

Some time past and Kiyoshi and Amy got back from their date. They thanked Taro and Ayami for watching their children and they waved goodbye to them as they were standing in the doorway.

The group arrived back at their house, but Taro felt that he had something to do, so he stopped in the middle of his driveway.

“What’s wrong, Taro?” asked Hiroko.

“Can I just say something to Mabel?” Mabel didn’t much understand human language, but she heard her name being mentioned so she turned her attention to Taro. “You did a good job today, Mabel. I recommend you go back to the Rhythm and Melody World right now.” He then gave Mabel five dollars so she could buy a ticket at the portal station. “I’ll be seeing you tomorrow so we could train together.” He patted her on the nose to symbolize his respect, just like a person would do with any loved animal. In return, Mabel licked Taro’s face. “Goodnight, girl.” Mabel the skipper was a bit saddened to see her tamer walking toward the house without her. Of course, she didn’t worry because she was going to see him tomorrow... she thought. Little did she know that Taro isn’t really going to keep his promise, and sooner or later he would have no choice but to reveal his deep, dark secret.

ANYWHERE”).” Her horns glowed a bright, heavenly yellow as she was preparing to put her power-up to good use. The magnolines, however, tried to scurry away as fast as they could. She dashed up to them with breakneck speed and gave them a taste of her blitz crash attack. She managed to hit all three of them, pushing them out of the way, making them aware of her temporary strength. They were all worn out from the battering they received and decided in a unanimous vote to surrender.

“Let’s just... crawl... away,” said the first magnoline. Since they lost their will to battle as well as their energy, the solar power in their systems escaped in multiple bright flashes and returned to their rightful solar panels. It wasn’t too long until the neighborhood’s power came back on. The magnolines proceeded to crawl away, knowing that their plan ultimately failed and that they weren’t wanted. “The sun will come up tomorrow morning as always. We can reap solar energy from there.”

The magnolines eventually went away and Mabel the aldebaron eventually reverse-mutated back into skipper. Everyone was happy about Mabel’s heroic deed; especially since she doesn’t normally battle mutate that much. Hiroko felt that she had something important to say to Ayami after all that.

“Ayami...” she said. Ayami looked up with bright eyes, innocently awaiting words to escape from Hiroko’s mouth.

“Yes?”

“I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you before. It was dumb of me to face that monster and you knew all along that he was bad news. Just because you’re younger than me doesn’t mean I shouldn’t take your advice.” Hearing those words made Ayami feel good on the inside.

“Finally!” she said, “I get the respect I deserve!”

“Are you sure you didn’t get that line from TV?” asked Taro.

“Noooo, I just know a lot of stuff.”

“Good, as long as you didn’t get it from *Cosmopolitan*.” Taro had some monster antidote with him for emergencies such as this and fed it to Mabel the skipper. She immediately felt better after swallowing the tincture.

The gang arrived home safe and sound and were relieved that the lights went on when they flipped the switch.

“I’m going to check on Barthy and Junior,” said Taro. Taro proceeded upstairs while Ayami, Hiroko, Bill the Chimi, and Mabel the skipper stayed put. Hiroko yawned, but covered her mouth to set a good example.

“Are you tired?” she asked Ayami.

“No!” replied Ayami, “That battle got me fired up! Let’s play a game!” Hiroko didn’t much feel like playing games.

“I don’t feel like playing games.”

“But you said it yourself: ‘just because I’m younger doesn’t mean you shouldn’t take my advice.’”

“Yes, but common sense plays a role in this, too. You should get to bed.”

When Taro got upstairs, he peeked into Junior’s room and was a bit startled by what he saw. Not only was part of the crib missing, but Junior was using Barthy as his pillow. Barthy was fast asleep on his back. He didn’t want to wake either of them, so he shut the door and left them to slumber.

to glow and mutate. The magnolines, who were still gnawing at her shiny, green scales, automatically let go. When Mabel was done, she looked like a beautiful aldebaron standing in all her glory.



The first thing Mabel the aldebaron did was glare at the monsters, letting them know who's boss. The magnolines still had it in them, though.

“Attack seeds!” said the third one. Once again, the seeds with tiny mouths shot out of his tail and bit her. This time, only a little HP was lost. Mabel had some better attacks up her sleeve, though. A flash appeared and her right claw turned brown. With the power of the ancient earth, she unleashed her fossil claw attack. The second magnoline got hit and the experience caused him to cower by the tree. To make things a little easier, Mabel used a power-up technique. She cast the lightning boost spell so her electricity-based attacks would get stronger.

“Ivy bomb!” said the first magnoline. A ball of leaves appeared in his sharp claw and he threw it at Mabel. It directly hit her face, poisoning her instantly. She fell to the ground, signaling that she clearly needed encouragement.

“Don't let it get to you!” said Taro, “You're stronger than them!” Mabel the aldebaron got up, even though she was slowly becoming weakened. Her health may have been deteriorating, but she was still prepared to unleash that attack she planned. Her bolt-shaped horns lit up and sparks were flying everywhere.

“Let's get outta here, boys!” said the third magnoline. Mabel the aldebaron replied with “roarooooaarr (which roughly translates to “Oh, you aren't going

bright green jumped out of the tree branches that were looming above them. All three of them looked pretty peeved.



As the gang was backing up, Taro was putting the pieces together.

“They were causing the blackouts!” he said.

“What?” pondered Hiroko.

“Those fiendish lion cubs were going from solar panel to solar panel converting the energy back into solar power and consuming it via photosynthesis. This gave them extra strength!”

“How do you know?”

“That bite you received was pretty painful. Their magical plant-based attacks could be even stronger.” Mabel the skipper’s monster instinct told her to defend, so she used her body as a shield against any possible attacks.

“Give us back our power!” said Taro in a powerful voice.

“Yeah!” said Ayami.

“Who are you, this guy’s daughter?” asked the middle magnoline.

“Yeah, and is the girl with the purple hair your social worker or something?” asked the one on the left. Taro was annoyed that this monster was thinking the same thing that little old lady.

“Why does everyone think that?!” he asked while slapping his forehead, “Just because I’m a teenager with little kids does NOT mean I’m their father!” Nonetheless, the monsters agreed to disagree and went back to threatening the kids.

“Attack seeds!” said the second magnoline. Out of his tail shot big, bulky seeds with little chomping mouths. They bit various parts of Mabel’s body, making her HP go down. With her inferior strength, her claw lit up and she rushed forward to perform her nebula claw attack. When the attack struck, it did almost nothing. This was an excellent time for all three magnolines to strike back. They each jumped into the air and latched onto Mabel with their teeth just like the seeds before them; the first one bit her head, the second one bit her back and the third bit her tail. Mabel couldn’t stand the energy-stealing parasites biting at her green scales; it was like a bad itch.

Taro couldn’t play his instrument because he has left it at the house. He then remembered that there had to be SOME way a monster could power up without the child playing the instrument. After all, piano players can’t drag their instrument around whenever their monster was in trouble.

“Mabel!” said Taro, “Remember the music that I’ve played before.” Within seconds, Mabel the skipper took his advice and tried remembering the original song Taro played on his guitar. Her brain processed the melody, and before she knew it, she began

toys, he jumped in another attempt to reach the button. Despite all his strength being put into this one hop, he fell back to the chair without even coming within four inches of the button. He fell off the pile of toys along with the baby chair and landed on his back fat. He could barely get up. After a few tries, he was sitting on his butt again. Junior couldn't wait any longer. "Now!" His limited vocabulary expressed a lot.

"Bare with me, little guy," said Barthy. He proceeded to climb on the pile of toys again and give it one more shot. To bring about more force, he slouched a bit. "One... two... three!" On the count of three, he leaped into the air in a way that which most obese monsters couldn't have dreamed.

He eventually hit the side of the crib and clung on to it. He was very close to the button so he stretched out his nub as far as it could go.

"Almost... there..." he said. He almost reached the button until a creaking was heard from the crib. The crib's structure was being weakened by Barthy's weight and was about to be damaged at any moment. Barthy came within one inch of the button and the entire side of the crib broke off! Crack!

Barthy the glylin eventually fell to the ground and landed on his back fat once more, except he had wooden bars on top of him. His heart beat rapidly as he caught his breath. The bed was broken, but little Junior couldn't have been happier. He took this opportunity to climb out of his broken crib and scurry to the bathroom.

As soon as he got there, he went inside and kept the door ajar (at his age, he didn't quite comprehend the concept of privacy). Barthy, on the other hand, couldn't get up very easily. All he could do was push the bars aside and lay there on his back. After a few minutes, he heard the sound of a futuristic vacuum toilet flushing. After Junior washed his hands like a big boy, he stumbled back into his room ready to fall asleep. Instead of climbing back into his crib like expected, he lay down next to Barthy like a sociable kitten and snuggled up next to him. At that moment, Barthy didn't want to move at all.



"You're so sweet, Junior," he said while yawning, "You can use me as your pillow if you..." Before he could finish the sentence, he dozed off.

After the magnoline viciously bit Hiroko, Ayami wanted to do something. She held up her monster Bill, trying to make him bigger than he already was.

"Stand back, you evil kitties!" she said, "I have a monster with me!" Everyone starred at Ayami and Bill the chimi, waiting for something to happen. Since Bill had no further direction, Ayami whispered a hint into his ear. "Bill, use your bubble pop attack." Bill's cheeks grew fatter as excess air was rising from within his throat. With one hiccup, he released a bubble the size of his head that floated toward the magnoline. When it met with him face to face, it popped, causing him to flinch.

"I've had enough of this!" said the magnoline, unimpressed by Bill's battle efforts, "Out of the trees with ya!" Within seconds, two magnolines who were also glowing

wanted to do it NOW. Unfortunately, Barthy was too rotund and out of shape to reach the button that pulled down the side of the crib.

“How do I do this?” He jumped in his attempt, but only got one inch off the ground. This was going to be tricky...

The children and monsters were still searching for the scoundrels masquerading in the darkness. The children looked in separate directions to speed up the process and make sure they didn't miss anything.

“You see anything, guys?” asked Taro as he was illegally trespassing on someone's property and looking through their bushes.

“No,” said Hiroko as she was looking through the trash.”

“Nada,” blurted out Bill the chimi as he popped out from under a flower in a pot. Ayami felt something whip past her. When she turned around, the thing she saw for a brief seconds was not black, but glowing green.

“I saw the thing!” exclaimed Ayami.

“Tell us where it went!” demanded Taro. They followed Ayami to another person's backyard. There were two trees, a swing set, a gazebo, and grass that was ready to be bathed by dew. Nothing out of the ordinary could be seen, except for one thing. Beside one of the trees was the glowing thing revealing itself in all its glowing glory. He was a magnoline, a cross between a lion and a tropical flower. Of course, magnolines usually don't glow.

“It's a big green kitten!” said Hiroko, trying hard not to resist the monster's charm. She forgot that the glowing creatures were the enemy and wanted to snuggle it. The glowing magnoline looked at the group with sad puppy eyes, looking as though he had a halo over his head. Ayami knew a bit better.

“Hiroko, don't go near that thing!” she warned. Hiroko couldn't believe that a little girl who didn't know any better than her was warning her about something that seemed harmless.

“Why would I listen to you? I'm older so I know more about what's dangerous and what isn't.” This, of course, was reflecting what happened earlier in the piano room. Hiroko abided by her own rules because she thought she was older and therefore had better judgment than her cousin. She walked close to the magnoline and scratched behind his ear. Like a kitten, he closed his eyes and purred softly. Ayami stood behind Taro, waiting for Hiroko to get what is coming to her. The magnoline waited until the perfect moment and then bit the poor girl on the wrist. “Ow!” Stumbling away, she took her right hand off the ailing wrist to reveal a vicious bite mark.

“Are you okay, Hiroko?” panicked Taro. Hiroko was much too ashamed to show her brother the bite marks. She was close to tears not just because she was in pain, but because Ayami was right all along.

“I'm sorry I didn't listen to you Ayami!”

Meanwhile, Barthy the glylin was trying everything in his power to push the button on the top of Junior's crib so he could go to the toilet. Barthy was taking his sweet, sweet time climbing on stuffed animals and toys since his weight was stalling him.

“Potty,” whined Junior. He was using his amateur muscle control to hold in the bodily functions. As soon as Barthy stood on the little chair that was placed on top of the

before he succumbed to his weight. “So far so good.” One by one, he lifted him onto each step with difficulty.

Taro and the others rushed out the door when Barthy the glylin rolled to the door of Junior’s room. He never babysat anyone before and didn’t know anything about little kids. He peeked into Junior’s room and saw him asleep in his crib. The penguin-shaped nightlight was giving off a soothing glow that was appropriate for sleep and reassurance. Everything seemed all right.

The children and the monsters scurried into the night trusting the flashlight in Taro’s hand. Little Ayami was only wearing a jacket and her boots along with her nightgown and the temperatures were near below freezing. Bill the chimi was a bit cranky from being awakened, especially since he was being carried by a running girl. They stopped to look at their surroundings

“I’m so glad we’re looking for these black things,” said Ayami, “Because living in the dark just isn’t my fetish.” Taro nearly choked on his own spit when he heard little Ayami say the last sentence.

“Where did you learn that word?” he asked.

“*Cosmopolitan.*”

“Why can’t you learn to read by looking at an *Arthur* book like other four-year-olds?” Taro knew he wasn’t going to get anywhere unless he called out for the creatures. Just looking for them wasn’t enough. “Come out, come out, wherever you are!” There was no answer. They didn’t know if the dark creatures were able to talk or even understand their language, but nonetheless, Taro kept calling for them.

Soon, they wandered farther into the neighborhood, where it was unusually quiet. The silence accompanied by the looming darkness almost scared the children. They knew they were going to hear SOMETHING sooner or later.

Meanwhile, Barthy the glylin was still outside Junior’s room, thinking “what’s the point? The child is clearly asleep and won’t wake up for anything.” Since Barthy wasn’t needed, he decided to think of various things that happened in the past week.

“Maybe I’ll think about Hiroko’s math homework,” he thought. “Jay and Marie had fourteen apples each. If Jay gave Marie…” His thoughts bored him so much that he dozed off in his position. Before he knew it, he was dancing in a land of milkshakes with chocolate syrup rivers and whipped cream snow. That is until whaling was heard.

“Taro!” screamed Junior. Barthy’s thought bubble popped and his eyes opened immediately. Junior was awakened and Barthy didn’t know why. Taro assured him that he might not wake up so didn’t know what to do when this situation arose. He opened the door and rolled right in.

“What seems to be the problem, Junior?” asked Barthy the glylin. Junior stared at Barthy through his crib for a second and called out Taro’s name again.

“Taro!” Barthy was a bit panicked, but he kept calm. He did, however, raise the tone of his voice a bit.

“Junior, what’s wrong?” Junior stayed quite again until he decided to say what was on his mind.

“Potty.”

“Oh, yes. Taro told me that this is the first night that you wear big boy undies.” Junior clearly didn’t have time for small talk. He wanted to get out of the crib and he

“Do you want me to read you a story?” he asked. He then picked out a children’s book with a smiling cupcake on the cover. He sat at the end of Ayami’s bed while Ayami was anxiously waiting for the colorful story to be read. Bill the chimi, on the other hand, was already asleep on one of the frilly pillows. Taro opened the book and read the first page. “Cassie the cupcake lived with the other happy pastries in the Kiss-Kiss Bakery on Happiness Lane...”



Just then, the lights went out. Like all power outages, it was very sudden and startling. Ayami rushed over to hug Taro, almost snapping the storybook in half. The smell of his aftershave was rather comforting to her. “Calm down, calm down. I’m sure there’s a reasonable explanation for this.” Out of the corner of their eyes was the black thing in the window; it looked as if it was jumping off the roof. Ayami screamed again.

“It’s the black thing!” she said.

“I saw it, too!” said Taro, finally taking Ayami seriously. “I’ll be right back.” Taro then hurried downstairs expecting Ayami to stay, but alas she picked up her sleeping monster partner and tagged along.

Hiroko, who was on the living room couch with her eyes closed, noticed the power failure because she wasn’t entirely asleep yet. She awoke thinking that she went blind because not a single light was on.

“The lights are out!” said Hiroko.

“We know,” said Taro as he was walking down the stairs, “We saw something jump off the roof shortly afterward.”

As soon as Taro felt through the drawer in the kitchen, he came upon a flashlight. As soon as he turned on the futuristic flashlight, the children and monsters breathed a sigh of relief. He insisted that they should go outside and see who or what is behind all this.

“Can I come?” asked Ayami in a whiney voice.

“You should stay here,” assured Taro, “It’s past your bedtime and Barthy will be here to keep you company.” This wasn’t the answer she wanted to hear.

“But it’s dark in here!”

“It’s dark out there, too.”

“But you have a flashlight.”

“Fine, you win. You should get your coat and your shoes. It’s quite cold outside.” Ayami breathed a sigh of relief and put on her little shoes.

“Taro, are you sure about this?” asked Hiroko, “Barthy doesn’t have much mobility when it comes to climbing up the stairs. Heck, instead of babysitting, he might just sit on the baby.” Barthy the glylin didn’t find the comment at all funny.

“I’ll drag him upstairs so he can sit outside Junior’s room.” He then put his hands under Barthy’s nubs and began lifting him up. Luckily, he made it to the foot of the stairs

“What could be causing it?” This was indeed a mystery. There were no thunderstorms or any other noticeable problems, yet blackouts were occurring at a fast rate. Meanwhile, another silhouette of a cat-like creature jumped away from the corner of Ayami’s eye. This time, she shrieked. The rest stopped to see what the matter was.

“What is it, Ayami,” asked Barthy the glylin, trying his best to look back.

“I saw something.”

“Was it the *CBS* eye logo?” asked Taro.

“Don’t worry,” said Hiroko, “We’re almost home. Would you like to hold my hand?” Ayami thought of herself as a big girl, but she still held Hiroko’s hand on the way home. After a while she wasn’t as scared anymore, though as they walked into the neighborhood, hover cars became scarcer, so the darkness intensified.

Luckily, Taro knew his way around the neighborhood, so he didn’t need a flashlight. Before they knew it, they were back at the house. Their house, along with the houses on the left of it, still had its power, but it was only a matter of time.

“That was an interesting walk,” said Barthy the glylin. “That old woman was especially nice to give us all that money.”

“Yeah,” said Taro, responding to Bathy’s comment about an event that happened, but wasn’t mentioned in the last few paragraphs. “Even though I kept telling her that Junior and Ayami weren’t my illegitimate children.” As soon as Taro took Junior out of his hover stroller, he shut it off, causing it to levitate toward the ground. He then pressed another button to fold it up into a portable size.

Everyone enjoyed their treat as soon as they got into the house. Taro made Ayami and Junior’s dinner and ate a little something himself. The night went rather smoothly.

Ayami, Hiroko, Bill the chimi, Barthy the glylin, and Mabel the skipper watched a little TV before bedtime.

“Now we return to the Hindu drama, ‘More Than One Life to Live,’” said the announcer

“Okay, guys,” said Taro as he entered the room, “Time for bed.” Ayami groaned. She didn’t want to go to bed that soon, but she was a growing girl and she needed her rest. To further encourage her to go upstairs, Hiroko shut the television off. She, too, was tired.

When Taro took Junior and Ayami up to bed, Ayami was still thinking about the silhouettes. She was quite scared by them and couldn’t get the images out of her head. The company of her stuffed animals wasn’t enough, so she went into Junior’s room, where Taro was putting the toddler’s footy pajamas on.

“Taro, I’m scared,” said Ayami. The frightened look in her eyes spoke for itself.

“Why are you scared?” asked Taro in an aggravated tone.

“Those black things I saw are still out there.”

“Ayami, did those black things you saw attempt to hurt you?”

“No.”

“Then you have nothing to be afraid of. Those things aren’t going to get past your security system, much less come into your room.” After putting Junior in his crib and pressing the button to secure the crib, he escorted Ayami to her room. As much as he didn’t like the sickeningly sweet children’s books in Ayami’s personal library, he didn’t want to see her scared.

weird situation, if anything; Hiroko usually got along with her younger cousins. She rarely ever snapped, nor does she ever try throwing miniature houses at people.

“Hiroko, get down here!” shouted Taro, making sure she would hear him upstairs. Hiroko slinked toward the foot of the stairs. She knew she was in deep trouble. “Ayami tells me that you tried to hurt her!”

“She has no right to be smarter than me!” said Hiroko, “She plays the piano better than I can and she’s only four years old! She made me look stupid!”

“She didn’t mean to make you look stupid! Nobody cares if she can play the piano better than you. You can do a ton of stuff better than her!” It was then that Taro was in a stressful situation that was similar to that of an elementary school teacher. What was he to do in order to stop all the feuding? Ayami kept clinging on to his leg and sobbing. “Listen; why don’t we all do something that makes us happy. Let’s go to the convenience store.” Luckily, the girls and the monsters agreed on that suggestion and weren’t upset anymore.

With smiles on their faces, they grabbed their coats and were ready to go.

The group contently walked down the street, since the destination could be reached without a hover car. Taro was pushing Junior in his hover stroller while he was dressed snug as a bug with a cute cat-like winter hat on his head. Everyone else was dressed snug, too, since temperatures were falling. Mabel the skipper, Barthy the glylin, and Bill the chimi were each wearing scarves.

Meanwhile, a couple of cat-like silhouettes masqueraded through the neighborhood climbing up drain pipes. Only Ayami noticed these creatures. They frightened her a little bit, but she kept on walking.

As soon as they got to the fill-up station (gasoline has long since been phased out and the tanks are now filled with an alternative fuel that is ahead of our current time), Taro asked the group what they would like.

“Cookie!” said Junior excitedly.

“I want a *Seven-Up*,” said Hiroko. Taro and Barthy proceeded into the store with everyone’s orders.

As soon as they stepped out of the store with the things they bought, Taro gave Hiroko and Junior what they wanted.

“I’m sorry, Hiroko,” said Taro, “They were out of *Seven-Ups*. All I could get was ‘Seven-Down.’” Upon hearing the devastating news, Hiroko shrugged.

“But Seven-Down is a terrible soda!” she whined.

“Look on the bright side,” said Barthy the glylin, “They had plenty of Mamma Ruths!” He then held up a humongous candy bar with white packaging and a red-colored logo.

As the group headed back to the house, things started looking... strange. The sun was almost down, but the street and the insides of buildings looked pitch black. Only the headlights from the passing hover cars were on.

“Why is it so dark?” asked Ayami.

“It gets darker earlier this time of year,” said Taro as he was pushing Junior’s hover stroller.

“Everything is dark.”

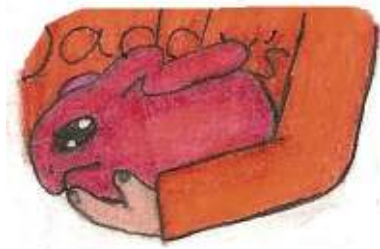
“Ayami is right, Taro,” said Hiroko, “Not even the street lights are on.”

“There must be a blackout,” said Taro.

“The little ones are entertained,” said Taro, “I’m going to the other room to do homework.” He set the Orange Asp down by the door and took his beat-up book bag into the other room.

Later, Hiroko and Ayami hung out upstairs. Ayami was proud of her piano-playing skills and her music monster.

“This is my monster, Bill,” said Ayami. In her arms was a tiny thing with a squiggle protruding from his head.



“He’s so cute,” commented Hiroko. The monster lay comfortably in Ayami’s arms and basked in his attention. The world was his oyster.

“Let me show you the piano!” Ayami then dragged Hiroko off by the hand.

In the “piano room” (as the family called it), Ayami showed off her piano playing skills. She played some beginner favorites, such as “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” and “Heart and Soul.”

“I want to become an expert musician one day!” she said happily. Hiroko was a little jealous of her cousin’s talent. It wasn’t fair that she was younger than her and she knew more about playing the piano. She decided to try it for herself. After all, a four-year-old could do it.

“I’d like to try.” Hiroko eagerly tried playing the piano, but couldn’t really read the sheet music. After fifteen seconds of this, Ayami felt the urge to correct her.

“Let me teach you...”

“No!” She then swiftly moved her arm. “I know how to do this! I’m older than you!” Ayami wilted a little and let her call the shots. “Let me try a different song.” Hiroko flipped through the song book, slightly abusing it. She got to a random page with the song ‘Chopsticks’ on it (the easiest song to play, but the most difficult things to use).

After many minutes of listening to Hiroko trying to play such a simple song without assistance, Ayami couldn’t take it anymore. She just had to stop her.

“Hiroko!” she said. Hiroko then stopped her piano playing to listen. “I think you shouldn’t be playing the piano. I’m just better than you at it.” Hiroko was shocked. She was being told by a younger girl that she wasn’t capable of something. She felt so immature and stupid at that point. “Now let me show you my doll house!” Ayami then got off the piano bench and picked up two little people that resembled a man and a woman. “This is Fred, he’s a firefighter. And this is his wife, Linda, who’s suffering from a hernia...”

Taro was downstairs doing his algebra homework while Junior was playing with a toy car. All of a sudden, a crash was heard upstairs.

“What the dickens?” Taro exclaimed. Five seconds later, Ayami quickly walked down the stairs one stair at a time while sobbing.

“Hiroko picked up my dollhouse and tried to hit me with it!” Feeling like she needed to be loved, Ayami hugged Taro’s legs and made them wet from her tears. A



“Now, we agreed on the payment of ten dollars tonight?”

“Yes.”

“I left it under the table cloth in the kitchen.”

“Ayami has been getting scary messages on television lately. She might make you check the closet for the *CBS* logo.”

“Yeah, that eye scares me, too.”

“Well, you kids have a good time, I know we will.” With that, the couple was out the door to engage in their unforgettable occasion. Taro turned around and saw his cousins, an adorable four-year-old girl with an even more adorable toddler-aged boy who was still mastering his three word sentences.

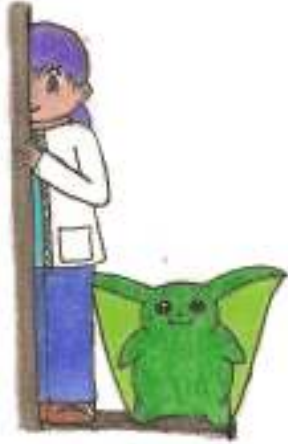


“If it isn’t Ayami and Junior,” said Hiroko. Ayami was a bit bossy, mostly because she hasn’t learned all of her manners. Kiyoshi Jr, who looked just like his dad when he was his age, tried to be just as talkative (if not more) as his sister.

“Mommy and Daddy grew shorter!” remarked Ayami as soon as she laid eyes on the two.

“We’re not you’re mommy and daddy,” said Hiroko, “We’re you’re cousins Hiroko and Taro. Your parents are out tonight so we’ve come to watch you.” All this came at Ayami so fast; all she did was stare at Hiroko. Fortunately, she focused her mind on something else.

“Look, Junior!” she said, “A dinosaur and a green blob!” She and Junior ran over to greet the prehistoric-looking guest and the rotund rodent with open arms. The children playing with Mabel the skipper was reminiscent of when Owen and Cathy were little and were playing with Cupcake.



“I have to go, guys,” he said, “I need to babysit my cousins.”

“I guess this means practice is over,” said Trevor, the lead singer, “We can’t do this without you.”

“Aw, that’s nice.”

“Don’t get all gay on me, man. Now let’s make like an amoeba and split.”

Taro packed up the Orange Asp, his prized electric guitar, and headed out with Mabel the skipper. As they walked, they crunched the dead leaves beneath their feet that haven’t already been raked.

“What do you suppose I do with the little ones?” asked Taro.

“I don’t know,” said Hiroko, “Whatever little ones like to do.” Mabel the skipper jumped like a kangaroo beside her tamer, like she always did. Barthy the glylin rolled right along and caught up with them nonetheless. He sort of wished the sidewalks were raked.

They arrived at their relatives’ house (a.k.a. Kiyoshi’s wife and kids), which was a beautiful blue house placed at the street corner.

Kiyoshi and his wife Amy were getting dressed up for a big event when the doorbell rang. Kiyoshi was concentrating on getting his tie through the loop in front of the bedroom mirror.

“Honey, can you get that?” he shouted. Amy ran downstairs with only half her makeup on. She answered the door and, thankfully, it was just who she was expecting.

“Oh good, you’re here,” she said.

Later, when the couple was ready, they laid down a few things to the young musicians and their monsters.



Barthy, the morbidly obese glylin, and Hiroko were watching Taro's band practice. They were concentrating on an especially good original song that the lead singer of the group had written. Practice was loud, but Hiroko covered her ear from outside the garage.



The music monsters of the band members were listening from the garage steps. This included Mabel the skipper, of course. They grew happy from listening to the loud music because they attained strength from it. After the song ended, Taro noticed his sister and her monster waiting by the garage.