

SUNY Dutchess Community College

Writing Contest Entry

Andrew Maguire

Fiction

*You Know, I "Dated" Amaterasu Once*

I know it sounds crazy of me to say, but I swear that it's true.

I, Patrick Duggan McCollins, dated the sun goddess of Japan herself.

Now before you start calling me 'crazy *chichi*,' let me explain myself. I know that I can tell fantastical stories at times. I mean, us Irish are known for our literary exaggerations and stretching of details. Just look at Swift if you want to know what I mean. Yet, I vow to you on my honor that this story is completely true. Now, grab yourself a cold one and take a seat because the tale is long, the time is short, and my beer is getting cold.

To start, I was in a very bad situation in early 1995 in terms of . . . well . . . everything! In early 1993, I had begun to work in Dublin, and I would work in the city for another two years. Looking back now, I can honestly say that my time in Dublin during those two years was probably one of the most miserable experiences in my life. I moved from the countryside of Cork to Dublin looking to get a job with my degree in English. I thought I could land an easy teaching job at a local college as I had the degree, the grades, and the recommendations from my former professors. However, I came to the Fair City during a time of low demand for new English professors, so I struggled to find a job that would take me for my English credentials. After days of searching and applying, I did eventually get a job at a local college where I worked as a clerk in the library of the college.

For my work, I received less than adequate pay as I did such scholarly work from fetching tea for the senior clerks, sweeping the floors, alphabetizing volumes of *Hot Press*, changing lightbulbs, and more. What's more is that the senior clerks would treat me like trash as they always poked fun at me, my looks, my intelligence, and my rural background. As an added bonus, at the end of every long day at the library, I would go home to my apartment near a noisy

intersection in the downtown area of the city. My apartment was a real beaut as not only did it smell of rotting birchwood and socks but also it had no running hot water. What I am trying to say is that I wasn't having the best of times in early 1990s Dublin, and I found at times that I was barely keeping myself afloat, both mentally and financially.

However, during my darkest of days in downtown Dublin, I had a solid rock to cling onto which was the 80,000 Sterling Pound inheritance left to me by my Auntie Susan. God rest her soul! It was a great some of money to have on-hand in 1995, and I kept a hold on that sum of cash with lock-and-key. I was biding my time with it until I could use it to strike it rich, but I had to be careful with what I invested my inheritance into. I wanted to be sure that with whatever opportunity I used my inheritance on, it was going to make me rich and famous beyond my wildest dreams. Until that opportunity came, I kept my inheritance with me as a sign of what was to come as I endured alone in my pains as a clerk.

Then on one morning in about mid-February 1995 as I was getting ready for work, I remember that I was listening to the morning news on the radio. In full honesty, I had the radio running as white noise as I shaved, tied my tie, buttoned my vest, and all. I didn't expect to hear anything of any life-changing importance from the radio, so I practically ignored it as I carried out my morning routine. By chance, as I was passing by the radio while looking for my wallet, I heard the announcer begin to talk about something unrelated to the standard droll of Irish news such as the yearly budget or some Dail member's corruption scandal.

I heard the announcer in his gravelly voice talked about something called the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme, or the JET Programme for short. I didn't think much about the JET Programme at first as I was more concerned with getting ready for work than listening to some international teaching programme. Even when the announcer started talking about how the

Irish had the lowest representation in the programme for 1994 when compared to all other English-speaking countries, I kept on in blissful ignorance of what the radio had to say until I heard the radio announcer say in a gruff voice,

“With Irish representation being the lowest in the program to date, the Japanese government is working hard with the Bruton Government to encourage Irish participation in the programme for 1995. In a press conference on Monday, the Japanese Minister of Education has outlined a plan to increase Irish participation in the programme. The Honorable Minister promised to all Irish volunteers to the programme: starting pay of nearly three million yen, free medical and dental insurance, complementary housing, and further employment opportunities to all Irish who join the program. The extent to which these offers will have in increasing Irish participation in English education in Japan has yet to be known. In other news, . . .”

All I remember is being frozen in-place for several minutes when I heard that announcement go through my ears. I soaked up what the man had to say with keen curiosity, and even after I had long turned off the radio that morning, the announcer’s words stuck with me during the whole day. From the moment I left my apartment to the moment that I went to bed that night, I couldn’t help but think about the wonderful perks that the JET Programme had to offer. The benefits and pay sounded too good to be true, and I couldn’t help but be intrigued with entertaining the thought of going off to join the programme.

In the following days, I quickly went to work on conducting research on how to get into the programme. While I liked the idea of not only helping my country and helping myself by enlisting into the programme, I had no real idea if I should make a serious go at it. While the perks sounded amazing to a bloke like me, I still realized that this programme would require me to teach English to native Japanese students in Japanese. I mean, we’re not talking about

knowing how to say *konnichiwa* and order *sushi* while on holiday. We're talking about a day-in-day-out type of thing where I would teach Japanese children about the fundamental basics of English grammar in their native tongue. Needless to say, the task seemed far too great for me to do, yet I still entertained the idea of applying for the programme.

Well, for several days, I researched the JET Programme and the optics of getting into the 1996 run of volunteers. I was very casual in my studies as I read about the inner workings of the JET Programme on my lunch break, studied some basic Japanese on my down time, and I even got some exposure to Japanese culture by watching Japanese shows and reading Japanese books at my apartment. I tell you right that in those early months of 1995, if I wasn't being exposed to the harsh and cold outside world, I was exposing my mind to the warm culture that Japan had to offer. I read and watched works from some *Nihon's* greatest artists like Lady Murasaki, Miyazaki, Mishima, Takeuchi, and more. In my study of all things related to Japan, I began to increasingly enjoy the fancy of going to Japan to teach English, yet I still realized what a very risky endeavor it would be for me to up-and-leave Ireland for a land that I had no exposure in. I knew that I still needed more time to think about the whole thing.

However, I think the forces above cut short my time for fence-thinking about my potential migration. On one cold day in early March 1995, I was at work in the college library. The day was normal with all of the usual mockery and busy work that I got. Then around 11:45 in the morning, I decided to go out for lunch as I wanted to try a new kebab shop that had just opened near the college. Anyway, I was just about to pass by the breakroom in order to leave when I suddenly heard a sharp bout of laughter erupt from the breakroom. Curious to know what all the fuss was about, I listened into the conversation that was going-on within the breakroom with a sharp ear. I crept over to the doorway to the room in order to hear the conversation inside

better, and I soon realized that the laughs and comments were coming from my coworkers. They all spoke loudly and brashly, and I was able to hear every word that they said. I think their conversation went a little something like this, if I remember right,

“That idiot expects to go to Japan? He probably can’t even point to it on a map,” said one brooding male voice.

Another voice shot out like a firecracker with a cackle before saying in a shrewd voice, “I don’t know what’s gotten into him. Maybe he’s been watching too many of those cartoons lately. What does he think he’s going to find when he gets there? Subtitles?!”

Then there was another round of laughter before a snively voice spoke up with, “Some good that English degree got him. Run off to Japan? That boy is not only dumb but nuts! No wonder he hasn’t got a girl!”

Oh my goodness, you should’ve seen me afterwards as I hid near the door. I fumed like a bad car engine, and I couldn’t believe what my coworkers were saying. Immediately, I stormed into that breakroom with such piss-and-vinegar that I am surprised campus security didn’t get called. I won’t tell you what I said, but let’s just say that I was told to say ten *Aves* by Father Michael when I confessed what I had done.

Well after thoroughly cussing-out my colleagues, I immediately quite my job at the college library. After quitting, I went straight to the nearest bookstore that I could find in Dublin. There, I cleared house and bought every book on Japanese culture, the Japanese language, and Japanese customs that I could find. As the cashier ran up my bounty of *Nihongo* material, I felt like Caesar at the Rubicon as I committed myself fully into getting into the JET Programme, come hell or high gallows.

Over the next few months, I lived off my Auntie's inheritance as I did everything in my power to get into the JET Programme. I prepared all the proper documentation, made my case to both the Irish government and the Japanese government on why I should be in the programme, sent in my medical and tax records, and more. I shouldn't forget to mention that during this time, I spent much time furiously self-studying Japanese from dusk till dawn.

Over the matter of a few days, I flew past reading and writing Hiragana and Katakana before moving onto the dreaded Kanji. All the while, I picked up grammar and patterns of speech like you wouldn't believe. As for the Kanji and how I learned them, well, get a load of this. In one week, with only a red-and-white marble notebook, a pen, a Japanese dictionary, and whole lot of builder's tea, I learned all of the *Joyou Kanji*. I swear on my life that I did it all in one week, and still to this day, I am quite puzzled with how I was able to pull it off.

Soon after months of studying, filling out forms, background checks, and interviews with the higher-ups from the programme, I was called down to the main offices of the executives of the JET Programme's Dublin branch. When I arrived there, I found a group of Japanese and Irish in tailored suits and dresses waiting for me in the main meeting room of the office. I naturally shook their hands and started off with my usual, plucky greetings and inquiries. I was still introducing myself and making general small talk when I was cut short by one of the Japanese men. This Japanese man spoke to me in very smooth English, and he cut straight to the chase with a line that sliced through me like a knife through butter.

"*McCollins-san*, after serious review and consideration, you have been accepted into the JET Programme's Irish class of 1996. Furthermore, you have been nominated to take up a teaching position in Nagasaki. We will provide you with further details about your relocation and

placement. We want to know if you will you accept this position at the request of the governments of Japan and Ireland.”

I naturally said yes to his offer, and I won't lie, I think I may have shed a single tear from the excitement and honor. Then after a long yet exciting day of handshakes, paperwork, discussions, and scheduling, I was finally in the JET Programme. The commission for the programme said that my departure for Japan was in August 1996, and I would be given a teaching position at a leading primary school in Nagasaki. Naturally, you could imagine that the months between my nomination for the job in December 1995 and my departure in August 1996 were quite busy. I had to not only plan for my resettlement in Japan but also keep up with my Japanese skills as well as plan some of my first English lessons. You must remember that despite my degree, I still had no experience in teaching English to Irish children, let alone Japanese children. So, it was going to be a tall order from the start to be an Irish teacher of English to Japanese children. But to be honest, I couldn't have cared less as I was so excited to finally have a job to use my degree with. I was just so excited to finally be given the chance at a real, teaching job, and because of this excitement, I became pretty frivolous in my spending over the months leading up to my departure. For example, I used a good chunk of my Auntie's inheritance to buy premium lesson books, teaching supplies, and comforts for the trip with no restraint on my purse strings. One of my most egregious examples of my spend fever was when I had a full morning suit outfit tailored for me before my leave. I spent nearly 700 Irish pounds on a beautiful, three-piece morning suit. In hindsight, it was such an “empty” purchase that I made with my Auntie's money, but I just wanted a morning suit for my stay in Japan. I wanted to teach in-style, what else do you want from me?

Anyway, after months of preparing, the day of glory finally came on August 22, 1996, when I left my Mother Ireland by plane to a land that seemed so far off and away from my own. I remember sitting in my cramped plane seat as I prepared for takeoff, and I just had so many butterflies in my stomach. I had no idea what was going to happen to me in Japan, if I would be good at my job, if I would be accepted in Japan, if I would achieve fame and fortune in Japan, and more. While I felt sad to leave the Emerald Isle, I knew I had to do it in a situation like this if I ever wanted to achieve the riches that I had long desired in my youth. After all, it wouldn't be the first time the Irish left their homeland for work opportunities. However, I could not help but feel some anxious feelings in my gut over what might happen to me in the Land of the Rising Sun.

After a nine-hour flight filled with anxious tension, snoring passengers, and the occasional crying baby, because every self-respecting passenger plane needs a crying baby, I finally arrived in Japan at Nagasaki Airport on the outskirts of the city. Upon arriving in Nagasaki, with my suitcase in one hand and my passport in the other, I was immediately struck by two things that the city had to offer: the climate and the overall look of the city. The climate in Nagasaki seemed to uproot me from the cold climate of Ireland that I was long used to. Nagasaki had a much more tropical vibe to it with its humidity, sunniness, and warm weather. I found the weather in Nagasaki to actually be quite a fresh change of pace from the cold, damp climate of Eire. Furthermore, the overall look of the city really took me by surprise. When I arrived in Japan, I was expecting more of a "traditional" look to the island's major cities with the stereotypical things that you would associate with Japan. I was expecting to see a sleuth of pagodas, *torii* gateways, temples, shrines, houses with paper walls, the whole thing. Instead, I found myself in a city that looked just as modern and flashy as any city that Europe had offer. To

be fair, I did see that traditional look to the architecture of Nagasaki that I was expecting at various points in the city. However, I found it interesting as I rode through the city via tram that all of the more conservative and orthodox markers of Japanese life were mixed with the modern signs of Japanese life. I mean, I saw modern office buildings and comfy apartment complexes next to traditional *kabuki* theaters and ornate parks. If anything, it felt more surreal than anything as apart from the Japanese signs everywhere and the clear markers of traditional Japanese life, it was almost like I hadn't left my native Eire behind. Instead, it came with me.

But as quick as I had arrived in Nagasaki and after being settled in a complementary apartment as part of the JET Programme, I soon found myself getting ready for my first "real" day on the job. Really, the day was going to be more of an interview with the higher-ups of the school that I was going to work in. I took my time to really make myself look pretty for the executives of the school. I woke up several hours before my scheduled meeting at 9:00 in the morning to shave, have a hot-water wash in the marble tub of my apartment, as well as put on my tailored morning suit. I still remember looking at myself in the mirror before heading out to the interview. I had my combed and slicked hair, my clean-shaven face, and my pressed suit and tie. God, I was a handsome devil back then!

Anyway, besides fawning over how I used to look, I still distinctly remember my first day going through the streets of Nagasaki while on my way to the school. I felt so amazed to see and be a part of the hustle-and-bustle of Nagasaki. On my walk to the school, I saw some typical scenes of daily Japanese urban life. There were children and teenagers in their *fuku* or *gakuran* school uniforms rushing to school with red *randoseru* on their backs. There were also the businessmen and salarymen in their pressed suits and long overcoats as they faithfully checked their watches while on their walks to work. I also saw a candidate for the upcoming 1996 general

election giving a speech on pensions to a group of people who would care to listen. I also saw street vendors peddling delicious foods and other fine-smelling treats to anyone who would be willing to spend 100 yen. In full honest, I remember feeling so amazed to be in such an industrious and prosperous city like Nagasaki as I did my part in traversing through the busy streets of the town while on my way to the important interview at the school. Speaking of which, I should probably tell you about what happened at that interview.

After a few minutes of walking, I had finally reached the school where I was supposed to teach. The school looked impressive on the surface with its red tile roof and cream-colored, stone walls. It certainly looked better than the school that I went to when I was a lad! However, what really caught my eye as I approached the school was a young lassie who passed me by as I neared the main entrance of the school. I only took notice of her when she passed me, and immediately after I saw a glimpse of her, I looked back to see her before I entered the school. In my spying, I saw that she was wearing a business suit and skirt, but what really caught my eye about her were her large hoop earrings as well as her curly, blond hair. I wished that I had gotten a good look at her face, but I guess my mind was too far in the clouds about my teaching job.

Anyway, I walked into the school building full of pep-and-pickup. Upon my arrival, I was expecting some sort of triumphant entry or reception from the staff of the school where the headmaster of the school would be present to welcome me. However, when I did enter the school, all I got was crickets. No one came to greet me or even shake my hand. I was confused by this as I was expecting someone to be at the door waiting for me. In my confusion, I saw two teachers walking in my direction, and I went to go talk to them to see what was going on. However, when I tried to stop and talk to them, they simply walked past me without giving me any notice. I had no clue what was going on. For a second, I thought that maybe I had gone to the

wrong school or maybe I had forgotten to notify the school about my arrival. I decided to walk around the school to find an answer to what was going on.

With the help of two polite students, I found my way to the main office of the school where I saw a receptionist working at a large, wooden desk. Upon spotting there, I walked up to her, and in my politest Japanese, I explained my situation to her in that I was new teacher at the school. The receptionist only asked my name to which I gave, and after a few seconds of searching through stacks of paper, the woman handed me a letter. Upon giving it to me, she said that the letter had all the answers that I needed.

With keen interest, I tore open the envelope and read the letter to find out what was happening. The instance that I looked at the note, the first thing that jumped out at me was a line of bolded text that said,

*“Patrick McCollins is terminated from the JET Programme.”*

Immediately, I felt a red hotness collect in my earlobes and stinging tears well up in my eyes as I read that line of the letter. Despite my inner, boiling rage, I read further into the letter in order to find out why I was expelled from the programme, and I found out that I was being tossed because I had apparently “*disobeyed the rules*” of the programme. The letter said that I had broken the rule of having work outside of the programme which I knew was clearly untrue. I was ready to go straight to the headmaster to set the situation straight until I saw a line in the letter that said,

*“Patrick McCollin’s outside employment was reported to us through a letter sent by the staff at the University of Valera in Dublin.”*

In that moment, I knew what happened. Those bastards bagged me like a skilled sniper!

Oh, I tell you that I left that office in such mad anger and frustration. I was grinding my teeth and clenching my fists with the crumpled letter in hand. I was so angry about what had happened to me. They had screwed me over in a spiteful act of revenge! I was just so mad that after I left the school in a huff, I just sat on the steps of the school and wept. I mean, in that moment, for all intents or purposes, I was ruined. I had no job, no source of income, and to top it off, I had little over a 1,000 pounds left of my Auntie's inheritance on me. To add insult to injury, when I tried to go back to the apartment that I was given as a part of the programme in order to assess my situation, I found that I was kicked out of the apartment too. All that I was given as a sendoff was my suitcase and a small, beaten-up backpack which had all of my personal belongings in it. In that moment, I became homeless too.

I think it goes without saying that I was completely overwhelmed with emotions after being kicked out of the apartment. I didn't know if I should cry, throw a tantrum, punch something or not. In a sense, I was down-and-out as a poor boy in a rich man's clothes. All I had left to my name was the meager remains of my Auntie's inheritance. So, with the last of my inheritance deep in my coat pockets, I did the only wise thing that I could think to do in such a moment of trial. I fearlessly walked down the street, found the nearest *izakaya* bar that I could find, went-in, went straight to the bar, and got plastered.

I think I started drinking at 10:40 in the morning, and I drank in silence for hours as I drowned my sorrows in *shochu* spirits and sweet *sake*. Over the course of the day that I spent in that *izakaya*, I was lucky enough to have good company who joined me in drinking my sorrows away. I was accompanied by salarymen who had just gotten back from a terrible day at the office, early *nomikai* drinking parties, Aussie tourists looking for a good time, scores of *gyaru* with their pink coats and faux jewelry, and more. Meanwhile, I just sat at the bar in my morning

suit where I downed shot after shot of whiskey and beer. Later that evening, just before the sun had set, I switched to tea and coffee to try and cheer myself up. Over smooth black coffee and rich green tea, I tried to think of a way that I could get out of this hole that I had dug for myself. However, I could think of nothing as the alcohol and caffeine combined stunted my brain from doing any hard thinking, so I just continued to sit at the bar in deep, solemn thought.

Then at one point, I was on my fourth cup of green tea when I was about to give the bartender some more coins for another drink. I was getting out my yen coins to pay when I guess the alcohol finally manifested itself in my system as I stupidly dropped a bunch of my coins onto the bar floor. Quickly, I went about trying to catch the money before it hit the floor. However, my flailing made me lose my balance, and I soon fell out of my bar stool and onto the stained wood floor. As I hit the floor, a wave of shame and embarrassment came over me, and I quickly tried to get back into my seat before anyone noticed me. But as I picked myself off the floor, I noticed the most interesting of sites. While I was on the floor, I saw a woman in a cubicle at the back of the club, and this woman had the cubicle all to herself as everyone else passed her by without giving her much notice. What caught me most about her was how this young maiden looked. She had long, black hair with bangs that went a bit over her eyes, the white robes and red pleated trousers of a Shinto *Miko* priestess, as well as the most beautiful complexion that I had ever seen.

After seeing such a fair maiden, my mind quickly turned from one of despair and drunkenness to one of romance and interest. Even in my drunken state, such a conservative-looking lady caught my eye, and I immediately began to plot a way to try and court her.

Back in my seat, I planned my method of approach on such a fair lady. I thought for a long and hard five minutes before I got my ready to make a move on her. Before I went off to the lady, I remember that I looked at myself in the mirror on the backwall of the bar in order to comb

my hair, straighten my tie, and look at my teeth. Furthermore, to ensure that I was as pleasing as I possibly could be, I sneaked off a couple mints from the guy next to me. Then, with a mouth full of peppermint and a drink in my hand, I walked over to the beautiful lady. I really had nothing to lose by this point, and I was going to do my best to try and woo this beautiful lass to my side.

When I approached the lovely lady in her booth, she did not notice me at first. She simply ignored me and paid attention to a scroll that she was reading. After standing there for a minute or two, just gawking and smiling at her, I came out with the best pickup line that I could think of in that moment. I think it went something like,

“Hey there *kanojo*! Are you the sun because you’re hotter than the stars.”

God, looking back, that was an awful pick-up line even for a drunkard like me!

Well, my words didn’t sweep this maiden off her feet like I thought. Instead, she just continued to sit still and ignore me. However, I was not deterred by this, and I still stood over her for about a minute after trying to charm her. Finally, without evening looking up from her scroll, the young maiden spoke to me by saying,

“Would you like to go back onto the bar floor again? If you don’t want to, then I suggest that you leave me alone.”

I was pretty bummed out when she said this, so I started to make my way back to the bar. However, as I was just about to cut my losses on trying to get this lady’s favor, I finally noticed what was on the scroll that she was reading. The scroll was a traditional-looking silk scroll, and it was written in a very early form of Hiragana, if I remember correctly. Furthermore, the scroll had a hand-drawn picture of the entire island of Kyushu on it with extensive details on Kyushu’s cities, villages, rivers, mountain passes, and more. I then became interested in what this fair lady

was reading, so in a last-ditch attempt to talk to this lady fair, I offered some commentary on her scroll by saying,

“Goodness gracious! That’s a mighty fine map, you’ve got there! It looks to be from about the early ninth century. What amazes me most is the coastlines on it as they appear so crisp and clean. Such detail and craftsmanship from the Heian period, I say!”

To my surprise, the lady spoke to me after I said that, and I couldn’t believe it when she said to me,

“Yes, sir. You’re right! The detail for such an early specimen is indeed astonishing to me. I am quite impressed that you were able to guess what my scroll was about. Actually, I got this scroll from a local shrine that I belong to.”

“Really,” I said to her with great curiosity, “would you mind if I look at it with you. You seem to be lonely, and maybe you would like someone to help you look at it. Besides, I always loved geography as a lad!”

The maiden then stuck out the palm of her hand gently to the other side of the booth as she said,

“Be my guest. Besides, I could use someone to talk too.”

Immediately, I took my seat with the maiden, and from there, I was able to hit it off quite well with her. The maiden introduced herself as Ohirume, and she told me that she was a local Shinto priestess who had a keen interest in Japanese geography. I told her who I was, and from there, we first started to talk about the map. We discussed some general details about the map like where some of the famous shrines were located, where most of Kyushu’s major cities were located, what were the major resources of the area, and the like. But after a while, we started to get sidetracked into conversations completely unrelated to the map. Instead of talking about the

map, we found ourselves cracking jokes, telling funny stories about our ourselves, our likes and dislikes, our favorite foods, and more. Soon, we forgot to talk about the map and entered into personal, entertaining small talk that made us both laugh and smile. Ohirume seemed to be very interested in me as she asked me about who I was, where I was from, what was Ireland like, what were some key parts of Irish culture, and things of that sort. In the same vein, I asked Ohirume about certain parts of Japanese culture and customs that had caught my interest when I first studied Japan. In response, Ohirume recalled with expert memory and excitement some of the greatest folk tales to come out of the Land of the Rising Sun.

Also in our conversations, Ohirume silently ensnared me with her charm and looks. She was at first calm and reserved in her mannerisms and speech, but soon after I opened up to her, she became very bubbly and energetic as our conversations became more and more personable. Ohirume talked to me in delight over various parts of Japan, and with each topic that the priestess picked, she presented her knowledge with much excitement and vigor in her voice. Besides her warm personality and smarts, what also enthralled me about this young lady was her appearance. I thought she was beautiful from far away, but when I was only a meter away, she was drop-dead gorgeous. What really got me about her was her large, diamond eyes that she matched up with mine during our deep conversations. I don't know how to describe this to you, but whenever she looked at me with those eyes, I could feel a charge of coursing electricity go through me. She just seemed to make me go silently wild with her eyes of amber as did her smile for that matter. For my part, I noticed that the young priestess softened up, and she became very smiley and giddy near me.

Anyway, what I am trying to say is that we really hit it off in our first meeting. We talked for hours on various things related to Japan, and we found ourselves in deep discussion about all

kinds of subjects related to both Japan and Ireland, ranging from history, to politics, the 1996 general election, music, media, literature, and the like.

Then at one point, I don't know how, our conversation got onto the topic of religion which *always* leads to a healthy and polite form of discourse between two people of differing faiths. Well, being southern Irish, I think you know exactly where I stood in telling her what I believed in. She naturally was interested in my beliefs to which I told her about some of our dogmas. Then when we got to what she believed in, Ohirume, being Japanese and a *miko* too, naturally told me about her devotion to Shinto. She told me about the *kami* or gods across Japan, the four principles of Shinto, the duties of a priestess, certain festivals related to the *kami*, the sun goddess Amaterasu, and more. I mean, she was really passionate about her faith.

However, at this point in our meeting, I don't know why I did this, but I was becoming a bit of a smug jerk. The *sake* and liquor were going to my head, and I found myself becoming more full of myself when speaking with the priestess. I don't know why her faith struck a nerve with me, but I suddenly became very condescending to this pretty lady about her faith and everything that she was trying to tell me about Shinto. Like, she was telling me about the importance of music and dance to the Shinto faith as it related to the story of the Amaterasu, and I responded to her about its importance by saying something like,

“Well, that's what you believe it, but really . . .”

You know. I was showing her that thick-headed side of me that is all too present in me. Especially when I've been drinking.

Needless to say, the discussion got a bit heated. Ohirume and I went back-and-forth like a couple of boxers as we discussed Shinto in the world today. I pressed Ohirume on various topics related to Shintoism, and in particular, I pressed her on the importance of the main goddess of

the faith, Amaterasu. To me, I just could not understand why the Japanese people would have all of these gods and spirits to play with, but of all things, it put Amaterasu on this pedestal as not only the center of its faith but also the supposed mother of the Japanese royal family. With every question and charge I made against Amaterasu, Ohirume would give a fierce and fiery rebuttal in defense of the supreme goddess. Then at one point after a long back-and-forth with the bold priestess, I crossed the line as I looked the priestess in her eyes and told her flat that Amaterasu and Shintoism were nothing more than one big myth to justify the existence of the Japanese royal family. I felt like I had cornered Ohirume with such a line, and I sat back after that with my eyes up and a smug smile across my face. I was trying to think of a joke to crack in that moment to tease her, but then, I felt a powerful slap rush across my face that knocked the daylights out of my soul. With a sore and throbbing cheek in-hand, I looked back at Ohirume. I wanted to give her a yelling for hitting me, but my anger immediately dissipated when I saw that the maiden was red hot in the face with tears in her eyes. Then, over her short breaths, I heard the *miko* say only one thing to me in a harsh yet sad tone,

“*Chigaimasu . . .*”

I knew that I had messed up, but as I tried to make peace with her by sticking out my hand to console her, she quickly grabbed her scroll and ran out of the bar. As she ran out, I heard her sob with her head in her right elbow. Quickly, I used my Gaelic footballer legs to chase after her. I pushed passed several people in order to leave the bar as fast as a fox, and when I left the bar, I saw Ohirume running down the crowded streets of Nagasaki at a rapid pace. Immediately, I bolted down the street after her as I called her by name. I called and called after the maiden while I ran after her down the streets of Nagasaki, but Ohirume always seemed to keep her distance away from me.

I think the chase through the bustling streets of Nagasaki lasted for nearly thirty minutes before I saw Ohirume enter a large, gated area that was connected to the main street that we were on. Not to let her go, I quickly caught up with her to see that she entered a public garden. I charged into the garden and went up-and-down the red brick pathways looking for her. Thankfully, I still had a sunset to guide me through the park as Nagasaki neared its hour of dusk. But after a fast-paced run through the garden over numerous flower beds and arched bridgeways, I came upon a roundabout area of the garden where there was a quaint fountain in the middle. It was near this fountain that I found the priestess hunched with her back to me and standing as still as a statue.

I ran up to her back and put my hand on her shoulder as I told her over my shallow breaths,

“Okay, okay, I’m sorry for what I said! There was no reason to run off. I was just joking before, honest! If it makes you feel better, maybe there is an Amaterasu . . .”

While saying that, I spun Ohirume around to take a look at her, but what I saw blew me away. Literally!

I saw her eyes blaze forth with a brilliant and blinding white light, and before I could do anything else, I was thrown back onto the brick pathway of the garden as Ohirume extended her arms into a T-position.

As I lay on the ground, I couldn’t believe my eyes with what happened next. Right before my eyes, I saw Ohirume ascend off the ground and undergo an amazing transformation. I looked on in disbelief as I saw her skin go snow white and her hair grow meters in length while her eyes became a brilliant amber color. Then, I saw how the rays of light from her eyes formed a myriad of gold ornaments in her hair while the maiden’s *miko* clothes morphed into the brilliant robes of

a royal. As I lay on the ground, I could not believe what I was seeing before me. I had no idea of what to make of Ohirume's transformation until it hit me. A cold sweat burst over my brow as I suddenly realized what was going on and I shook in fear as my mind began to connect the dots.

Before I knew it, Ohirume's metamorphosis was complete, and in her splendor, I saw her gaze at me in her royal and divine regalia with a cold and angry look on her face. I was not able to get a word in before the lady spoke to me by saying,

“See me now Irishman, for it is I, Amaterasu of the Heavens! Do you still wish to insult me now!? If you do, then in the name of all *Nihon*, I will unleash my wrath upon you!”

As she said this in a brooding voice, I saw great sparks and rays of blinding light rush forth from her robes as an intense heat radiated off the goddess. Not knowing what else to do, I retreated deep inside my suit coat like a cowardly turtle. In an attempt to try and placate the angry goddess, I found the last of my Auntie's inheritance in my coat pocket, and without thinking twice, I threw my money at the feet of the *kami*. I was scared out my mind, and I yelled at the divine lady over my tears in a hoarse voice,

“I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm really sorry, dear goddess Amaterasu! Please, don't hurt me! I didn't mean to upset you; I swear to God! *Mea culpa!* Please, have mercy on a wretch like me!”

Over my sorry screams, I could see from under the cover of my coat that the goddess collected my offering with a wave of her hand. Then, as fast as a bolt of lightning, I saw her as she flicked her wrist into the air and the last of my inheritance was thrown into the pastures of the garden. Then, I watched in wonder with how the goddess changed my money into flowers on the green from purple Camellias to ten-foot-tall Morning Glories to Cherry Blossoms saplings. This site caught my fancy, and for a minute, I was in wonder at the sight. However, my inner *zen* quickly fled when I looked back at the goddess, and I saw that she was looking dead at me with

cold eyes. I immediately turtled back into my coat with a whimper, and in my coat, I could feel the presence of the divine lady come over me like a mighty wave.

Over shallow breaths, I could hear myself praying as I felt afraid for my life. I swear to you that I thought I was a dead man in that moment.

Instead, to my surprise, I felt the goddess pick me up by my arms and bring me into a firm yet comfortable embrace. In our embrace, I could feel my fear and dread dissipate into a great, inner peace. In wonderous shock, I felt my arms slowly return the hug to the goddess as I gripped her tightly into my arms. I looked up at the goddess only to see her smiling down on me with beaming eyes and a fair, clear face. Over the amazing things that I was feeling in my heart, the goddess spoke to me in a tender and mild way by saying,

“Don’t be afraid, *Patorikku-san*. I will not harm you for how could I be mad with such an innocent, little lamb like you? Hold me and be still.”

With a leaping joy in my heart, I hugged her back and gripped her as tightly as I could. I felt like I was in the bliss of heaven as she rubbed my head and cloaked me in her warmth. I never imagined that my first embrace with a girl would be so pleasant and warming to the heart.

In the middle of our brace, I suddenly saw a cloudy whirlwind encase us both as I looked up to see Amaterasu smiling with her eyes closed in our embrace. Me though, I was worried about what was going to happen next, so I burrowed myself deeper into Amaterasu’s chest. After a minute or two, I opened my eyes, and there in my arms, I saw Ohirume as she rested her head on my chest. Then, ever so calmly, she smiled up at me and left our embrace. She then put her hands to her hips, and with a cocked head and a playful grin, the priestess said to me,

“Believe in Amaterasu now, you big bully?”

I took a second to laugh at her tongue-in-cheek comment before I realized the full extent of what she said. Immediately, I fell on my knees before her and groveled before her for forgiveness. Over my apologies, I felt Ohirume lift me to my feet as she hugged me and talked to me in a soothing way.

“Don’t be afraid *Patorikku-san*, I don’t bite,” she said while holding onto me tight, “I just needed to do that to show you who I really was and teach you a lesson. But don’t get me wrong, I wouldn’t even think about hurting you. You’re too nice and charming for me to hurt!”

“Well, it certainly worked my fair lady, and my apologies for what I said earlier,” I said to her as I held her close, “But, why did you stop? I was having such a lovely time with you. Did I do something wrong?”

The goddess then looked at me with her sparkling eyes as she blushed and said to me,

“Well, I was having such a lovely time with you too, but I needed to stop for a couple reasons. For one, a human can only be near a divine spirit for only a short time before the power of a god can overwhelm a person to the point of killing them. I certainly didn’t want to do that to you! But more importantly, it is nearing the night now, and I really shouldn’t be out past dusk. I am the goddess of the sun after all, and I am only meant to be out when the sun is out too. I am sorry to do this to you *Patorikku-san*, but I need to leave you and get back to my *Ama*.”

With that, the *miko* broke from our embrace, gave me a quick bow, and ran away into the depths of the garden. Still enchanted with the divine maiden, I chased after her through the winding and bending paths of the garden. Over flower beds and arched bridges, I ran after her as I called to her to stay with me. I was about to catch up with her at one point when I tripped over my shoelaces and fell face first onto the garden walkway. Then, the last I saw of the goddess that night was when she jumped into a dense thicket of flowers and shrubbery, but not before giving

me an air kiss as she left me there on the garden floor. Quickly, I got to my feet and ran to the area where she went into only to find no goddess or priestess in sight. I searched everywhere in the area that she vanished in, but I saw not a trace of the maiden anywhere. It was like she had fluttered away like a divine wind.

After that, I just sat on the dirt floor of the garden where Ohirume or Amaterasu disappeared, and I just remember being in an intense whirlwind of emotions. I collapsed onto the garden grass below me as I felt emotions of shock, stress, fear, happiness, confusion, and heart-throbbing love run through me like blood. The whole day from losing the job to meeting Amaterasu took the wind out of my sails, and before long, I passed out on a flower bed of roses and slept in peace under the starlit Japanese night.

When I awoke the next morning, my mind was still in a blur about what had happened the night before. Even though I was able to remember what had happened the previous night, I was still in great disbelief about what happened. I couldn't tell if I had dreamt the whole thing up from too much liquor or if I actually did experience such a marvelous event that previous night. To be safe, I decided to rationalize the previous night, and the best thing that I could think of was that I had gotten drunk at the *izakaya* and stumbled into the garden by accident where I fell asleep. It wasn't a great story, but it was all that I got.

Through my grogginess, I sluggishly got to my feet and made my way through the garden to its main entrance. As I roved out of the garden, I tried to make sense of what I should do next. To take inspiration from Orwell, I was down-and-out in downtown Nagasaki, and I had no clue on what to do next. I was broke and homeless. The best thing that I could think of was to get my behind to the Irish embassy where I could begin my immigration process back to Ireland.

But as I was about to make my way up the sidewalk in search of some consulate, I heard a distinct, girlish voice behind me say in a cheery voice,

“Good morning *Patorikku-san!*”

I snapped my head in the direction where I heard the voice coming from, and there on a bench, I saw Amaterasu in her priestess, Ohirume disguise waving to me with a beaming smile. In full honesty, I was shocked to see her again, and her appearance immediately wiped away my idea that I had gotten blackout wasted the night before. I initially just looked at her with my mouth agape to which the disguised sun goddess quickly rushed over to me and took me by her warm hands. I will try to repeat to you our conversation during that first part of the morning. My memory is still a little hazy over the finer details of that day, but I will do my best to repeat what we said. I think it went something like this:

“I . . . I . . . I . . .”

“For an English major, you really aren’t a man of words at times, aren’t you?”

“No, I am just surprised to not only see you again. You just look so . . . fair and pretty. Your sharp complexion, your cute, little nose, your large, sparkly eyes, your ornate priestess robes, your . . .”

“Hey, knock it off! You’re making me blush! Did Benzaiten suddenly come over you before I came back this morning? I’ll smite her if she did!”

“No, not at all, my fair goddess! I’m just a bit taken aback by you, your shining beauty, your romantic radiance, and your twinkling eyes that sparkle like the Emperor’s throne.”

As an aside, I knew I got to her heart with that one as after I said that, she smiled and held one of her hands over her lower face to hide her blushing cheeks. I quickly relieved her rosy-red embarrassment by asking her another question.

“Pardon me Amaterasu the Great, but why exactly did you come back for me?”

“Well, I think my blushing and ‘romantic radiance’ tells you exactly why I came back to a decent Irish boy like you. What with your fine suit, your wavy hair, your soft features, your charming nature, and not to mention a laugh that sounds like music to me.”

I remember her chuckle as she pointed to the redness in my cheeks and nose as it became my turn to hide my blushing.

So, there we stood, a goddess and a Gael. For a long time, we just stood looking at each other, not really knowing what to do with ourselves. Not wanting to let her go, I thought about what to do with her that would be nice and pleasant for the both of us. With my noggin jogging, I looked to the park entrance when I finally got an idea in my head. I broke the stillness between us by slowly lifting a hooked arm to her and asking if she would care to join me on a walk through the garden. I remember the joy that I felt in my heart when she jumped to hug my arm, and soon enough, we began our stroll through the garden.

As we strolled together, I remember that we rested our heads together as we silently marveled at the stone facades, crystal blue ponds, and colorful landscapes on our walk through the tranquil garden. The garden was extremely peaceful that morning, and all one could hear was the elated whistles of a nightingale or the movements of the *koi* fish in the ponds that we passed over. In addition to the beauty of the nature, I remember how I felt exceptionally warm near Amaterasu. The way I felt near her was like how someone feels after getting to a warm hearth after a long day of shoveling snow in the middle of a blizzard. I don’t know, but when I was near Amaterasu, she seemed to satiate a longing in me that I had for years.

A little while later during our walk, I decided to strike up some conversation with the goddess by asking her a question that had been on my mind all morning. Once again, I’ll try to

do my best in recounting our conversation as my head was still in the love clouds when I was speaking with her.

“Pardon me, Lady . . . or . . . um, . . . Madam . . . or Most Highest . . .”

“Please *Patorikku-san*, call me *Amei-san*!”

“Aye, *Amei-san*, I’ve had something on my mind that I’ve been wanting to ask you. Now, what exactly is a beautiful, intelligent, kind, and fair goddess like you doing here on earth? Shouldn’t you be in the heavens somewhere and doing battle against evil in the world?”

“Well, it’s funny that you say that because I am doing battle against evil in *Nihon* right now! I do usually fight evil from my home in the heavens, but recently, I have seen that my dear *Nihon* has been undergoing a very tumultuous time as of late. There has been a recent economic downturn in *Nihon*’s economy, corruption in the government, chaos in the upcoming general election, attacks by *yokai* spirits, unpredictable natural disasters, *yakuza* crime syndicates running wild, and more!”

“Bejabbers! With the way you put it, it sounds like the whole country is going to come apart at the seams at any minute.”

“I know, and that is what many of my children think too! I’ve heard enough of my people pray for me to help *Nihon* in its hour of need, and I have decided to come down from the heavens to investigate what is causing my island nation such trouble. I have been going up-and-down the whole island in the disguise of a *miko* priestess, and after a long period of investigation, I think I know who is causing all the trouble in my dear *Nihon*. Susanoo . . .”

“Wait a minute, Susanoo? Your brother?”

“*Hai*, the same one I banished from the heavens and the island many, many years ago. I think he is stirring-the-pot here to try and get petty revenge on me for what I did to him. I have

followed his signs for weeks, used old scrolls and maps, had divine help, resorted to astrology, and more, and I believe he is here in south on the island of Kyushu. While I am pretty sure that he's here, I am having the most terrible luck in trying to find him. Whenever I think I have cornered him on some beach somewhere or in some teahouse, I find that I've come to a dead end. Then, I have to go back to the drawing board on other ideas of where he could be in. That is why you found me in that *izakaya* last night as I was trying to think of more spots to find him after a long day of fruitless searching. While I might be an all-powerful and all-knowing goddess, Susanoo is as quick as a rabbit and as crafty as a fox, and recently, I feel spent in trying to find him. Whatever I do, it seems my brother is just six steps ahead of me, and I can only keep up so much with him. His zeal and jealousy drives him to keep doing his worst in order to get back at me, and I just don't know what to do or where to look anymore."

As Amaterasu went on, I noticed that her golden eyes grew fainter and fainter while a soft, glossy blue overtook them. She grew quiet and troubled, and I could sense that her search was taking the light out of her eyes. I don't know what came over me in that moment, but I suddenly felt an angry surge of energy channel down my spine and make me drop on one knee before the sovereign goddess of the morning star. I clenched her soft hand tightly and looked at her boldly in the eyes as I proudly said to her,

"My dear goddess of the sun Amaterasu, please hear me now. While I might be a foreigner in your great land of *Nihon* and a stranger to you, I sympathize with you and your pains. It tears me apart inside to see you in such a silent distress, and I cannot stand it any longer. Therefore, I ask for your permission to let me help you restore order to your fair island nation. Through me, the four provinces of Erin are at your service!"

I must have struck a nerve with the lady in white and red as after my moment of boldness, the goddess only smiled down on me before I saw tears stream down her face. She then hugged me in a tight and strong embrace before speaking to me,

“You know *Patorikku-san*, I don’t have the best of knowledge on you Europeans. Europe is far outside of my domain, you know. However, I do know a few things about you Europeans through people like Xavier, Hearn, and Adams, but one thing that I know that is common in you Europeans is your chivalry. It probably would seem silly to my fellow *kami* to take the help of not only a mortal but also a foreigner, but I couldn’t care less about what they think now. I appreciate and cherish your offer of support, and you would make me the happiest *kami* in all of heaven and earth if you joined me in helping to save my dear *Nihon*.”

In that moment, we laughed and hugged each other tightly as a wave of excitement and joy ran through us both. We were still hugging each other before I gazed into her eyes to see that they had a gold, amber color in them once again. The goddess’ shiny eyes that spoke of joy and hope overtook me, and the joy that come from her eyes pushed me to try and lean-in for a kiss. I closed my eyes and put my lips to hers, but before I could kiss her, the fair goddess put a hand to my lips and said,

“*Patorikku-san*, before we do anything else in our plans, I feel that I must leave soon for the night is approaching fast.”

I looked away from the goddess and towards the sun which had just begun to set over the silhouette line of downtown Nagasaki. In that moment, I realized just how long I had spent in the garden with the glorious goddess.

“I must go back to my secret cove at *Ama-no-Iwate*. It is a cave that I know well, and it is sort of like my home away from home in the heavens. There I can rest for the night before we begin a new day of searching tomorrow. I’ll see you around . . .”

I felt sad to see the maiden go off again for I enjoyed our time together that day, but I understood that the fair lady needed her rest. But as I was about to give her my last regards, I heard her say to me,

“Actually . . . oh, screw it! I don’t care if I might get in trouble with the others for this, but . . . *Patorikku-san* . . . I would like to know if you would care to join me in retiring at my retreat at *Ama-no-Iwate*. I would be honored to have you as a guest, and while we’re there, maybe I can show you around the place or even have dinner together? My treat!”

I smiled at the goddess while my heart skipped a beat at the thought of a dinner date with the fair goddess. I was very thankful for her offer, and I bowed before her while saying,

“It would be my highest pleasure, *Amaterasu-san*.”

The goddess only smiled back to me before sticking out her hand before me. In a rather nonchalant way, I grabbed the lady’s hand, not expecting anything unusual, before I suddenly felt weightless as fresh wind blew past my ears. Confused, I looked down at me feet, and below, I could see the rooftops of Nagasaki passing under my soles. In awe, I looked to my left and right, and I saw the setting sun on one side and the rising moon on the other while clouds and faint stars twinkled around us. I was flying! I couldn’t believe it myself, but I was flying! And with a goddess nonetheless!

I will admit that for a second, I did feel a bit scared as I flew through the sky with the goddess. I was always a chicken when it came to heights. I think I might’ve let out a whimper of childish fright until I felt a tightened grip in my hand from Amaterasu. I looked at the goddess,

and she only smiled at me before looking to the horizon that we were heading towards.

Suddenly, I felt as if I was in a dream as we whisked through the sweet southern air of Japan. As we went deeper into the pink and orange azure of the heavens, I felt a liberation envelop my soul that left me speechless with a wide smile on my face. As I passed over the Japanese countryside with my true love, I saw some traditional markers of Japanese life. I saw ancient castles and shrines from centuries ago, rice farms, and small, quaint fishing villages where Japanese men and women went about their evenings. In viewing such typical scenes of Japanese life below me, at some point, I didn't feel like a man anymore. I felt like a spirit. I saw the people below me as a garden of blooming flowers that all blossomed individually. By seeing the people below, I felt a wonderful and magical feeling bloom deep inside my heart like a sweet cherry blossom tree in spring. I didn't just want to help Amaterasu anymore. I wanted to help her people too. In that flight over the glens and hills of Kyushu made me realize that I not only loved Amaterasu but I loved her people as well.

Anyway, after our flight through the skies of Japan, Amaterasu and I finally landed on holy ground before a large crevice as fresh, southern wind blew past us. It was here that Amaterasu showed me the front to the cave of *Ama-no-Iwate*, and on the surface, the cave was nothing impressive to look at. The cave was situated in a quaint little area with plenty of foliage and shrubbery to hide it from the public eye. However, the signs of public reverence in the form of Shinto arches, paper lamps, and offerings were all too present near the outer banks of the cave.

The cave was a cave, an obvious statement, I know! I don't know why, but the way Amaterasu drummed up her cove, I thought that I was going to be greeted by some beautiful grotto that took my breathe away. Instead, I saw a cave that if I saw it on my own, I wouldn't have guessed in a million years that some great goddess was hiding out in it. I mean, why on

God's good, green earth would a fair and lovely goddess of the sun hide out in a cold, dark, and damp cave with creepy crawlies running about all over the place. It must be scary to be all alone in a cave with critters around to take a bite out of you. That was what was exactly on my mind as Amaterasu took me by my hand and lead me into the depths of the cave.

“Come on *Patorikku-san*, you are going to love it,” said Amaterasu to me with a cheerful glee as she led me deep into the cave system.

“*Amei-san*,” I said to her in a reluctant voice, “I don't want to sound like Little Lord Fauntleroy, but couldn't you have picked a better place to stay while here on earth? I really am not in the mood to spend my night in a cold, cramped cove. I mean, I'm going to get my suit all dirty, ants in my pants, rocks in my shoes, and . . .”

At this point, the goddess turned to me and looked at me in a stern fashion that made me hunch before her as she said,

“*Patorikku-san* . . . you are my guest, and I invited you to my residence. Please don't disrespect me by speaking ill about my home. Now I want you to think about what you've done by closing your eyes, tightly.”

I did as the goddess commanded, and with no sense of sight, I could feel how the goddess led me through the depths of the cave system. As the goddess led me deeper into the cave system, I kept bumping my shoulders against the hard stone walls with the occasional scrape of my head on a rocky roof above. However, after a few minutes of perilous walking through the cave system with the goddess as my shepherdess, I finally heard the lovely spirit say,

“Okay, open your eyes!”

When I opened my eyes, I couldn't believe where I was. I swear, it was like I had stumbled into the underground version of Eden. I was in a cleared-out expansion of the cave

system, and I saw that the cave was richly decorated with ornate and beautifully crafted markers of traditional Japanese home culture. I saw paper walls separating individual rooms, candles, and paper lanterns above us on the roof of the cave, shrines and arches with offerings of food and incense scattered here-and-there, flowers and trees galore, instruments of *shamisen*, flutes, drums, and harps scattered all around just waiting for someone to play them, tea sets, wall scrolls with calligraphy and paintings on them, suits of ancient armor, and more. I walked around in wonder in the cave before I looked back at Amaterasu who I saw had silently transformed back into her goddess form without me looking, and she still looked as gorgeous as ever. At once, I spoke to her as I made my intentions clear to her when I said,

“I mean . . . am . . . am . . . am I even in a cave right now?”

“I told you! I made this place real nice for you and before you were insulting it.”

“My apologies *Amei-san* for I had no idea that I would be entering a palace that would rival where the Emperor lives.”

“Well, I guess I can forgive your sins for you couldn’t have known any better. You are Irish after all. It is not like your people sleep in caves.”

“Well, actually, we do have a history of that. Except, they weren’t as ornate as this and we did it out of necessity. If it wasn’t the Vikings, it was the English who left us the caves to live in!”

“Hahaha! You are funny *Patorikku-san*! You got a good sense of humor!”

“It is my pleasure, your divineness. Pardon me, but could I please explore the place a bit. I mean, this is too good to be true!”

“Well, before you do anything else, take off your shoes and take these.”

With that, she threw me a towel and a back brush before pointing to a room with a large wood basin in it.

“I am not too strict, but I have one strict rule in regards to cleanliness. Before all else, you need a long scrubbing for your hair is greasy, your nice clothes are scuffed, and you smell like the bathroom in a brewery. Now, go and clean yourself while I check if my servants have dinner prepared for us.”

Glady, I went to take a fresh, rejuvenating bath in some of the softest water that you could imagine. I swear that bathwater was so nice, it felt like I was washing myself in velvet. Anyway, after cleaning off all the grime and grease on me, I got dressed in a lovely *haori* robe and *hakama* pants to rest in while she had my morning suit cleaned and fixed. So, with a good bath, good clothes, and good company, good food came next, and the goddess did not disappoint in the slightest. Amaterasu sat us down at a large spruce table where we dined on *sushi*, *sashimi*, *tempura*, *sukiyaki*, *ramen*, *onigiri*, *miso*, several kinds of rice, *natto*, and *botamochi*. All the while, we washed everything down with plenty of *sake* and green tea. The funny thing was that the goddess had servants that kept bringing out course after course of food for just the two of us. By the third course, I felt like my stomach was going to burst, but the goddess had barely broken a sweat in her feasting. I guess that is what being a god can get you.

Over our dinner, Amaterasu and I discussed plans in trying to locate Susanoo. We went back-and-forth for the longest time as we talked about all the kinds of places we should look. She said that we should look in areas of religious or environmental importance while I suggested that we should strike near the coastal regions of Japan where the major cities and beaches were. After a long while of verbal fencing, the lovely lady and I made a compromise of alternating day-by-day to specific regions of interests. On one day, we would follow Amaterasu’s idea of visiting

the major religious and nature areas where Susanoo could be hiding out while on the next day, we would visit my areas of interest near the coastal areas and cities. So, with a plan in mind and some leads already on-hand, we put our best foot forward starting the day after.

Over the following month, we went to several regions of interest on the island of Kyushu. Right now, I cannot recount everything that we did. However, just know that we searched Kyushu like how I search for beer in the fridge on Sunday. We traveled to various areas of interest on Kyushu where we thought Susanoo was. Off the top of my head, I think we went to Fukuoka, Saga, Kitakyushu, Nagasaki, the Amakusa island chain in the south, Kumamoto, the beaches of Miyazaki, the Sakurajima volcano, scores of villages and towns, and more. All of which turned up nothing but dead ends and loose leads.

However, our search was not completely fruitless. While we could not find Susanoo in our search, we did see and experience a fair amount of early 90s Japanese culture. In our visits to the various domains and towns of Kyushu, we visited various places in our search like local shrines, teahouses, music halls, theaters, manga stores, museums, gardens, forests, and the like. Even after days of hopeless searching, the goddess and I always seemed to have much fun together as we explored certain areas of interests. Naturally, this gave rise to many delightful moments and funny stories that I could tell.

There was the one time in Kumamoto where I “helped” Amaterasu by pickpocketing a *yakuza* mobster to which I then gave his wallet stash of yen to the poor. Later that evening, the *yakuza* member came looking for us, and while he did find us, I scared him off by pelting him with cockle and mussel shells.

There was also the time in Dazaifu where we stopped to pay our respects at the shrine of one of Amaterasu’s *kami* friends, and I must admit that the visit was a very enchanting

experience. On the same day, I got into a three-on-one barfight with some troublemaking youngsters who tried to insult Amaterasu.

I also remember the time when I sang to Amaterasu at a karaoke bar in Nagasaki, and once again, I saw out of the corner of my eye, the same blond hair girl that I saw back on the day of my job rejection.

Anyway, what I am trying to say is that Amaterasu and I had our fair share of fun adventures during our search for Susanoo. We visited the beaches of the south, fought off evil spirits together, walked through parks, invoked the help of other *kami*, danced, held hands, looked at each other's eyes, and . . . I'm sorry, where was I?

Overall, our search on Kyushu had turned up dry after a month of meticulous searching. To make things more difficult, my love and I were forced to stop our search for a day on September 22, 1996. That day was important to not only Amaterasu but also the Japanese people as that was a special holiday to celebrate the arrival of the Autumn Equinox Holiday. I am sure you know from school about that holiday and how the Japanese use it to celebrate the arrival of a new season by visiting graves, shrines, and temples across the country to honor and pay respects to dead family members and local *kami*. Naturally, this meant Amaterasu had to stay at her cave in order to take part in the reverence of the holiday which we were both fine with. We both felt tired from our month of hard searching, so we decided to use the holiday as a break day to reassess our situation. Well, actually . . . Amaterasu used the day to think about where else to find Susanoo while I used the day to get some beauty sleep.

That's right. I took the whole day to sleep inside Amaterasu's cave on one of her soft *tatami* mats while my *kanojo* spent her day in solemn thought and meditation as the people of Japan honored her.

All I remember about the morning of that day was that I saw Amaterasu off as she went to the mediation chambers in the cave while I went to go sleep. I told her to call me in time for dinner to which she just laughed and gave me a wave. I went to sleep, and for the most part I slept like a baby as all seemed peaceful while I was in dreamland.

Suddenly, I remember being awoken from my soft slumber to the sound of a great ruckus coming from outside the cave. And when I say a ruckus . . . I mean a ruckus! I mean, the volume of noises that I was hearing was enough to make July 12th celebrations in Belfast sound like crickets. What I heard outside the cave just made me shake with fear as I heard growls, scores of angry jeering, clashes, bangs, zaps, and sparks to accompany the thunderous melody that ripped through the dewy cave air. While I was scared to death about the noises that were going on outside, a sudden terrible thought ripped through my mind about the sounds that manifested in one word that passed through my lips,

“Amaterasu . . .”

Quickly and quietly, I went out of the cave in my morning suit and into the dense spread of rocks and boulders on the outside of the cove. As I stumbled along over slippery stones, I heard the echoes of the sounds that I heard before boom louder and clearer. Despite all of my shaky nerves and fears, I continued to creep forward in search of where the noises were coming from. I was worried about Amaterasu, and I had no idea where she was or if she was in some sort of trouble. After a few minutes of blindly pacing about in search of where those noises were coming from, with the crick of my head, I saw in the distant horizon an explosion of flashing lights and flaming debris coming over the tops of a few, tall rocks. With my legs shaking like leaves, I crept up to the edge of the rocks before like a soldier in a trench, I peeked over the top of one of the moss-covered rocks to see what was making such a hellish symphony of noises.

Then, I saw it.

I saw a heavenly battle going-on before me in an arena-like area near the cave entrance. On one side was Amaterasu with her hair tied up in multiple places and her robes fluttering in the wind. What's more is that my love had fiery eyes and a strong stance as she threw beams of light at a divine being on the opposite side of the arena. Her enemy looked to be the manliest giant that I had ever seen in my life. He was scruffy, tall, strong, and decked out in velvet robes and *samurai* armor forged from gold and steel. I saw that the man had storm clouds circling around him. In that discovery, I knew exactly who this devil of a man was who was fighting my love.

It was Susanoo!

I couldn't believe that it was him, and what got me most about him was that he approached Amaterasu for a fight first. I mean, what hubris this ruffian had to not only throw the first punch but also on a holiday too! What's more is that he fought with ferocious piss-and-vinegar. I saw in awe as he flew grand waves at my heavenly love, chucked sharp coral at her, and even hurled harpoons and spears at her. Everything he did, he did without restraint which I found to be especially cruel and low.

Also, I need to mention how both warriors were surrounded by a heavenly host of various figures. There were spectator *kami* and spirits, mythical creatures, folk heroes, emperors and empresses from ages gone by, famous *samurai* and *onna-musha*, and more. Most of them were either jeering or cheering for their favorite, and it mostly seemed to be a fifty-fifty split between who liked who. It was almost like I was a witness to a civil war among spirits.

With all this fighting going on, I stuck back behind the safety of my rock as I saw the spiritual war being raged in front of me. I wanted to help Amaterasu, but I didn't want to risk

getting my head blown off by a rogue wave from Susanoo or a ray of light from Amaterasu. I decided to hang back and see how the fight turned out.

After some intense back-and-forth between the two siblings, I heard Susanoo begin to speak to his sister in a rough-and-tough voice that could cut oats. I'll relate to you what they said to each other.

“Oh, just give up sister! You've had your fun, and it's time you give me a turn at ruling *Nippon*.”

“Never! Never in a million millennia will I let you rule over one stone of *Nihon*!”

“You know, it's funny sis! Even when the cards are obviously against you, you always stay fighting even against the likes of me. When will you learn that sometimes, you just need to give up and give me what I want?”

“Oh! The South of *Nihon*? Yeah, I'll give it to you when you pry it from my red-hot hands! Why would I give you the south of the island? Especially after what you did to one of my maids?”

“She had what was coming to her, that dumb maiden! She was in the way of my celebration feast for the time that I bested you in a contest. And, I plan to have an encore of that celebration right now!”

“Shut up! You . . . you . . .”

“What? Are you scared without mommy or daddy to come here and take your side? Well, don't count it! No one is going to help you now!”

That did it for me, and with an angry heart, I got up on the rocks that I hid behind and shouted at the top of my lungs,

“She's got me!”

Suddenly, everyone from the *kami*, the spirits, the demons, the folk heroes, and, of course, Amaterasu and Susanoo looked back at me.

I won't lie. I felt my legs quiver from the attention that I got with thousands of divine eyes staring at me. Not knowing what to do, I quickly ran past several groups of spirits to make my way to the battle arena to help my love. But as I came more into view for the gods, most of the spirits went from a hushed silence to loud, uproarious laughter as I rushed to Amaterasu's side. Susanoo especially laughed up a storm from my appearance, and he even took the time to insult Amaterasu about it.

"Is this one of your *kami* Amaterasu? He's probably the first Irishman I've ever seen be a *kami*. Don't tell me! He is either the spirit of potatoes or alcohol. Or, if not that, maybe he is your little bundle of fun? I have to say, I didn't know a stoic lady like you had it in you to be with a human. And a foreigner at that!"

A swarm of drawn "*ooohs*" and laughs bellowed through the spiritual audience, and I noticed that Amaterasu started to blush in a way that telegraphed anger and embarrassment. Over the laughs of the other spirits, my love sternly looked down at me to say,

"*Patorikku-san* go back inside the cave. I don't need your help. Just go back inside. I can fight for myself."

In response, I said,

"*Amei-san*, please forgive and excuse me for what I am about to do."

With that, I called out to Susanoo by saying,

"Say great and glorious god of the seas, do you got any crabs in that blue bush under your gob!"

I knew I got Susanoo with that line as after I said that, the spirit shot me a look that seemed to burn right through my soul and make my spine shake. In the meanwhile, the whole congregation of spirits and mythical figures ate up my joke with great laughter. With my comment and the laughter, Susanoo spoke to me in a sterner fashion by saying,

“The great god of the seas and storms will not be ridiculed by a commoner from a foreign land. I suggest you run off you lewd, little leprechaun before I crack your skull open like a crab’s soft shell.”

Without letting my guard down, I responded with,

“I won’t leave before I kick your arse back into the sea from which you came from, you big, bearded barbarian!”

“You dare challenge me, *gaikokujin*?!” screamed Susanoo with a fiery glare in his eyes and a great fury in his voice.

I then took a bold stance against the spirit with my chin held high as I said to him in rebellious defiance,

“I do! I don’t care if you are a god or mortal, but I’ll fight for the woman that I love even if it is against the likes of a cockle like you!”

I will admit that I did draw some cheers and claps from the fellow spirits with that line.

In turn, Susanoo just looked at me with his brow line in a deep crinkle. For a long time, the god just stood there looking at me before he approached Amaterasu and I to say,

“Okay Irishman, since you are so stuck-up and haughty about yourself, I accept your challenge to a duel. I will represent my own party while you shall represent the party of my sister Amaterasu. I believe that fair judgment of this contest will be left up to our fellow *kami*. If they choose me as the victor of our contest, whatever it may be, then I shall receive parts of *Nippon* to

rule over. However, if the honorable *kami* decide that you win, then Amaterasu will retain her right to rule over the entirety of *Nippon*. Do you agree to the terms of this contest?"

With a graceful bow before the lord of the seas, I responded,

"I humbly accept the terms and rules of the contest. May the better man win!"

After a round of cheers from our heavenly friends, Susanoo raised his hands in the air to quiet everyone down before he once again spoke to me.

"Being a gentleman of the heavens, I naturally don't want to be unfair to you. After all, I am an all-powerful and magnificent god of the waves while you are a bumbling drunk. I feel that it would be unfair of me to pick what weapons our duel will use, so I will let you choose. What course of battle do you pick, Irishman? A drinking contest, a sword fight, a fist-fight perhaps?"

Boy, was I caught in a pickle in that moment! I had no idea what I could do to match or even best a man of the heavens. Quickly, my brain scrambled to try and find a talent that I could use to challenge the god. After a few quick seconds of deep-thinking, I suddenly felt an idea hit my brain like a shot of vintage gin, and I capitalized on my genius by turning to Amaterasu.

"Amaterasu-san, get me my bow," I said to her with a wink.

Upon hearing what I said, Susanoo gave a hearty laugh as he exclaimed in boastful pride,

"Oh, a man of archery, I see! Well, us divine gods are natural archers. I suggest that you better start praying for mercy Robin Hood. The glory is mine!"

However, Amaterasu knew exactly what I wanted, and in my hands, she manifested a violin bow and a magnificent violin of mahogany wood. With my weapons in-hand, I called out to the great *kami* of the waves,

"Archery? What made you think that I wanted to do that, you pillock! I wanted a bow to use with my violin for a music contest between you and me!"

“Ah . . . well . . . naturally,” said Susanoo in a shaky voice, “Well, us *kami* also have deep skills in musical instruments and song writing. However, I am a bit rusty in my singing and tuning. I suggest that we each take a thirty-minute break in order to prepare. What say you Irishman?”

I gave the spirit a nod, and I soon started off to the depths of Amaterasu’s cave to practice my songs for the contest. However, as I made my way through the crowd of *kami*, Amaterasu suddenly whizzed in front of me and took me into a tight embrace. I could feel from how she hugged me tight that she was scared, and then I looked at her face to which I saw that she had tears streaming down her face. Then in a hoarse and shaky voice, the goddess said to me,

“*Patorikku-san*, please don’t do this! You have no idea who you’re messing with! I swear I can fight him; I swear! I don’t want you to get hurt. I’d feel responsible if you got hurt, and I couldn’t bear to see you in pain. For me, please . . .”

I only smiled at her with tender eyes before I hushed her and used my cravat tie to wipe away her tears.

“Don’t worry about me sweetie,” I said to her softly while rubbing her cheek with my tie, “What do I have to fear when I have you to protect me as my shepherdess?”

She then smiled at me as she looked at me with her sparkling eyes of rich amber. In the spur of the moment, I couldn’t help but pop a kiss on the goddess’ right cheek, much to her red-blushing surprise and the surprise of the spirits around us. I gave her one more hug before I slipped inside the cave to practice my songs for the competition.

So anyway, I went into the depths of the cave with my violin and bow to practice my songs. With only thirty minutes to think of a song to sing, to tune my instrument, to practice my notes, and the like, I was nervous to say the least. In order to get my thoughts in order, I set my

violin and bow down on a nearby rock while I sat on a different rock a little ways away. For a long time in the cave, I just sat with my legs crossed and my chin on my fist as I thought and thought about what song to play. Then, after some minutes of searching in the mush that is my brain, I finally came up with a great crusher, at least in my opinion, for a song to please the spirits of Japan. Quickly, I went to fetch my violin and bow in order to practice my great plan.

However, as I went to grab my instruments for practice, I found to my horror that a fox was fiercely biting at the horsehair strings on my violin bow! I immediately sprang into action and chased the trickster away in order to save my violin. Thankfully, I was able to scare the red devil off before it could do anymore harm. What was the funniest part about that *kitsune* was that as it ran away, I swear it gave a girlish chuckle to my plight. Maybe that was just my mind playing tricks on me, but even to this day, I still say that there was something more to that fox.

Anyway, after chasing off the troublemaker, I carefully examined my violin bow. It looked fine on the surface, but I didn't know if the fox had worn out the fine horsehair strings enough to where they might snap. I was so worried about the bow that I completely forgot to practice my songs. I only realized this fact when I heard Susanoo's loud, echoing voice ring throughout the cave as he shouted,

“Well, Irishman! Are you coming? We're all waiting!”

When he said that, I felt my stomach churn with tense, painful fear as my underprepared hands plucked at the bow strings in panic. In that moment, I felt scared and worried beyond all compare. I hadn't even played one note on the violin, and now, I was expected to go out and perform against him. I almost felt like curling up into a ball and dying in that moment than face the embarrassment of losing to the god. But with nowhere else to go and knowing that Amaterasu was counting on me, I opted to play and not surrender. Soon, I left the cave and made

my way to the arena to face-off against Susanoo in a battle of musical wits. As I approached the arena, I didn't make any eye-contact with any of the other *kami*. I just thought about Amaterasu and prayed internally that I still knew how to work a violin.

At this point, the contest began, and now, it was my time to be a gentleman as I let Susanoo perform first. Susanoo didn't hold anything back as he used everything in his power to make his performance a real spectacle to the eyes. Susanoo sang in a low voice as he let out a song in an early form of high court Japanese. While his whole piece sounded like Greek to me, I must admit that he did sing very sweetly. From what I could understand and remember, he sang a song about how the sea and divine winds saved Japan in repelling the Mongol invasions of Kublai Khan. As backup for his song, the *kami* of the seas had help from a grand orchestra. But with a twist! A section of his band used coral and bamboo for wind, another section used stringed instruments with fine seaweed strings, and another section even used clam shells as a spoons section to help Susanoo perform his poetic song. In full honesty, I was surprised with how well the spirit performed, and when he finished, I gave him a full round of applause as did so many of the other *kami* and spirits, both loyal and against him.

Now the time had come for my turn to perform. So as all the spirits quieted down, I gave a bow of my head and a deep breath before I began my performance. I had no idea what I was going to do, but I was going to give it my best despite whatever happened.

At the start, I drew my bow and ran it over the strings lightly for a chord. But as I did that, right in front of my eyes, I saw the bow strings snap from their tight hold in the bow. I watched in horror as the grey strings flopped down over my violin into a mess of wiry horsehair. With that, I felt my spirits and confidence suddenly slip from me as a wave of sharp

embarrassment came over me in the form of redness. In response to my misfortune, the *kami* and Susanoo laughed uproariously at me. In that moment, I felt that all my hope was lost.

That was until I looked back at dear Amaterasu only to find her looking at me with wide, glossy eyes and clasped hands to her soft lips. I just looked into her amber eyes, and all of the sudden, something came over me, something strong. Something that made me immediately look back at Susanoo before I let out a loud yawp to get his attention and the attention of our heavenly band. I spung the violin into an embrace in my arms, and quickly and confidently, I began to pluck the strings of the violin, and soon, I was playing smooth, fluent rhythms on my violin as if it were a guitar!

As a side note, I bet that you did not know that I learned how to play the guitar when I tried to impress a barista during my college years!

Anyway, I strung and played my violin like a guitar as I strung notes together into melodies. Before, I knew it, words began to leave my lips that began to run together into a song. A song that came from my Irish heart in Japanese words. I can recount exactly what I sang to the *kami* in that duel, and it went a little something like this:

*I'll tell me ma when I go home,  
The gods won't leave my girl alone.  
I got no dough, and I lost my job,  
But that's alright, she's a heartthrob.  
She is handsome, she is pretty,  
She is the belle of Nagasaki!  
She is a beauty, one, two, three,  
Oh please, I hope that she likes me!*

*Poor, dear Amaterasu!*

*She got upset and hid from view.*

*They knock at the rock and ask the belle,*

*"Tell us, goddess, are you well?"*

*Out she comes as white as snow!*

*Long black hair and heart aglow.*

*Oh bejabbers! I swear I'll die,*

*If I don't get the gally with the golden eye!*

*I'll tell me ma when I go home,*

*The gods won't leave my girl alone.*

*I got no dough, and I lost my job,*

*But that's alright, she's my heartthrob.*

*She is handsome, she is pretty,*

*She is the belle of Nagasaki!*

*She is a beauty, one, two, three,*

*Oh please, I hope that she likes me!*

*Let Hokkaido sing and Honshu ring with voices that do say*

*Of the beauty found on Kyushu during the month of May!*

*And geisha too, from Chugoku, Tokyo and Shikoku.*

*They'll sing to you while strolling through*

*The Land of the Rising Sun!*

*Hi di-diddly-idle-um, diddly-doodle-idle-um, diddly-doo-ri-diddlum-deh,*

*Hi di-diddly-idle-um, diddly-doodle-idle-um, diddly-doo-ri-diddlum-deh!*

*There's rice fields that sprout in the south,*

*Like the fertile fields of Louth.*

*With cherry trees that bloom in the breeze*

*With pink leaves for you and me.*

*Who needs Corfu, or Bermuda,*

*Or the whiskey of Dublin!*

*I am heaven bound to sacred ground in*

*The Land of the Rising Sun!*

*Hi di-diddly-idle-um, diddly-doodle-idle-um, diddly-doo-ri-diddlum-deh,*

*Hi di-diddly-idle-um, diddly-doodle-idle-um, diddly-doo-ri-diddlum-deh!*

*What's the news, what's the news, you fair priestess*

*With your long, following robes that I see.*

*What good fortune brings so much joy to your fair face*

*While speaking good tidings to me?*

*Goodly news, goodly news do I sing in my song*

*Goodly news that will ring loud and long.*

*For the goddess has sent down her own darling son*

*Emperor Jimmu, Tenno of Nihon!*

*Tell me, who is that gent who marches along*

*With the gods in his heavenly band?*

*Seven feet is his height, with a frame big and strong,*

*And he carries a bow in his hand.*

*Ah my boys, that's the pride of Amaterasu!*

*He's the man we put our hopes on!*

*Breathe a prayer, give great thanks to the goddess who*

*Gave us Jimmu, Tenno of Nihon!*

*But once, the red sun of the goddess grew dark*

*After death befell one of her maids.*

*Yet grandly did she return like a lark*

*By breaking our chains and cursed blades.*

*Glory-o, glory-o to her wonderful child*

*Who she blessed with great smarts and great brawn!*

*Glory-o to the hero, so tender and mild!*

*Emperor Jimmu, Tenno of Nihon!*

So, after all of my singing and dancing was complete, my melody came to an end in a big crescendo. Internally, I was so shaken up with an odd mixture of excitement and anxiousness as I had no idea what the gods would think of my song.

Initially, the spirits, folk heroes, famous dead ones, and more were all silent as they just looked at me in awe. Then, like an artillery barrage bursting in the air, the angelic troop all rose and burst into a ringing round of applause for me. I couldn't believe it as I looked around me to see spirits and beings like Empress Himiko, Ikkyu the Monk, bands of *daimyo*, Hibari, Prince Shotoku, Emperor Taisho, Yutaka, and more cheer and clap me on for what seemed like a century. In my amazement and humble thanks, I bowed before my heavenly audience as I spun around to bow to them on all sides. I was still bowing before the spirits in gratitude when I got to Amaterasu. I looked at her with a big smile on my face as she looked back at me with a big smile across her face and tears in her eyes as she stood clapping profusely. To her, I gave the deepest bow that I could possibly give.

However, during the clapping, something unexpected happened which took me completely off my guard. As I bowed before my heavenly host, I suddenly saw Susanoo approach me. Naturally, I feared what he was going to do, for I think he knew who the gods had chosen as the winner of the contest in that moment. But what caught me by complete surprise was when Susanoo, the god of the seas, bowed before me, a simple bumpkin from Ireland, in a very honorific fashion before saying,

“You've done well, *Patorikku-san*. You competed bravely and admirably, and for that, you have won honorably. For that, you have earned my deepest respects.”

In return, I bowed before the great god of the seas as I thanked him for his kindness as well as for his great performance. The man did put up an amazing fight, and for that, I wanted to say that he too had earned my deepest respects and the respects of Eire.

So, I think what with all the claps and cheers from the gods, you can guess who had won the contest. The *kami* quickly declared me the winner of the contest *en masse* which meant that Amaterasu got to keep her position of queenship over all of Japan. Susanoo, being a man of his word, agreed to head back out to the seas and leave Japan alone for good.

However, I want to add this in here. Just as the warrior spirit was about to leave for fresh water, Amaterasu quickly rushed over to him and took him into an embrace. We were all shocked when we saw Susanoo return the favor as the two hugged each other for a few precious moments.

Now, this is just between you and me, but I swear that I heard Amaterasu say under her breath,

“I love you brother . . .”

To which Susanoo responded with,

“And I have always loved you sister.”

I don't know if that was the case, but I think we can imagine it was in sacred tradition.

So with the contest over and Susanoo back in the sea, peace soon was restored across the whole of Japan. In the following days after my “battle” with Susanoo, Amaterasu and I watched with delight as the situation in Japan gradually returned to normal. We read and watched the news to see *yakuza* members being arrested in the hundreds, chaos in the general election died down, the economy in Japan seemed to improve, and more. Even more so, the whole of Japan seemed to be a lot more “sunnier” if that makes any sense. As Amaterasu and I went about

Kyushu in the following days, the whole island lit up with smiles and sunshine while the birds in the sky and the wind sang in the breeze.

From all this, Amaterasu would talk to me at lengths about how happy her subjects were and how good things were going for Japan now. One afternoon, she was relating my “battle” with Susanoo to a great performance by the Hiroshima Symphony Orchestra, and over her excitement, I took her by her hands and told her that I did it all of her. Then, I got down on my knees and confessed my love for Amaterasu. I told her that I was madly in love with her and that she was the sunshine in my life. She made me drunk on happiness, and every moment I was around her, I felt like I was in eternal bliss. Then I came out with a line that made her eyes widen as I told her that I wanted to live with her forever. I spoke at length about all the great fun we could have on the shores of Japan and Ireland. I even told her about my dreams of having a villa in Saga during the spring and summer and a cottage by the Lee during the winter and autumn.

However, after I finished with my wide-eyed lecture full of fancy and excitement, I saw Amaterasu slowly slip into looking away at me. She just stared in the distance from me as her hair covered her face like a screen in a confessional. When I asked my love what was wrong, Amaterasu turned to me slowly and said in a soft voice,

“*Patorikku-san* . . . I am sorry, but no. I can’t stay here with you, nor can you stay with me. I was only here in *Nihon* in my human form to save my fair domain. Now that my work is done, I must return to my place in the heavens. Sadly, you can’t come. Not only would our relationship not work in the heavens, but you would not be accepted among the *kami*. I wouldn’t want you to be abused in the heavens, so I feel that it is best that you stay here on earth.”

I felt my heart break at what she said. I just sat next to her as she spoke while it was my turn to look off in the distance from her. I just felt numb to every word she said. I had no idea if I

should feel angry, understanding, upset, or what, but all I wanted to do was cry. Over her soft voice that entered my ears, several, stinging tears fell from my eyes. I would have shed more watery poison until I felt the goddess take me by the hand and look at me in the eyes with her eyes of glossy gold. I felt my inner anguish dissipate as she smiled at me with a warm smile before she said,

“But . . . that does not mean that I don’t love you. Actually, I love you too *Patorikku-san*. I never thought I could fall in love with anyone, but you proved otherwise. I love you so much *Patorikku-san* from your wit to your sense of humor to your looks to your pure heart. While it breaks my heart to depart from you too, I am still thankful for all the jewels and riches in *Nihon* that I could spend time with you, have fun with you, and most importantly, be in love you!”

With that, we entered into an embrace and hugged each other tenderly for what seemed like years. Our warm cuddle was broken when with a laugh, Amaterasu jumped up and danced around me before taking me by the hands and saying,

“Alright *Patorikku-san*! How about we do one more fun, little thing before I go. What would you like to do? Go to the movies? Karaoke? Have a little fun in Gion, maybe?”

I was lost in what to say! I had no idea how to spend our last moments together. I looked around the cave for any sign of inspiration before I saw a red-and-white porcelain vase with some chrysanthemum flowers in it. Then, a wonderful idea came over me.

Without saying anything, I slowly walked over to the vase and took up the bushel of sweet-smelling flowers before I then approached the fair maiden with the flowers in hand. In my softest of tones, I then said to my sweetheart,

“How about we have a walk where we met . . . my love.”

Amaterasu couldn't have been happier with my pick, and soon, we found our way to the garden in Nagasaki where she first showed me her true form.

The walk itself was a complete bliss for the both of us as we walked through the illuminated garden, plucked flowers in groves, talked about everything we planned to do in the future, and . . . finally . . .

Shared our first sweet kiss in the light of a soft twilight.

Yet, when the sun began to set over the Land of the Rising Sun, Amaterasu told me that she felt her powers fading and that she needed to leave. With that, we said our final teary goodbyes to each other as we shared one last kiss under a large Bonsai tree in the middle of the garden. However, before Amaterasu began her way upwards, she took a loose string from my tailcoat and in her hand, made it into a beautiful, brilliant, ruby-red rose. She told me to keep as a sign of our love and a sign that she would always be watching over me. Upon receiving her gift, I told her that I would cherish it forever as I held the rose tightly in my hands.

Then, right in front of my eyes, Amaterasu ascended into the heavens with a smile on her face. I waved her goodbye as I smiled and cried with tears of joy as my love shone before me like a magnificent star in the skies. As she left me, I remember her voice distinctly when she said to me from above,

“Goodbye *Patorikku-san* and remember that I love you! Never be afraid as I will always be watching over you. Take care my love, and one day, I promise we'll meet again!”

And with that, my true love was gone. She disappeared into the clouds and left not a trace that she had ever blessed the world with her appearance. After the bliss of the moment had passed, I felt my joyful tears morph into sad tears, and for a long time, I wept alone in agony in

the garden. I just remember standing there as I silently wished my true love the best in the great heavens above.

Later after I had spilt my sadness, I slowly made my way to the front of the garden. At this point, I had no idea what to do anymore. I was back to square one with no money, no house, no job, no friends, and no true love to my own. I left the front entrance of the garden with the red rose in hand as a feeling of immense loneliness and fear came over me. I did not know what to do, and in that moment, I clung to the red rose for hope.

As I stood there on the sidewalk before the garden entrance, I was still in a trance of lost despair when I heard a voice call out to me from my right side. Quickly, I turned my head around, and there before me on the same park bench where I saw the sun goddess before, I saw a girl. Immediately, I knew who it was when I saw her curly, blond hair. But now that I had a good look at the blond-haired girl that I had seen before, I suddenly felt my heart seize up as I looked at her. Her skin was slightly tanned, she had great amounts of jewelry on her, and to match her gilded hair, she had on a red skirt and fluffy white sweater. Despite whatever false stigmas exist around the fashion trend that she followed, I remember being so entranced with the girl. She just looked so lovely!

After calling out to me and waving to me, the girl ran up to me before she said to me in a sweet voice,

“Excuse me sir, but do you remember me? My name is Mika, and I remember seeing you about a month ago at the nearby primary school. I don’t know why, but ever since I gazed at you as you passed by me, I always wanted to talk to you, but I never had the chance.”

I was stunned at first by what she said, but quickly, I got myself together as I bowed before her and said,

“Hello *Mika-san*, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu!* My name is Patrick or *Patorikku*, and it is an honor to meet you! I remember seeing you before too, and I also wanted to talk to you. You caught my interest, but I feel that you have come at a bad time now as . . . I . . .”

At this point, I was beginning to tear up again because of Amaterasu’s departure. I guess Mika must have seen my sadness because she soon spoke to me in a concerned fashion by saying,

“Oh my! What’s wrong *Patorikku-san!* I see that you’re upset. What’s the matter? Please tell me!”

I began to stutter over myself as I tried my best to string words together to explain what had happened, but I felt nothing coming to me. Then, by accident in my sad mumbling, I unknowingly stuck out the goddess’ rose to her to which the girl froze up. She then went red hot in the face before she then cupped her mouth with her hands while her eyes lit up like a Christmas tree. I was caught completely by surprise when all of the sudden, Mika jumped into my arms for a hug before she said to me,

“Oh *Patorikku-san!* This is all so sudden! A rose! You know that you’re not supposed to give a rose to a girl until the third date, but who cares!”

Before I could say anything else, Mika grabbed my hand and led me on as she said to me in an excited tone,

“I don’t care what’s bothering you *Patorikku-san*, but whatever it is, I know that I can make you feel happy. Here, come with me! I am going to show you a fun time! Come on, let’s go!”

With that, Mika took me by my hand and led me on a tour through the whole city of Nagasaki. And man, did we have fun that night! We went to teahouses, *izakaya*, restaurants,

stores, shops, street vendors, shrines, and more over the course of the whole night.

Singlehandedly, Mika turned one of the saddest nights of my life into probably one of the happiest nights of my life. I still remember how we went around Nagasaki as we talked, sang at karaoke bars, played in video arcades, and more. The more time I spent with Mika that night, the more I felt my sadness over Amaterasu's departure leave me as Mika purged my heart of any lost love.

During the night, I told Mika about my troubles and my story, though I did leave out the parts about Amaterasu, to which she was sympathetic. She told me that even though it probably would be a big scandal with her father, she was going to take me to him for help. The very next day, Mika marched me up to her father's company office. Her father was a rich salaryman by trade who worked as an executive in one of the top offices of Nagasaki. In our meeting, Mika did all the taking for me as she implored her father to help me out while she hugged me in a cutesy fashion. Mika was a bit of a Cleopatra as she tugged at her dad's soft heartstrings in that meeting. I guess her charm worked as after a brief interview, her father hired me on the spot.

Her father was a very kind man, and he really welcomed me into his company. After some intense training, he gave me a job as company trades manager with overseas trade in the European Union. He thought that he could use my Irish character to bolster profits in the European markets to which he was right. Not only did he become immensely rich with his new trade network through me to the Emerald Isle, but I also grew increasingly rich from his work. Soon enough, I was able to make a comfortable living in uptown Nagasaki as one of the richest foreigners that the city had to offer.

In the meanwhile, with the blessing of her father, I fell into a relationship with Mika. Mika encapsulated me with her fun spirit and energy that seemed to radiate like energy from a

star. She would always be cheers and smiles, and every day I couldn't wait to get done with my work to hit the town with her and be happy with her. Then one day, after months of dating and deep thinking on my part, I proposed to Mika with a gold ring to which she naturally accepted.

After weeks of planning, Mika and I got married on February 11th, and we decided that we would get married at both a church and little shrine in rural Kyushu. Our wedding day was wonderful as people of high renown and prestige from the company and from all over Nagasaki were there to celebrate our marriage. The funniest thing that I remember about our wedding day was that even though it was February, that day could not have been more perfect. It was sixty degrees and sunny the entire day with a cool, sweet breeze in the air. What's more is that I still remember how Mika shone with radiance in her *shiomuku*. I remember how Mika nearly stole my breath away with her beauty that day. As an ornament for her, I gave Mika the red rose of the goddess with the wish that she pinned it onto her wedding attire. I still remember how I looked at her before the altar, and how her shining beauty matched the lush, blooming rose on her dress.

With all that in mind, I don't know how to say it, but it was almost like a certain someone was there with us on that special day to cheer Mika and I on as we went down the aisle together as husband and wife. From that day on, Mika and I have lived happily ever since, and I couldn't have been happier to have such a wonderful wife who loves me as much as I love her.

And so that is the story about how I came to date Amaterasu the sun goddess, and funny enough, that is also the story about how I came to meet your mother.