Taikutsuna, Abburido, Boring

by Alex Austin

The room housed a dozen elevated caskets, arranged along a circular wall from least to most expensive—plain as a packing carton to elaborate as a king's crown. Hugh walked the circuit, noting that each had an individual tune that played while the viewer stood near the coffin. He reached the last coffin, an ivory beauty with golden handles. He pulled up, but the casket barely budged.

“Be careful. That's $10,000.”

A child stood at the entrance. A Beatles haircut and loose Khaki painters overalls rendered the child sexless. Perhaps nine or ten, the child had a lovely delicate face. He or she walked over to Hugh's side and standing tiptoe peered into the casket. She, for Hugh had determined it was a girl, stroked the silk lining.

“Silk. Very expensive.”

“Yes.”

“Do you know how silk is made?”

“I think so. But why don't you tell me.” This was an approach he used in the classroom, let the student give an answer.

“They breed thousands of worms and then they mash them.”

“Mash them? Are you sure?”

“Like mashed potatoes. Do you like mashed potatoes?”

“My favorite kind.”

“I like the ones from the Stonefire Girl.”

“Grill.”

“That's what I said. They have garlic in them. Garlic is what you use to ward off vampires.”

“Does it work?”

“I don't believe in vampires. There is—*are* certainly none here.”

Hugh bared his teeth. The girl ignored him

“My name is Lily.”

Available online at *«http://fictionaut.com/stories/alex-austin/taikutsuna-abburido-boring»*
Copyright © 2010 Alex Austin. All rights reserved.

“Lily. What a pretty name. I'm Hugh.”

“No you're not. You're yourself.”

“H-u-g-h.”

“Huge?”

Hugh respelled his name, but it was unnecessary. Lily smiled at his naïveté. She reminded him of Thelma, the little girl who had been misplaced in an ESL class. Thelma was only ten years old, but her English almost perfect and always a step ahead of his instruction.

“Do you know who my mother is?”

“Griselda?”

“How did you know?”

“I guessed.”

“I put letters in envelopes.”

“I bet you're good at it.”

“It's boring. Fold the paper in three, stick it in the envelope, damp the adhesive with a sponge and seal the envelope. That's it. Easy. But you try it 200 times. What do you do?”

“I teach.”

“What do you teach?”

“English.”

I speak English, Japanese and Spanish. English is the most difficult, actually, but it's easy for me. Do you know any Japanese?”

“A little. I lived there once.”

“Where?”

“Tokyo,” he said, thinking the small suburb that he actually lived in wouldn't mean anything to her. To his surprise, she asked, “Where in Tokyo?”

“Edogawa.”

“Aaargg,” she growled, like a dog whose food was being taken away. “I hate Edogawa. It's boring. Nakono is much more interesting. We're going there in two weeks.”

“Really?”

“We go back to Japan every summer. It's so hot. Almost worse than the Valley. But nothing is worse than the Valley.”

“Do you have relatives in Japan?”

“Many. We have relatives in—

Griselda entered carrying a manila folder. “There you are, Lily. I looked all over for you. Your lunch is getting cold.”

“I was talking to Hugh. Actually,” she pointed, “I was talking to him.”

Griselda said, “Lily, you really should be in the display room without my permission.”

“I heard a noise. I thought another bird had gotten in. We've had three birds get in since the New Year. Why a bird would want to be in here makes no sense. There's nothing to eat and nothing to drink. All they do is poop on the caskets. Very messy.”

“Come on, Lily. Go back to the office and eat.”

“Ahh, don't want to eat. It's boring.”

“I wish she'd never learned that word.”

“In English, boring. In Japanese, taikutsuna. In Spanish, abburido. ”

“If you're good, maybe we'll go see a movie, after work.”

“Goody. None of that G-Rated stuff. I want to see the one in which the world ends.

“We'll see.”

“We'll see, we'll see.” Lily stomped toward the door and left.

“Bright child.”