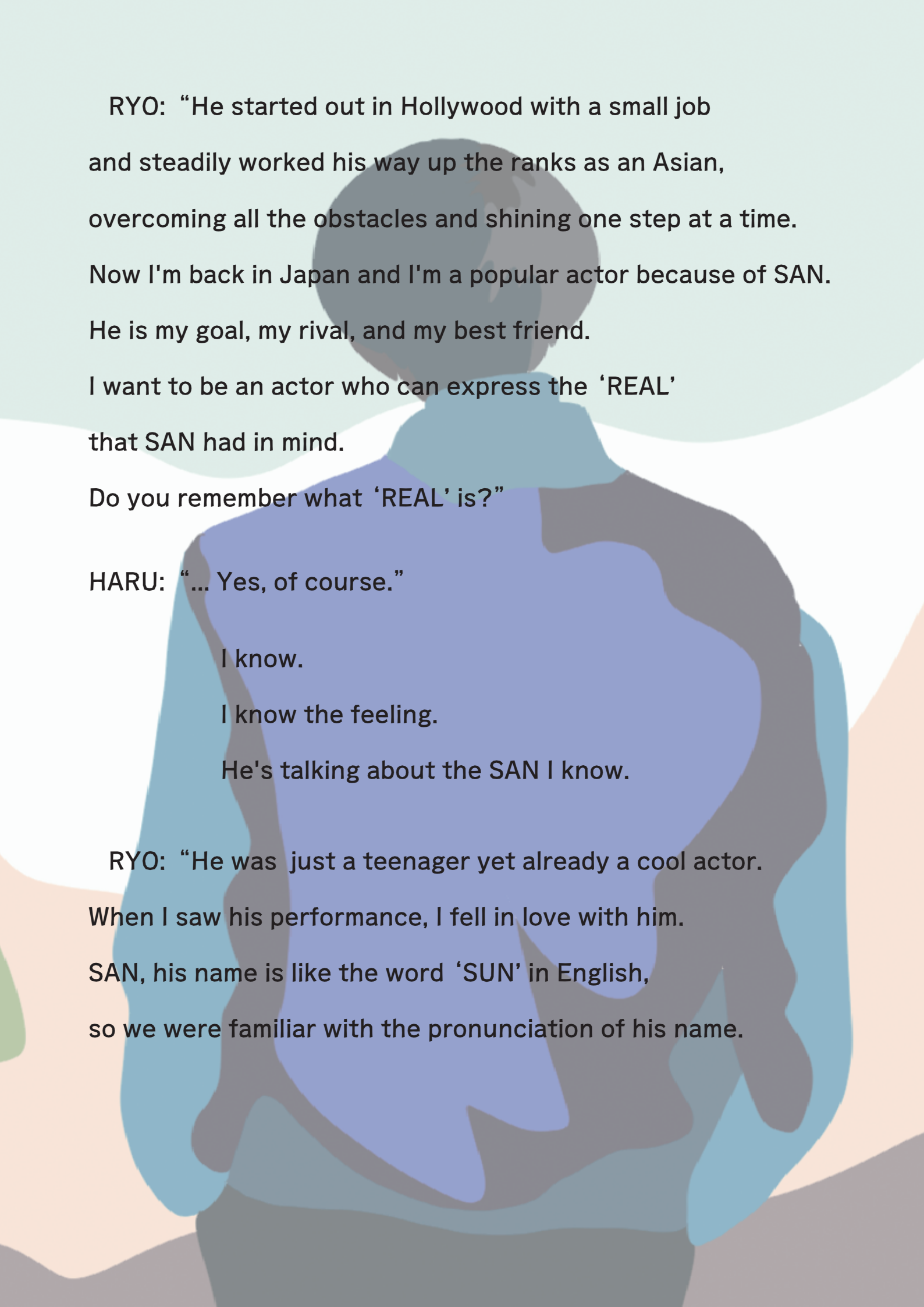
I'm speechless.

RYO: “I'm sorry to have to tell you the painful truth now.
SAN didn't have your contact information,
but by the chance that I might someday meet you in Japan,
he left me a letter to give to you.
I'll take pictures and send them to you.”

RYO continues.



RYO: "SAN has always wanted to meet you, HARU. He was rooting for you more than anyone else. I met SAN at an international school in Los Angeles. He was learning English at a tremendous pace and had his own outstanding style and acting skills, and he tried to go to Hollywood. He was always talking about you, HARU. SAN always said happily, 'I'm going to meet her in the art world in the future.' He was so happy to see HARU's success in the fashion world in Japan through the information from the Internet."



RYO: “He started out in Hollywood with a small job and steadily worked his way up the ranks as an Asian, overcoming all the obstacles and shining one step at a time. Now I'm back in Japan and I'm a popular actor because of SAN. He is my goal, my rival, and my best friend. I want to be an actor who can express the ‘REAL’ that SAN had in mind. Do you remember what ‘REAL’ is?”

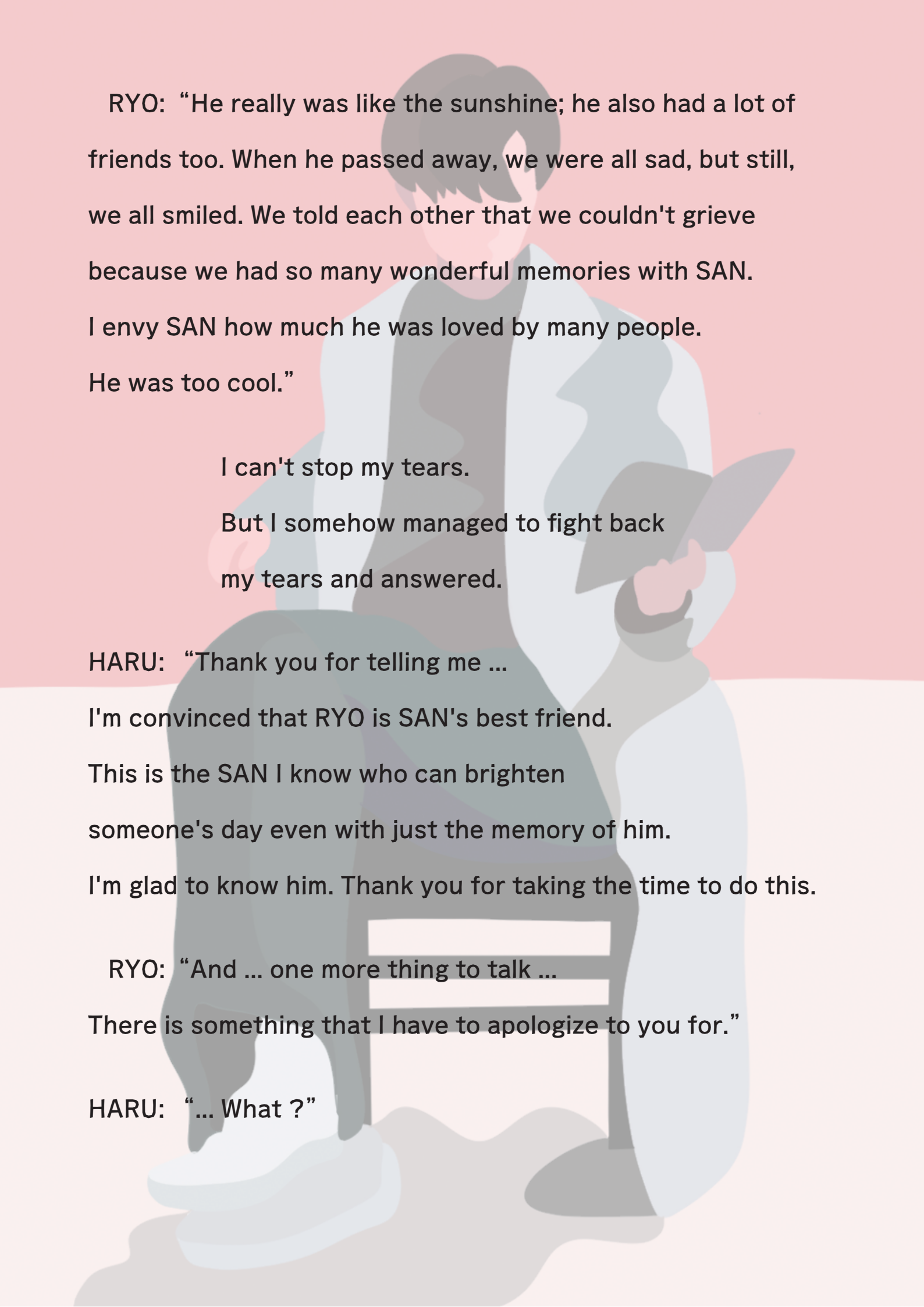
HARU: “... Yes, of course.”

I know.

I know the feeling.

He's talking about the SAN I know.

RYO: “He was just a teenager yet already a cool actor. When I saw his performance, I fell in love with him. SAN, his name is like the word ‘SUN’ in English, so we were familiar with the pronunciation of his name.



RYO: “He really was like the sunshine; he also had a lot of friends too. When he passed away, we were all sad, but still, we all smiled. We told each other that we couldn't grieve because we had so many wonderful memories with SAN. I envy SAN how much he was loved by many people. He was too cool.”

I can't stop my tears.

But I somehow managed to fight back my tears and answered.

HARU: “Thank you for telling me ...

I'm convinced that RYO is SAN's best friend.

This is the SAN I know who can brighten someone's day even with just the memory of him.

I'm glad to know him. Thank you for taking the time to do this.

RYO: “And ... one more thing to talk ...

There is something that I have to apologize to you for.”

HARU: “... What ?”

RYO: "... So I decided that the best thing I can do is to make sure I meet HARU and give her this letter.

So I became a famous actor in Japan, and found you.

On the day I met you, it was not actually by chance.

I'm sorry about that.

As soon as I heard the rumor of which airport you would use to go to New York, I planned to go there to meet you.

Again, I'm sorry about that.

But I really wanted to meet you and give you this letter before your important show begins.

Finally, I can play my role.

It's a painful reality, but please read his letter."

HARU: "Oh I see. Yeah, it was a surprise.

Thank you for taking the time to do this.

But I'm sorry, I need a little time.

I'd like to talk to you again when I get back to Japan."

RYO: "I understand. I'm sorry for the painful truth at this important time, SAN used to talk about HARU all the time. He kept telling me that he loves your smile. So HARU, please smile.

Memories are the depth of love.

The deeper your love is, the more you remember him.

You have the deepest memories of SAN.

RYO was crying over the phone.

RYO: "Be confident.

Make sure you have a successful show in New York.

I'm sure SAN will be watching you looking cool on the runway.

And I'll be waiting for you in Japan.

... Good Luck."

RYO was very gentle and polite

in explaining things to me.

I started to cry.

I cried so much.

It was pitch black.

The Sun has gone out.

I can't see SAN anymore

... I can't see SAN.

I can't even wish to see him.

RYO sent me a photo of a letter.

This letter is the only way I can meet him again.



6

I couldn't read the letter right away.

Because I would think that I really didn't have SAN.

All the stretching, exercise, and thorough
dieting I do daily don't even matter anymore.

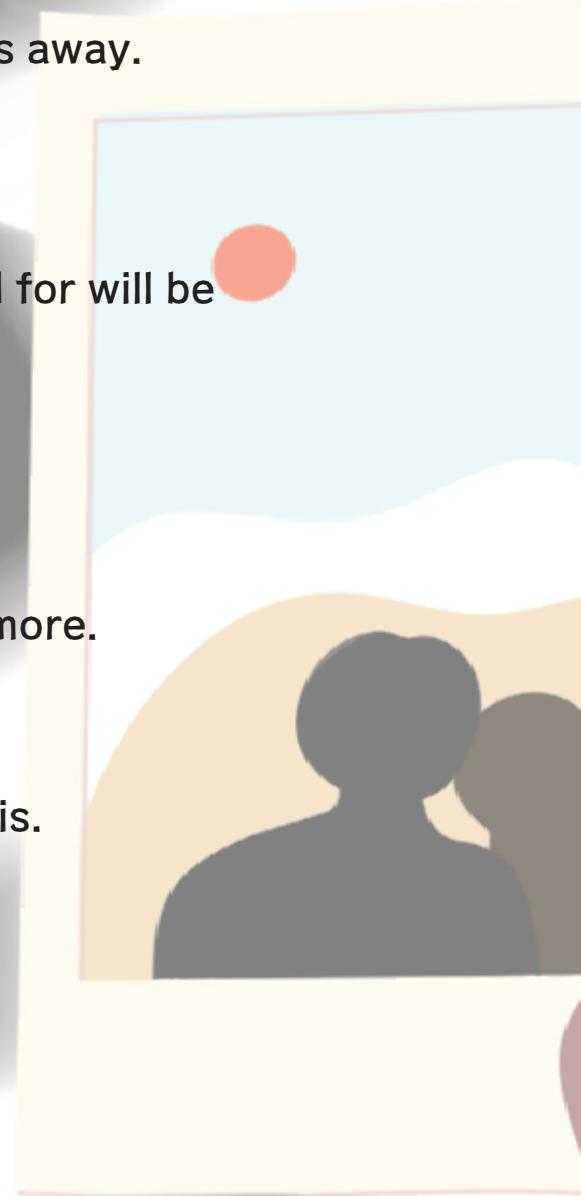
The big show is only three days away.


If I don't move forward,
everything I've worked so hard for will be
meaningless.

But if I can't see SAN, then
maybe living isn't worth it anymore.

I don't have to live anymore.

... I'm beginning to think like this.





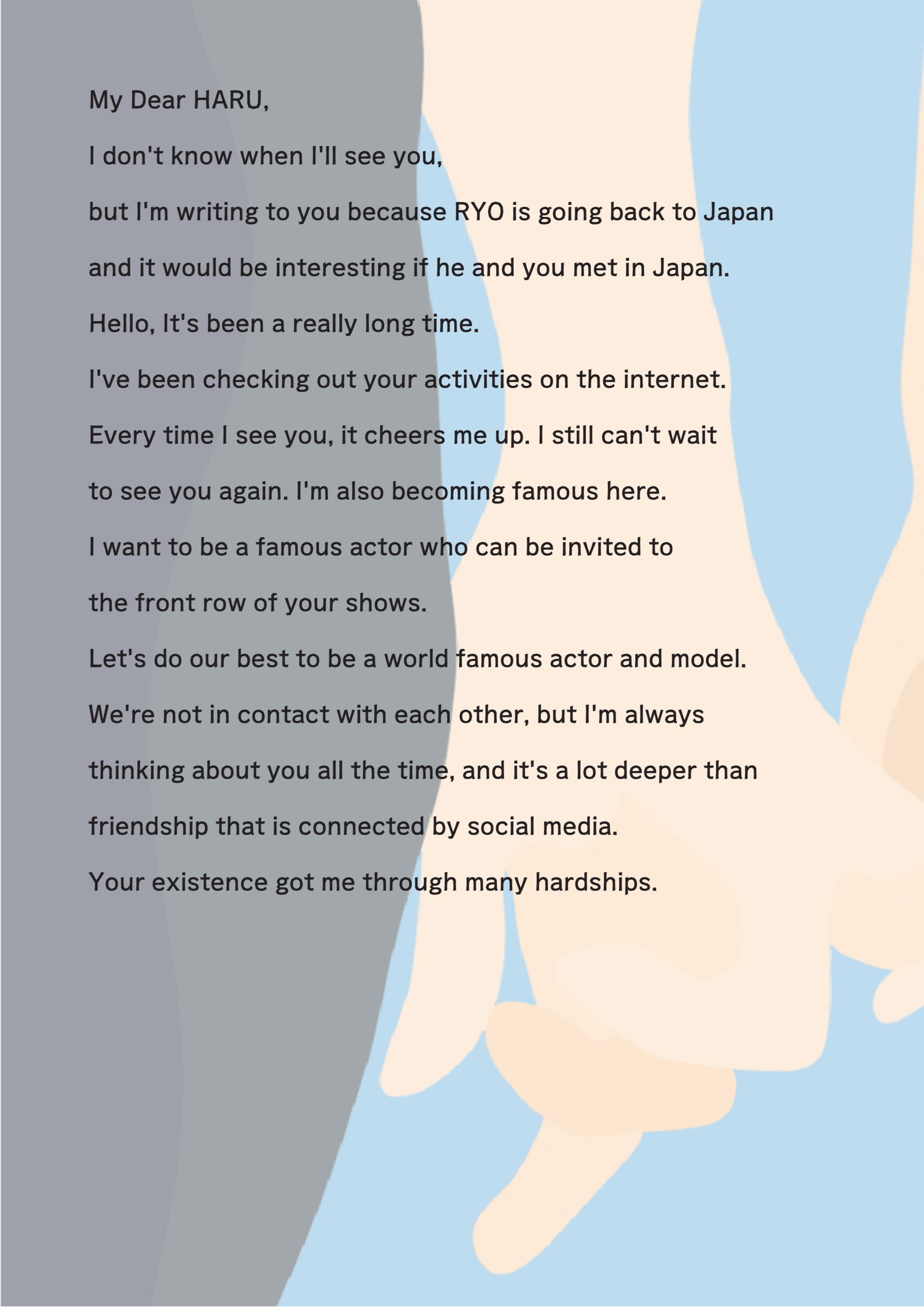
But I knew that if I died now,
I would see him as myself,
having accomplished nothing.

I still have so much more to express.
There is a world I want to express.
I've only just begun as a model.

I felt like SAN was telling me not to be spoiled.

HARU: "Okay."

So I finally decided to read the letter from him.



My Dear HARU,

I don't know when I'll see you,

but I'm writing to you because RYO is going back to Japan
and it would be interesting if he and you met in Japan.

Hello, It's been a really long time.

I've been checking out your activities on the internet.

Every time I see you, it cheers me up. I still can't wait
to see you again. I'm also becoming famous here.

I want to be a famous actor who can be invited to
the front row of your shows.

Let's do our best to be a world famous actor and model.

We're not in contact with each other, but I'm always
thinking about you all the time, and it's a lot deeper than
friendship that is connected by social media.

Your existence got me through many hardships.

I've had a lot of bad days.

There were films where I couldn't play the main character because I was Asian, and there were people who seemed to criticize everything they saw.

But what about you... How are you doing?

Are you still a crybaby-wimp?

You were a sweet girl who only cared about others, but have you become even more beautiful?

I wonder if YO is still in your mind or not.

I love both of you, YO and HARU.

I just hope that you live in the world where you can smile and fascinate people like the Sun.

I can't wait to meet you. I'm going to be much cooler when I come back to you. Be prepared for that! lol

I'm working on a new movie right now.

The script is interesting, and it's a lot of fun, even though it's hard to shoot, physically and mentally.

I still love acting, this job I have.

A stylized illustration of a man and a woman walking away from the viewer on a grassy hill. The woman is on the left, wearing a blue long-sleeved top and a long, flowing purple skirt. The man is on the right, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and green trousers. They are both looking back over their shoulders towards the camera. The background is a light purple sky and a green hill.

Let's enjoy each other's job.

I wanna see you soon.

I will meet you with my handsome smile,
so you also come to meet me with your most beautiful smile
as if all people who saw you would fall in love with you.

Let's work hard and enjoy our own life together until then.

I am always with you.

Take care of yourself.

My dearest, my beloved artist, my sunshine,

With much friendship, gratitude,
sincerity and love,
SAN.

The SAN in the letter was a 15-year-old SAN.

He died rescuing his friend who also might be the actor who worked on that new movie with him.

SAN, who I love the most, was stuck in this letter.

He still is as cool as ever.

It is truly too painful and tragic for me to accept his death.

I don't know why, but he is still so brilliant and exciting to me until the last memory.

He must be such a heart-pounding presence.

I shouldn't brood.

I know.

I know that SAN is my sunshine at all times.

Thank you SAN.

I admired you a lot.

I loved you with all my heart.

Please rest in peace and I hope you will stick around.

I am going to keep our dream alive.

A stylized, flat-design illustration of a woman with long, dark, wavy hair, looking upwards. She is wearing a white long-sleeved top. The background is a solid purple color. In the top left corner, there is a large white number '7'. The overall style is modern and minimalist.

7

Today is the day of an important fashion show.
I won't see SAN again, but somehow it feels like
I'm going to see SAN again today.

STYLIST: “Oh wait, HARU, something's different about you today.
Maybe it's because of this important show?
Wait! Hummm, you're more like a woman who met her lover?
You are so beautiful today!
Does this mean that you finally got a boyfriend?”

HARU: “Ha Ha. Well, yeah kind of?”

STYLIST: “What?! Wait ... What?!!
After the show, let's have dinner! Right?!!
Oh my goodness!! Finally!!
I can talk with you about your love story!! I CANNOT WAIT!!”

I have to thank my stylist
for always making me feel at home like this.

Now this big show begins.
This is where I've always been admired.

‘HELLO, SAN.

I AM FINE BECAUSE I AM BEAUTIFUL.

I go now, with the confidence I've found with you.’

A stylized, flat-design illustration of a woman from the back, walking away. She has dark hair and is wearing a light pink, sleeveless, form-fitting dress. The background is a solid dark red. The overall aesthetic is minimalist and modern.

“SAN, KEEP YOUR EYES ON ME.”

HARU walked the runway
like an angel and a butterfly
as if she were about to disappear

She captivated her audience
The show was extremely successful

After this show
HARU is recognized as one of the world's top models

HARU was interviewed by many medias
There is no SAN who would be the top actor and
who was supposed to stand next to HARU

Next day
on the front pages of many articles
there were many HARU's beautiful smiles

It was as if SAN was right next to HARU
a dazzling smile on HARU's face
that captivated everyone who saw it



8

After returning to Japan,
I met RYO again in Japan.

RYO: "Hey! HARU!"

HARU: "RYO! It's been a while."

RYO: "I saw your show and walking.

You really are a strong woman.

Everyone knows you now!

It's a pleasure to see you again."

HARU: "Thank you! Glad to hear that.

... I was really shocked about SAN. I know I'll never
see him again, but I'll always yearn for him and
love him for the rest of my life.


That's why it was hard for me to move on.

... But after I read the letter, I changed.

He even gave me the courage to have that resolve.

He really is amazing. I ... well ...

I really love SAN. I am so happy to tell you this feeling."



We discussed a lot of memories with SAN.

RYO: "This is wonderful, HARU.

You accepted SAN's death properly.

You are already invincible.

SAN will be alive in our heart. I believe it.

So let's keep pulling this world of expression together.

Aah! I won't lose either."

HARU: "Yes! It's just the beginning!

I also won't give in.

Let's enjoy this world together."

SAN will live on in our hearts like the Sun forever.

I will live this life with a lot of things
that I learned from SAN.

Don't make assumptions based on first impressions.

Understand the genders, races, and names.

Don't give up on your dream
because of your environment or prejudices.

Don't be ashamed of loving yourself.

Encourage someone.

Be encouraged by someone.

Make your own dreams.

Be ambitious.

Believe in yourself.


Believe in others.

I will take that outpouring of love and
turn it into an expression.

Today I am walking on my runway.

May this brightly lit path lead me to a brighter future.

I'll keep walking until I meet SAN one day.

A stylized, abstract illustration of a person's legs from the mid-thigh down to the feet. The legs are rendered in a light cream color with soft, flowing orange and yellow gradients that suggest movement and muscle. They are wearing black high-heeled pumps. The background is a solid, vibrant coral or salmon color. A horizontal band of light blue is visible at the bottom, representing the ground. The overall style is modern and graphic.

“SAN. Keep your eyes on me.”

to be continued

POSTSCRIPT

This is my first book.

A lot of people have helped me with the production of this book.
My writing is not in its infancy,
so I am very happy that it has finally become a reality.

This story is about the encounters I have had in my life.

The person named SAN, was actually in this world.

The two who have known SAN, HARU and RYO are now shining
in the world of expression.

The lovely words of SAN's uncle are a quote from my mentor.

The model for the stylist is not only one person,

but my bright and kind friends who have always supported me.

Thank you all for being in this story.

This love story is a fictionalized version of a non-fictional story.

This is sure to light up someone's heart.

There is no age requirement for this book.

Dearest Readers,

Where are you now?

Do you love yourself now?

Is there anyone you'd like to see right now?

We are all still struggling in this world with prejudices,
stereotypes, changing tides, relationships, casual uncaring
words and attitudes, and ourselves.

Please know that you can hurt people without even knowing it.

Please don't use the irresponsible words "I don't know."

Please don't mess you around.

The encounter of HARU and SAN represents the important memories that everyone has.

The encounter of SAN and RYO represents a precious encounter at school or work.

The fate of the meeting of RYO and HARU represents the expansion of their relationship.

“Encounters spread”

I'm sure the same is true for you.
Every encounter with you has supported you in the present.

I would like to thank all of you who have this book in your hands for our encounter, from the bottom of my heart.

Now, stand up straight, cheer up, and go your own way today in the Sun. SAN will always be in your heart.

Let's live in this world with HARU.
Let's go to meet your Sun (SAN) with HARU one day, with a smile on your face, of course.

To all the people I have met.
To all the people I will meet in the future.

Lots of Love to you.

IORI KIKUCHI

Dedicated to my friend

Thank you for everything.

I love you.





About the author

IORI KIKUCHI

Born in Tokyo in 1998, a Japanese Visual Artist.
She works and challenges herself in a field of various media.

Her portraits are drawn in stained-glass style,
and her themes of love, memories, dreams, and other
unformed things are expressed with unique coloring
through her visuals.

Her clients include Sony Music Artists Inc. (Anna Takeuchi),
Ian Lynam Design, among others.

Instagram: @kikuchiori

Webpage: kikuchiori.com

