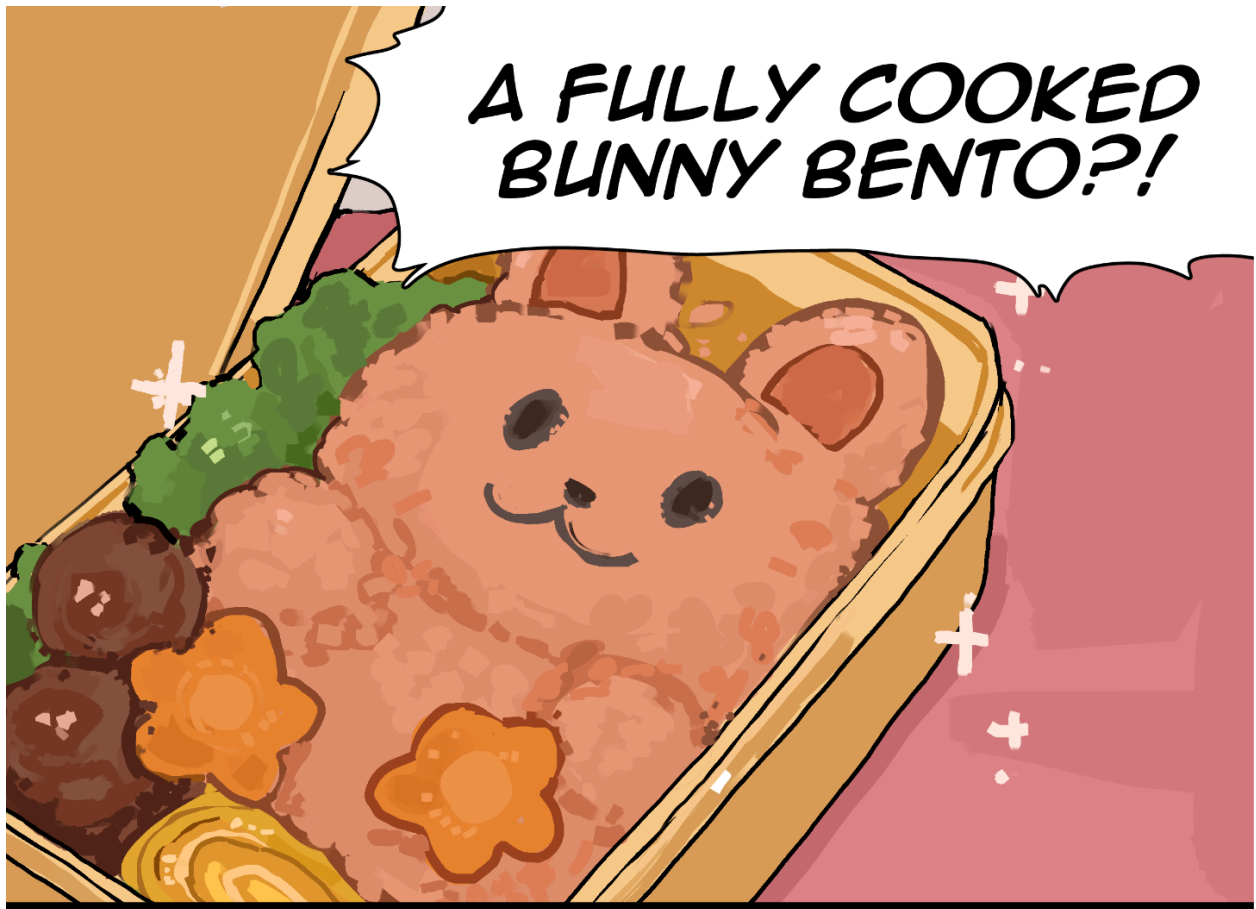


**A FULLY COOKED  
BLUNNY BENTO?!**



**FROM NOW ON,  
I PROMISE I'LL  
TAKE CARE OF  
YOU, KIKI PYON!!**



# Bunnies and Spring Bento

Spring came and I hadn't noticed. Every academic year has felt the same since middle school, so aging up one makes no difference. I'm officially a senior; there are thankfully no more annoying upperclassmen I have to use honorifics with. But at the same time, everyone's gonna start usin' honorifics with me. What a hassle. I wish people spoke plain, like family does. There'd be less fuss.

The weather's better now too. It's slightly chilly when the breeze blows, and makes me sweat less while working. Blossoms start falling and they paint the bottoms of my work boots a light pink when I tread on them, so I can't take em to school any more without risking turning the farm into some pride parade.

Everything's got a tradeoff, so what's the payoff here for wasting my time?

"Man, she's late. Probably ditched me." I glanced around.

Give somebody an inch and they take a damn mile.

The new class president's a third year. Doesn't make sense. I thought you had to earn that spot by working your way up till your fourth. Must be nepotism, or something...

Then again, I wouldn't know. I don't keep up with any school events or titles. Everybody mindlessly drifts through the same buildings, year in and year out, without questioning the setup. They form cliques. Join clubs. They act like they like this arrangement. Like they aren't forced together like a pack of sardines. I don't get why more people aren't pissed. No-one actually gives a shit 'bout any of this, right? I feel like a frog poking its head out of the water, watching fish swim in circles.

Still, I swim too. I see the current. I follow it anyway.

I start gnawing on my barley. Part of the stem breaks off into my mouth and pokes my tongue.

—

She was running from class after first bell. Had this huge stack of collected summer homework and wanted to be first to deliver it to the office. I was late. I didn't expect her to collide with me, but she swerved to the left and hit me square in the chest.

The tower toppled over and fluttered down around us. Her lunchpack, which was clipped to her backpack with one of those extra strength carabiners, unzipped as she fell on it, oozing rice and popping a bag of Harvest Snaps onto the floor. Her glasses slipped and hung crooked

on her nose.

"H-Hey! No halls in the r- no running in the- " she stammered while scooping food haplessly back into the bag, still trying to scold me.

...I wasn't the one running though, she was.

If it were anyone else, I'd kick the papers around some more before walking off, but she looked so damn sorry I almost felt sad. I nudged the stack into a pile with my boot and left without saying much else.

—

"KIYOMI PYON?!"

I slouched over my desk, chin in hand, chewing lightly on my barley. She bolted upwards, charged at the sound of her own name.

"WHY WERE THE ATTENDANCE PAPERS COVERED IN RICE AND CRACKERS?!" Our teacher covered her phone's receiver and glared at our president, having just as terrified an expression as Kiki, awaiting response.

Kiki shook. Looked like she might fry a circuit. "I wa... wh... when I..."

She stopped moving.

*Sniff.*

"I was..." *Sniff.* "hallway..."

*Sniff.*

You've got to be kidding.

I stood up. For no apparent reason.

"I was eating on the way to class and spilled some breakfast on her. My fault." I bowed just enough to sell the lie.

She turned to me, mouth wide and eyes huge. Almost blew it. I nearly burst out laughing, but then I saw the whole class staring. I sat down, slumped again.

Teacher wasn't happy. But she knew better than to make a scene with me so we dealt with it after class.

Kiki fixed her glasses and sat down too. She spent the rest of class trying not to stare at me, sending strange messages from across the room using nothing but her facial expressions and failing. She looked away each time I caught her, and then back again once she assumed I'd stopped looking too.

What's a brat like this doing in the student council...?

—

Now I'm here, waiting on this no-show of a president. I kicked at the dirt before deciding to just go home.

"Um... excuse me, mister."

I turned. She stood across from me, nervously twisting her soles into the ground.

"Um, sorry, um. I thought we were supposed to be meeting behind the *thirteenth* window of building C... not the *third*. We're currently at the *third*. I've been waiting on the other side... Sorry, maybe my directions were bad. I thought they could have been, so I came looking for you... just in case you got mixed up... ah... I'm sorry, it's my fault if you got confused."

Fuck. My mistake. But still, "thirteenth window"? That's so oddly specific. What kind of direction is that?

She's more apologetic now, at least. Not like she was in the hallway.

I scoff, hoping it eases the tension. "Oh. My bad." We stand there awkwardly. Neither of us really knows what else to say.

Now that I'm getting a good look at her, the situation becomes more absurd. She's my class president, but she's so much smaller, so much more meek than I. Her posture is slumped. Her presence is naturally small. But she tries so hard to assert herself. She's the opposite of me, but the same.

Her little brown bunny ears droop on either side of her head as she looks me over. She has this geeky aura to her, like a shut-in trying to pass as class ace. It's strangely endearing seeing somebody trying so desperately to fit a role they could never naturally fit. I appreciated the effort, but I could see the larp suffocating her.

"I'm Champy." I had to say something. Otherwise we'd both freeze solid.

"A... ah... Sorry, I didn't get to introduce myself properly," she said, exhaling after. "I'm Kiyomi Pyon Pyon... But you can call me Kiki!"

Her hair moved with the wind. Brown, long, and sleek. Uniform pressed, armband pinned. Skin so fair it almost glowed. It accentuated her eyebags, which glasses couldn't hide.

We shifted our line of sight in different directions. Anything to avoid eye contact.

"I called you here earlier because... ahh... I wanted to say thank you."

She fumbled with an item she had been holding behind her back and forced a hard bow, thrusting it in front of her- "THANK YOU FOR LETTING ME BORROW YOUR PENCIL EARLIER TODAY!"

I almost lost it and nearly laughed myself out of the courtyard.

"O-okay! Okay, you don't have to yell! It wasn't that big of a deal. You didn't have to call me down here for that anyways."

Wind blew through the trees, rustling some of the cherry blossoms down onto us.

"Your act of kindness meant a lot to me, Champy.

I.. I can't say this kind of thing in public, but being a class president just feels too much sometimes. It was my very first big task this year and I wanted to do it perfectly and I got so nervous I... felt like everything was falling apart for me the moment I dropped my papers. I thought if I didn't do everything right the first time through, everyone would be so disappointed in me- like my life was completely over on the very first day. But you saved me."

She frowned and hung her head lower.

"It's stupid, I know, sorry. I shouldn't be doing this. I'm a bit embarrassed too. But I... I want to show you how thankful I was. This isn't much, but I hope you could maybe eat it for dinner. I don't know, sorry."

This wasn't about the pencil.

Ahh... What do you say back in a situation like this? I took the barley out of my mouth and scratched my head. I just met her.

"Hah, Thanks Kiki. See ya later." I folded the box under my arm and took it home.

I wanted to comfort her, but did she want to be comforted? Girls don't usually talk to me unless they need something. If I said anything else I'd probably scare her. God damn. I wish I knew what to say. I never do.

—

I hopped down the stairs later that night at about 2:30 AM, yawning, with a mild headache and nothing on but a T-shirt and my green draws. I spent half the night browsing forums, but I still had to be up early to finish the rest of my detention.

I told myself I'd sleep after a snack. I opened the fridge and pushed my arm past old takeout and half-forgotten leftovers, until my hand found Kiki's box.

"It's gotta be crackers or cookies or something, right? Enough to hold me till breakfast."

The box was wrapped in pink, bunny-patterned parchment paper. I untied it carefully. There was a small hand-written note stuffed into the crease of the lid:

"I think your accent is cool!!!  
(^人^)! go west rabbitville!!"

I'm from South Rabbitville. I had to cringe to prevent my face from heating up. This brat is stupidly cute.

I set the note aside and opened the plastic tin.

—

The box felt light on the walk home, but in reality, it was packed tight. Rice, flowered-carrots, rolled eggs, seaweed, lettuce, and meatballs, all decoratively shaped into a small rabbit. Did she seriously make all this just for me? All because I covered for her that one time? I hadn't known that could have meant nearly this much to anybody.

I ran my hands through my hair, trying to shake off the feeling. God damn, I never let my mind circle around someone this long.

I glanced back at the bento and sighed.

Kiki Pyon, I swear I'll watch over you for the rest of the year.

Authors note:

Hey Katastudents!!! Bunnies and Spring Bento was my first big personal writing project I ever saw to completion and I am so nervous to show it to the world hahaha!! I really hope you all enjoyed this labor of love!!

It's the first story I made (of four) for the Katabasis Light Novel Anthology Series (how wordy) revolving around how each of the girls met their respective fanbases, and I'm really honored and grateful that Kiki let me take the wheel (pen) while also giving me such good feedback and pointers!!

I discovered my love of writing in early high school, where they gave us a massive list of required reading and I enjoyed a lot of it!! I wanted the writing style of each of the boys to be related to an author that I enjoyed reading, and unsurprisingly, I wanted Champy's written personality to be reflective of Earnest Hemingway. I read his book "The Sun Also Rises", which was about bullfighting, being racist, and getting your weiner blown off in the war. I enjoyed his blunt writing style and thought if anyone could embody his punchy tone it'd be Champies. Although I will admit it was a lot harder to write like this than you'd think, because you really have to force yourself to cut back on details! You might see a bit of Mikan peeking through, hehe.

I knew that what made Kiki special was the egalitarian attention she gave to each of her Champs, keeping them "equal", in a sense. It was the first thing I noticed, how she treated her fanbase as "one" entity. I also picked up on the shared sentiment of feeling lost and personal isolation before meeting that special somebody they could truly relate to, like Kiki! I know it's a bit reductionist to treat a fanbase like a monolith, but it's for the sake of fiction, okay!!

Kiki also told me that a lot of Champies come from the countryside, so I knew I had to mix that in, humorously enough I kept imagining you guys with a big stick of barley and a cowboy hat on and she liked the idea enough we decided to keep the barley! And in my head, you work on a ranch now, Yeehaw!!

Thanks for reading!

-Mikan 