

Lea Jacobson

Sebastian Meza

Ms. Slama

English 11

17 Sept. 2018

The Salmon God and Naoji the Human

Once, long ago, humans could breathe underwater. The human, Naoji was walking along the shore of the Yoshinogawa River that led into the ocean. When Naoji reaches the place where the river met the ocean, he hears cries for help, “Help! Help! I can’t breathe!” Confused, Naoji walked towards the sounds, and finds the great Salmon, a god of the sea, trapped in a fishing net left by a fisherman, on the sand. Having mercy, and realizing this extraordinary fish was a god, Naoji cut the god free of the tangled nets. As the human Naoji was working, the Salmon struck up conversation. “Kind human, what is your name?” he asked, the human replying that his name is Naoji. When at last Naoji had cleared all the rope, he helped the Salmon into the ocean, where he belongs. “Oh thank you Naoji-san,” the Salmon exclaimed, “Would you join me in my castle for a grand banquet in your honor? It is the least I can do for you saving my life. You are human, so this is possible because you can breathe underwater.”

Delighted by this offer, Naoji hurriedly accepts and the two set off to the Salmon’s castle. Upon arrival, Naoji gasps in amazement. The castle is the most grand thing he has seen, and Salmon laughs in amusement, “Is my castle impressive to you, Naoji-san?” The human chuckles good-naturedly, and the two continue to swim closer and closer. When Salmon directs them into

the banquet hall, another wave of amazement washes over Naoji. The hall is already set, with glorious mounds of both Water food and Land food sparkling down the length of the table. The nobles and minor gods under the Salmon god are also sitting and waiting for the host and the guest of honor, but as soon as the Salmon and Naoji enter, the hall goes quiet respectfully.

Taking their places at the head of the table, the Salmon god introduces his guest, “Loyal subjects, this is my guest tonight, the human Naoji-san. I owe him my life.” The subjects cheer and applaud, and begin the feast.

After the nobles and minor gods have retired to their own residences, the Salmon and Naoji crack open a case of sake together. Taking their sake glasses along with them, the Salmon takes the human on a tour around his castle. “Naoji-san, I shall now take you into my favorite room of all, the one that houses my favorite magical hakama, which can change the patterns and colors of the fabric to my desire. It is a wonderful hakama, and I treasure it dearly!” Upon entering the room, Salmon gestures towards his hakama grandly, and announces in a loud voice due to a little too much sake, “Behold, human, for you are the first of your kind to lay eyes on my majestic hakama!” Naoji sighs in appreciation, and says, “O great Salmon, thank you for this honor!”

After finishing the tour and many more drinks, the Salmon god proposes that the human Naoji stay the night, as it is far back to the surface, and there are extra rooms in the castle. Naoji agreed and the two parted ways to their own rooms. But, secretly, Naoji wanted the magical hakama for himself. So quietly, in the dead of the night, Naoji snuck out of his room to the room that held the Salmon’s favorite hakama. He put it on, and willed it to change to look exactly like his own clothes so no one would notice. With the hakama, Naoji went back to his room and fell asleep.

The next morning, the greedy human woke to the sounds of general panic and commotion. Walking out into the hall out of his room, he stopped one of the attendants and asked, “Do you happen to know what in the world is going on? The whole castle seems to be in a state of panic!” The attendant looked down and quietly replied, “The great Salmon god has discovered his favorite magical hakama missing this morning.” The attendant bowed and continued walking on. Now knowing his theft was discovered, Naoji set off to find the Salmon god and excuse himself. Naoji roamed around trying to find his host, occasionally asking for directions. Eventually, Naoji found the Salmon god, bowed and excused himself saying, “Thank you for letting me visit your palace, Salmon, but now I must return home to the Land.” The Salmon god almost let the thieving human go, when he detected his hakama’s magic wrapped around Naoji. “Stop!” the god yelled, “Do not let that human leave! He has tricked me and is leaving with my favorite magical hakama!”

Naoji began to race away, trying to get to the surface as fast as possible, but he was overtaken and put back before the Salmon. Disappointed, the Salmon god told the thief, “Naoji, I have been grateful because you saved my life, and I even let you stay in my castle for the night. But you have betrayed me, and my trust by taking my favorite magical hakama. This offense cannot be overlooked.”

Panicked, the human exclaims, “I’ll make a deal with you! Let me leave with the magical hakama in peace if I can beat you in a race up the Yoshinogawa River!” The Salmon god paused and thought about it. Finally he accepted the challenge and said to himself, “I am a salmon, who’s kind swim up-river, and I am a god, and cannot be beat by a human.” So the god,

confident in his inevitable win, set the race to be the next day. The human Naoji was sent back to his room under guard and was only allowed to receive visitors, but not leave.

Naoji thought of different ways he could win the race for many hours, until he finally thought of one idea. He requested a visitor to his guards and the visitor came to Naoji's room. "Octopus, please help me win this race tomorrow against the Salmon god! I am a mere human who would otherwise have no chance against a god like Salmon!" Then Naoji, the crafty human, told Octopus his plan on how to win. Octopus thought carefully and decided to help the human because of an old grudge he had against Salmon. Together, the two plotted together for the rest of the evening. By the next day, they had a plan.

On the morning of the race, Naoji paced the length of his room worriedly, thinking if his plan would work. Octopus came in, and calmed him saying, "Naoji-san, remember we have a plan that surely will not fail. You will win against the Salmon god and leave to the Land with his most prized possession!" Bolstered, Naoji stood straighter and nodded. Naoji was allowed to have breakfast sent to his room, which he ate quickly then began to stretch to swim better.

As the time for the race grew near Naoji made his way to the river. Upon his arrival he saw the Salmon god there already, waiting for him. "Naoji, are you ready to face me and lose? I know I am ready to have my hakama back in my possession," the god boasted. Not shaken by the god's remark, Naoji replied, "Please do not let your hubris blind you Salmon-san, you'd be surprised at what a mere human can accomplish when he puts his mind to it. I did steal your hakama from right under your nose." The god only grunted and turned away.

The race started, and the two were off, relatively even. The spectators, mostly Salmon's subjects, a few minor gods, and some humans who had heard of the race were lined along the

river banks to watch the god and human race up the river. As the race continued, the god began to pull ahead. Naoji became worried about losing and wondered when the Octopus would complete his part in the plan they had made the day before. In the final turn of the race, the Octopus swam by as if completely oblivious to the racing human and god. He swam in front of the Salmon and let out a great burst of ink. Blinded, the Salmon god paused and flailed around in an attempt to clear the ink covering his eyes. When the god had finally cleared his eyes, to his astonishment, Naoji had overtaken him and was now in the lead! Angry, the god swam harder, not even realizing the sudden disappearance of the Octopus.

Finally, just as the god caught up to the human, Naoji crossed the finish line. Not even a half second later did the now furious god cross the finish line. The winner was declared Naoji, and the triumphant human changed his prize hakama into an intricately designed, colorful, silk hakama, to rub his victory in the Salmon's face.

The Salmon was furious with the outcome, as it was obvious Naoji had used the Octopus to cheat. "You cheated you insufferable human! I should strike you down where you stand for this transgression! You nor your lousy race shall ever be welcomed in my domain ever again. I hereby remove yours and your every other humans ability to breathe underwater. You shall forever be bound to the land," the Salmon declared, bitter at his loss against the cheating human. Not one to back down, Naoji replied, "If we are forever bound to the land, then your kin shall forever provide us with nourishment. We will hunt them far and wide for our dining pleasure."

And so it was, and so it remains, the humans bound to the land, not able to ever breathe underwater again, and the salmons forever hunted by humans.