

Greenwood Passage

by Juliet Carnell

based on 'Koko wa Greenwood' by Yukie Nasu

Kisaragi Shun stood in the center of room 210 of the Greenwood dormitory looking at the lifeless lump lying on the top bunk and sighed. Glancing out the window at the gorgeous May morning, he wanted nothing more than to get some breakfast and then get out of this dorm, but his roommate Hasukawa "Suka" Kazuya was still fast asleep.

Shun placed his hands on the edge of the bunk and lightly sprang up to kneel on the edge of Kazuya's mattress. He considered for a moment how best to awaken his comatose classmate, but a sudden growl from his own stomach forced him into action. He grabbed the sleeping boy's shoulder and shook as hard as he could.

"Suka-chan? Suka-chan, wake up! I want to go to breakfast."

There was a groan from beneath the blanket that soon turned to a growl as Shun continued to shake his roommate.

"Go away!" barked the sleeping form, "Let me sleep!"

"But it's beautiful outside," whined Shun, his feminine sounding voice becoming particularly irritating, "Don't you want to get out of this room and into the warm sunshine?"

"No! I want to sleep." With that Kazuya curled into a ball and dragged the blanket up over his head.

"Fine," Shun said as he leapt lightly down from the upper bunk, "be that way, but don't complain to me later when there's nothing left for you to eat." He looked expectantly at his lifeless roommate one last time before heading out the door.

As Shun entered the dorm's cafeteria, he searched the room for his neighbors Tezuka Shinobu and Ikeda Mitsuru. The two older boys were the closest thing Shun had to friends at Greenwood, but this morning they were nowhere in sight.

As he scanned across the sparsely occupied dining hall, he noticed a tall dark haired boy staring at him from one of the tables. Shun was used to the probing looks from the other boys, some of whom still couldn't believe that he wasn't the pretty girl he appeared to be, but it was already more than a month into the new school year and most of the freshmen had at least stopped staring at him.

He made eye contact with the boy who, embarrassed at being caught, quickly looked away. Shun decided he might as well confront the guy and set him straight, there was always the chance that some sempai had convinced the poor kid that Shun was actually a girl. His own roommate had fallen for that old scam last year for nearly three days.

After getting his tray from the counter, Shun approached the boy and sat down a few seats away at the same table. The most remarkable thing about the freshman was his height, he was easily one of the tallest boys in the dorm. His black hair was cropped very short, something Shun found oddly disturbing, and even though this was Sunday the boy was dressed in his uniform shirt and tie.

“Good morning,” Shun said, hoping to break the ice quickly, “my name is Kisaragi Shun. You live on the second floor, don’t you?”

The boy’s shoulders hunched together as he seemingly tried to disappear into his breakfast tray. “Um...” he started to say in a nervous voice, but he ended up just nodding his head in answer.

“I thought I’d seen you around.” Shun waited for him to say something, his name for instance, but the longer Shun waited the more obvious the boy’s discomfort became. “Uh, what’s your name?” Shun finally asked.

“Sakamoto...” the boy seemed to gain some confidence just by saying his own name. He lifted his head, but still would not look at Shun as he continued, “It’s Sakamoto Kioshi. I’m in room 201. I already know who you are sempai.”

“I guess there aren’t many people at Ryokuto Academy who don’t know me,” Shun said in a lighthearted way. “How do you like living here?”

The boy seemed to shrivel up again, “It’s... okay,” He began picking at the food on his plate without really eating anything.

Shun was never one to take offense at being ignored, a rare occurrence for a boy who looked so much like a girl, but the aura of panic surrounding this kid was palpable. Shun knew he was about the least threatening person at Greenwood, so there was probably only one thing Kioshi could be uneasy about. After an uncomfortable few minutes of silence, Shun decided to get it out in the open, “I’m not gay, okay?”

Kioshi stopped picking at his food for a moment, “Neither am I,” was all he said. It wasn’t said in a rude way, if anything it sounded like he was apologizing for some deficiency in himself. This was one strange kid!

Shun ate the rest of his breakfast in silence and Kioshi never once looked up from his own plate. When Shun finally stood up to leave he noticed that there was still as much food on Kioshi’s plate as there had been when he sat down. “I’m going out to enjoy some

of this great weather,” he said more for himself than the other boy, “Have a nice day Sakamoto-kun. Let’s have breakfast again real soon.”

Shun wasn’t really surprised when Kioshi didn’t respond. He’d have to check this guy out with Mitsuru-sempai later on, but right now there were sunshine and blue skies to be enjoyed. He dumped his tray at the wash station and hurried for the door. So preoccupied was he with getting outside that he didn’t even notice Kioshi staring after him as he left.

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The sunny days of May soon turned into the rainy days of June and life at Greenwood collapsed in on itself as everyone prepared for the onset of summer and exams. Returning from class one showery afternoon, Shun rushed into the dorm entrance hall and shook the water from his long hair. He put away his umbrella and traded his wet street shoes for a nice dry pair of slippers.

Taking the stairs two at a time he quickly came to the landing between the first and second floors. There, sitting on the bottom step, sat Kioshi just staring out of the window at the rain. Shun stopped and waited for the boy to notice that he was no longer alone. When it began to look like that wasn’t going to happen, Shun cleared his throat and said, “Hello there, it’s Kioshi-kun, right?”

Kioshi looked up with a startled expression, “Sempai!” The freshman tried to stand up, but only managed to dump everything from his lap onto the floor of the landing. As he quickly tried to gather them back up, Shun noticed a variety of pencils, markers and a black cloth covered notebook with a red binding.

Shun giggled as he said, “Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you. This is a strange place to be doing your homework.”

Looking red-faced with embarrassment, Kioshi said, “It’s not homework... it’s... well... I was just trying to find someplace quiet to do some... drawing actually.”

“Oh really? What kind of drawing? Can I see?” Shun gushed in his most unabashedly girlish way.

Hugging the notebook closely to his chest, Kioshi seemed to once again retreat within himself, “I’m... it’s... not very good.”

Remembering how the boy had closed up in the cafeteria the time before, Shun decided not to press the subject. After a few moments of thought he asked, “Hey, do you like manga?” When he saw the lights go on behind Kioshi’s eyes he smiled and continued, “I just got a package full of them from my little brother. You’re welcome to come over to my room later and have a look. Maybe you’ll find something you like?”

“Really? Won’t your roommate mind?”

“Not at all,” Shun was sure of it now, he had this fish hooked and just needed to reel him in, “This is his Mahjong night, so he won’t even be there. Stop by anytime after dinner.”

“Gee, thank you sempai!”

Shun flicked his hair triumphantly over one shoulder and marched off up the stairs saying, “See you later then.”

Kioshi sank back down onto the stair step, his face suddenly alight with a huge smile. He stared out the window for a few more seconds then opened up his notebook and began drawing furiously.

Kazuya had left for the Mahjong game only a few minutes before Shun heard a light knock at the door. He looked up and saw Kioshi’s hesitant face peeking in through the doorway.

“Come on in,” Shun said, “Have a seat. I’d offer you something to eat, but Mitsuru-sempai has already raided my package from home.”

“That’s okay, I brought something from mine.” The tall boy reached out and dropped a handful of small candy bars on the table in front of Shun. Shun examined them for a moment and then his eyes grew wide. There was not a single Japanese character on any of the wrappers! They were all from overseas.

“Wow, where did you get these?” Shun asked.

“My parents are in Europe,” Kioshi said as he settled his long legs under the table, “They’ll be there all summer, but they send me stuff just about every week.”

“Don’t let Mitsuru-sempai find out about it...” Shun began to say, but Kioshi waved him off.

“Too late, this is all he left me this week.” Kioshi grinned for the very first time and Shun decided that he liked the freshman better when he was smiling.

“Well, here are the manga,” Shun said pointing to three piles of books on the floor beside the table. Picking up one of the candy bars with the words “Dairy Milk” written in English across the front, he continued, “This first stack is mostly ninja stories from my little brother, the second stack are vampire and horror novels from my father and this last stack is shoujo from my mother. Find something you like and start reading.” Having successfully torn open the candy wrapper, Shun bit into the sweet honey and almond flavored chocolate, “Mmm... and be sure to take some with you when you leave to read later.”

As Shun went into sensory overload from the chocolate bar, Kioshi reached for the piles of manga. His hand hovered over the shoujo comics for a few seconds before he quickly snatched one off the top of the horror pile. He looked embarrassed and withdrawn again. Shun made an exaggerated display of choosing one of the shoujo books, then he plucked the horror comic from the freshman's hands and deposited the love story in its place.

"But..." Kioshi began to say.

"Always do what your sempai tells you." Shun said with all the authority of a grade school girl, "Read what you really want to read and eat some of this chocolate. That's an order."

They sat and read manga, ate all the chocolate and talked for the better part of two hours. At first Kioshi had been reluctant to open up and say anything, but before long Shun's natural charm had worked its magic on the younger boy and he had begun to talk more freely. Even so, Shun could not get over the impression that Kioshi was hiding something he really wanted to say. When the freshmen finally left with several more shoujo manga under his arm, Shun decided it was time to get the official low down on him from the team next door.

"Sakamoto-kun?" responded Shinobu when Shun asked about Kioshi, "I don't know much, how about you Mitsuru?"

"You mean the tall kid in room 201?" asked Mitsuru from his perch by the window. "His parents send him some pretty good stuff from Europe every week. He shares the room with another freshman, Matsuuro Youshi-kun, who complains that Sakamoto-kun does nothing but study all the time."

Shun nodded, he could have figured that much out on his own.

"I do know that he had the highest entrance exam score out of all the freshmen this year, but he refused the position of class representative," added Shinobu, "He hasn't joined any clubs yet and he doesn't play sports outside of gym class."

Shinobu glanced towards Mitsuru and their eyes met. "*If this were a shoujo manga,*" Shun thought, "*they would be surrounded by flowers right now!*" Shun rolled his eyes and said aloud, "So that's it? That's all you guys know about him?"

"Is there something more we should know?" asked Mitsuru, "Maybe that he's *special* to you Shun-chan?"

Both Shinobu and Mitsuru looked at Shun in a way that made his skin crawl, "N-no, he just seems a little depressed and I thought you two might have checked him out by now. I guess he's just a bookworm."

“Even invertebrates need love Shun-chan,” his sempai were looking deeply into each other’s eyes again and Shun backed quickly out of the door. Up until now they had never actually kissed each other in front of him and he intended it to stay that way for a while

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July arrived at Greenwood with all the cuddly warmth of a blast furnace. Kioshi had been making regular stops at room 210 each week to return the manga he borrowed, discuss them with Shun for a while and then leave with another armload. On this day he found Shun stretched out in front of the open window wearing nothing but his gym trunks.

Shun looked up at the tall boy rooted in the doorway with his arm frozen in preparation to knock. He looked like a Maneki Neko, the Lucky Cat statues you often see in restaurants. Shun had witnessed many boys’ first reaction to seeing him without a shirt on. They ranged from bug-eyed disbelief to crest-fallen disappointment, but Kioshi was the first one to look lost in thought.

Shun put down his mechanical pencil on top of his calculus homework and reached for a t-shirt. Slipping it on over his head and pulling the wet ponytail of hair off his back, he waved Kioshi into the room. Even after only a few seconds with the shirt on Shun was beginning to sweat again and contemplated taking it off until he noticed that Kioshi was wearing his white uniform shirt and tie as usual.

“Aren’t you hot wearing that? You should put on something cooler Kio-chan.” this was the nickname Shun had given the tall boy shortly after he had begun borrowing Shun’s manga collection.

Kioshi shook his head, but didn’t answer right away. Still looking pensive he crossed the room to the open window and looked out across the city. “I don’t have any other clothes,” he said at last, “My dad threw them all out before he sent me here.”

“What? Why would he send you here with nothing but your uniform? That’s ridiculous, this isn’t a military school.”

“We had... sort of a fight before they left for Europe. He didn’t like the way I looked, so he said I would just have to make do with my uniform from now on.”

Shun was shocked, were there really parents like that nowadays? “Well even so... You still don’t have to wear that shirt and tie in this heat. Do what everyone else does and just wear your gym shorts without a top.”

Kioshi turned towards Shun with a pained look on his face, “It’s true. You don’t feel like a girl at all, do you?”

Shun was blindsided by the question. “W-what!? Well... no, I guess I don’t...”

Suddenly Kioshi's face turned beet red. "I'm sorry sempai. That was terribly rude of me." Racing for the door the boy dropped the stack of manga on the table next to Shun's homework. "I won't bother you any more."

He was already to the door by the time Shun managed to shout, "No wait! Kio-chan, please don't go. I'm not upset. It was just such a strange question. Usually boys say just the opposite about me." Shun tried to laugh, but it came out as more of a tense giggle.

With one hand resting on the door jam, Kioshi slumped forward and sighed heavily. He didn't move for several awkward moments and then said, "There's an error in the solution to your third equation. The answer is correct, but the work you showed is wrong."

"Oh really?" Shun looked down at his homework paper on the table, now partially covered by the stack of manga. It was a mess of badly scrawled mathematical formulas and Kioshi couldn't have looked at it for more than a second when he dropped the books. "That's not surprising. I copied the answers from Suka-chan's homework and tried to fill in the equations myself."

Kioshi turned from the door, slowly crossed the small room and sat down opposite Shun at the table. "It's right here," he said pushing the manga aside and pointing at the paper, "You need to transpose this before you factor it in."

Within five minutes, Kioshi had not only corrected Shun's entire homework but had also managed to explain calculus in such a way that Shun actually understood it for once. "Thanks Kio-chan! This is great, but as your sempai I should be helping you do your homework. Where did you learn calculus?"

Kioshi smiled slightly, "I just picked it up on my own in middle school. I really liked middle school..." After saying this, he stared out the window again with a wistful expression on his face.

"What is it Kio-chan?" Shun could tell there was still something bothering him, "Why did you ask me a question like that?"

The pensive look returned to the Kioshi's face, "I envy you sempai. The way you look..." His face began to turn red, "It's all so easy for you..."

"Easy?" Shun laughed, "Are you kidding? Do you have any idea what it takes to look like this? The hair alone takes hours..."

Kioshi hung his head and whispered, "I know..." Gently he raised his hand to the back of his neck as if feeling for something that wasn't there. He looked directly at Shun with sad watery eyes and said, "Sempai, can I tell you someth..."

“Why does it have to be so damned hot?” At that moment Kazuya stormed into the room shouting, “Shun, aren’t you hot in that t-shirt? Not to mention all that hair of yours. We’re all going to the pool do you want to come with us? Bring your friend here, how can you wear a shirt and tie in this heat?”

Shun had been certain Kioshi was about to tell him something very important, but Kazuya’s boisterous entrance had cut it short. Kioshi was already edging away from the table in preparation for making his escape.

“Kio-chan, don’t go,” Shun begged. Turning to his roommate he shouted, “Suka-chan! Get the hell out of here!”

“I’d better go,” Kioshi said as he stood up. He bowed to Kazuya and said, “Pardon my intrusion sempai,” then he turned and ran from the room.

Furious, Shun leapt to his feet and jumped all over Kazuya, “What the hell did you do that for? He was about to open up and tell me something. Now he’ll probably never come back in here again and it’s entirely all your fault!”

Kazuya looked bewildered. All he could say in response was, “Who was that guy that just left?”

Shun screamed in frustration and headed for the door. If he was lucky he might catch up with the long legged freshman before he got too much of a head start, but as he reached the door Mitsuru appeared to block his way.

“I’ve told you before Suka-chan,” the older boy said with an evil grin, “these walls are as thin as paper and that if I ever heard Shun scream you would have to pay the price.”

“Please sempai,” Shun shouted, “get out of my way!” He tried to edge his way past the other boy, but a second body appeared to block his path, it was Shinobu.

“Hey Shun!” Shinobu said, “Does that tall friend of yours ever take off his uniform? He just ran past me down the stairs. Funny thing is he didn’t even look like he was sweating...”

Shun gave up and retreated back into the room. Collapsing into a heap on the floor, he buried his face in his hands.

“What’s going on in here anyway?” asked Shinobu.

“Suka just tried to rape Shun,” Mitsuru said with deadpan delivery, “I heard the scream myself.”

“I did not!” Kazuya shouted, “It was that other guy... who was that anyway?”

Shinobu shook his head, “For a Head Resident, you certainly haven’t done your homework. That was Sakamoto Kioshi-kun, this year’s bright shining star of Ryokuto Academy academics.”

“More importantly,” Mitsuru interjected, “shouldn’t we be getting Shun-chan to the infirmary and have him tested. I’d hate to send him home for the summer pregnant.”

Once again Shun screamed, “Would you all just please shut up! Something important was happening in here and all you can think about is making jokes. There’s something going on with Kio-chan and I think I’ve figured out what it is.”

Silenced by the outburst, Mitsuru at least acted as if he was being serious when he asked, “And what would that be Shun-chan?”

“I know this sounds weird, but I think... I think Kio-chan is actually a girl!”

No one in the room laughed. None of them had ever seen Shun this serious before.

Shinobu was the first one to recover and he stepped across the room to stand next to Shun. Looking down he said softly, “Shun-chan, I’m sure you have good reasons to believe that, but I’d like to ask you something? How many six foot tall girls with tenor voices have you met recently?”

Shun looked up at his sempai, “Oh... I guess you have a point there, but something is seriously wrong between Kio-chan and his family. They threw away all his clothes before he came here, that’s why he’s always wearing his uniform.”

“Okay,” said Mitsuru, “so while you’re on summer vacation buy him a couple of cute t-shirts as souvenirs.”

“Summer vacation? Wait a minute,” Shun said with sudden enthusiasm, “is he staying at the dorm over the summer? He said his parents were in Europe.”

Mitsuru nodded, “Yeah, his name’s on the list.”

Shun looked hopefully at his friends, “Will you guys look after him for me? Maybe try and get him involved in some things?”

Mitsuru looked first at Shinobu and then at Kazuya, “Sure. Of course we will.”

Shinobu nodded as well, but Kazuya just shrugged his shoulders and said, “I still don’t know who he is!”

“Don’t worry about it Shun-chan.” Mitsuru said, “We’ll take good care of your friend while you’re away.” He turned towards the door and collected Shinobu’s arm. “Come on,

let's leave these two alone. Coming home to find another man in bed with your wife must be hard on a guy."

"He's not my wife!" Kazuya yelled after them.

In the hallway, Shinobu turned to Mitsuru, "Are you really planning to look after that guy for Shun?"

"Oh, I intend to pay Sakamoto-kun lot's of attention this summer," Mitsuru said with a devilish grin.

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Shun turned the corner and caught his first sight of the Greenwood dorm building. For once he was happy that summer vacation was over. It had been a hectic month, being dragged around to business functions by his mother, enduring his brother Reina's latest obsession with video games and baby-sitting his little sister. Through it all, Shun had managed to forget all about Kioshi.

He met up with Kazuya in their room and after telling him all about his summer at home, Shun asked, "How did the rest of the summer go around here?"

"Not bad," Kazuya replied, "Pretty much the same as last year except that I had all the Head Resident work to keep me busy."

"And that is never ending Suka-chan," said a voice from the doorway. Turning they saw Shinobu standing there holding some papers, "Welcome back Shun-chan, how's your little brother."

"What can I say," Shun replied with a grin, "Reina-chan's going through puberty and acting like it."

Shinobu laughed and stepped inside. Handing the stack of papers to Kazuya he said, "Mitsuru had to go help out at his family's temple today, so he asked me to have you post these announcements on all the bulletin boards."

Kazuya glanced at the papers and then tossed them on his desk, "I'm not his errand boy just because I'm Head Resident!"

"Suit yourself," Shinobu said as he was leaving, "Oh, he also said to remind you not to forget your flashlight again when you do bed check tonight."

Shun pulled the stack of announcements off the desk and started leafing through them. They were pretty much the normal assortment of club notices and sports schedules until he came to one listing the room openings for this term. At the top of the list was room 201, Kioshi's room.

“Suka-chan,” Shun said hesitantly, a bad feeling had come over him suddenly, “what happened with Kio-chan over the summer? This says there’s a bed open in his room.”

“Oh, right,” said Kazuya looking at the announcement over his roommate’s shoulder, “You probably don’t know. Sakamoto-kun transferred to a school in Europe. He left just a couple of days ago.”

“What?” Shun shouted in surprise, “You mean that’s what he was trying to tell me right before vacation?”

“I guess so. I wasn’t here when he left. I decided to go home for a couple of days to get away from the madness around here and he was gone when I got back.”

“No wonder he was so upset, but I was so sure he was trying to tell me something else entirely. I wish I had been here to say goodbye.”

Kazuya laughed, “I don’t think you would have wanted to be here.” When Shun gave him an inquiring look he continued, “Well, you’ll find out sooner or later, but Mitsuru-sempai played a little prank on your friend before he left.”

“Oh no,” Shun could well imagine the sort of things Mitsuru was capable of pulling on an introverted boy like Kioshi, “What did he do?”

“He told Sakamoto-kun that the real reason you look so much like a girl is because a ghost cursed you.”

Shun groaned, “What did Kio-chan do?”

“Actually he took it rather well. After the séance...”

“Séance?”

“Yeah, in the cafeteria. Mitsuru-sempai had someone dress up as an old woman and play the ghost, but the guy tripped over his skirt and gave the whole thing away when he crashed into the table. Sakamoto-kun was laughing as much as everyone else that night so I guess he just thought it was funny.”

“When I asked Mitsuru-sempai to involve Kio-chan in things I meant to invite him to the pool or something.”

“You should know better.”

Shun laughed, “I should, shouldn’t I? Well, I hope Kio-chan will be happier wherever he is now. He never seemed to fit in around here.”

“I never could figure out how you two became friends.”

“It was strange,” Shun furrowed his brow as he thought about that, “The first time I remember noticing him, he was staring at me in the cafeteria.”

“Shun, everyone stares at you in the cafeteria.”

“Yeah, but Kio-chan was different...” with that thought left hanging in the air, Shun changed the subject, “Hey, want me to help you put up these announcements?”

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Later that evening, Shun knocked on the door of room 211 and stepped inside to find Shinobu sitting at his desk and Mitsuru standing by the window.

“Mitsuru-sempai, when did you get back?” he asked.

Mitsuru, looking uncharacteristically morose, replied, “Just now. I didn’t feel like hanging out at home all night.”

“Well I’m glad you’re here,” Shun said, “I wanted to talk to you both about that prank you pulled on Kio-chan over the summer. I really wish you wouldn’t include me in your schemes when I’m not even here.”

Shinobu and Mitsuru gave each other a worried look and then bowed their heads. As Mitsuru turned and pulled the window closed, Shinobu looked up at Shun and said, “Please close the door Shun-chan. We have something we need to tell you.”

Shun closed the door and turned to face his two sempai. This smelled like another one of their schemes to him and he couldn’t wait to see what direction it took.

“Shun-chan,” Shinobu began, “your friend Kioshi didn’t transfer to a school in Europe. That’s just a story we started spreading around the dorm to explain his absence. He’s actually... well...” Shinobu seemed at a loss for words, so he turned to Mitsuru with a desperate look.

“A few days after we sprang the séance on him in the cafeteria,” Mitsuru explained, “Kioshi-kun slipped out of the dorm after curfew, walked down to the train station and bought a one-way ticket home.”

“We assume he was intending to confront his parents about something,” added Shinobu.

There was a long pause before Mitsuru continued, “He never got on the train for Nagoya... instead he stepped off the platform in front of an approaching local train. I’m afraid he’s dead.”

There was silence in the room as Shun let it all sink in. Then he began laughing, “You had me going there for a minute sempai. This has to be one of the most outrageous jokes you two have ever tried to pull on me. The look on your faces is priceless!”

Mitsuru shook his head sadly, “I wish this was just a joke Shun-chan. The police were here for two whole days going through his things. They found a letter on his desk that was addressed to his parents. It said that he couldn’t put up with the pressures of being an A student any more and that he wanted to quit school. He even put stamps on it, but apparently decided to go home and tell them in person.”

“The police,” Shinobu continued, “think that he got to the station intending to take the night train to Nagoya, but became depressed over the thought of facing his parents. They have ruled his death an opportunistic suicide.”

“That’s why I was at the temple today,” said Mitsuru, “His parents held a ceremony for him there before cremating the body and taking him home.”

“I guess he just couldn’t live up to their expectations,” said Shinobu, “even though he aced all of his exams last term and was going to be made a member of the honor society.”

Shun shook his head, “I just don’t understand this. How could he be... d-dead?”

“It happens sometimes Shun-chan,” said Shinobu gently, “Boarding schools are stressful places for some students, especially when their parents expect too much from them. I need to ask you a big favor. We want to keep this quiet. Word of a suicide is never a good thing around a dorm like this.”

“I know it will be tough Shun-chan,” added Mitsuru, “but can you keep this to yourself? Even Suka-chan might go over the edge if he knew about it.”

Shun nodded slowly, “I understand. I won’t tell anyone else on one condition.”

“What’s that Shun-chan?” asked Mitsuru.

In answer Shun ran across the room and wrapped his arms around his sempai. Mitsuru held the effeminate boy in his arms as Shun cried his heart out.

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Later that night, Shun lay on his bed staring at the bottom of Kazuya’s bunk unable to sleep or stop thinking about Kioshi. Finally he reached up to the bookshelf above his head and turned on the little reading light there. When he did so, he noticed the corner of an unfamiliar book sticking out over the edge of the shelf.

Sitting up in bed he looked at the black cloth covered notebook with a red binding and tried to remember where he had seen it before. It certainly wasn’t his and if it were

Kazuya's it must be new. He opened it and found a title drawn and inked in stylish characters on the first page.

Greenwood Passage
by Sakamoto Kioko

"*Kioko?*" he thought, "*Did Kioshi have a sister?*"

He began to leaf through the book. It was a rather well done manga. Some of the panels were drawn in pencil, but most had been inked as well. Shun began to recognize some of the characters as residents of Greenwood including Mitsuru-sempai, Shinobu-sempai, Suka-chan and Shun himself. He also noticed that just about every page included a tall character he recognized as Kio-chan.

As he flipped to the last page a piece of paper fell out of the notebook. He picked it up and read the meticulous handwriting:

"Shun-sempai.

"Forgive me for not saying goodbye. You have shown me a great deal of kindness and in return I have not been completely honest with you. I never told you the real reasons why I always stare at you. Perhaps this manga will explain what I cannot.

"I am deeply sorry for the pain and sorrow that what I'm about to do will bring you and the others at Greenwood. Please assure Mitsuru-sempai that the trick he played on me was in no way responsible.

"Sayonara,
Kioshi"

Shun reread the message several more times before setting it aside and beginning to read the manga from the beginning.

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An hour later a puffy eyed Shun read the last few pages. The manga had turned out to be a very well drawn diary of Kio-chan's life at Greenwood. Shun recognized many of the events that had occurred since March, but where he remembered the events one way Kioshi had replaced the dialog with the words he had never had the courage to say in real life. The picture it painted for Shun was one of a very confused, hurt and lonely person.

Shun's first surprise was that in the beginning of the book, Kio-chan had long black hair down to his waist. He looked like a tall version of Shun, but then came the argument with his father, the burning of all his "strange" clothes and the haircut that had broken his heart. His mother had been helpless to prevent his father from "making a man out of him."

So, stripped of his individuality, he had been sent to Ryokuto and Greenwood. His first days there had gone about as well as could be expected. He met his roommate Youshi who was into sports, computer games and girls, everything Kioshi was not. The school's various clubs, all of them anxious for new members, had assaulted him repeatedly. Shinobu-sempai had approached him about becoming the class representative. Shun was sure that the manga deviated from reality at this point, because Shinobu gave up far too easily.

Then one day Kioshi had seen something that shook him badly. Walking down the hallway he passed by what he thought was someone's girlfriend. On closer inspection the girl turned out to be wearing a Ryokuto school uniform. He later discovered that this was Shun and he became obsessed with watching Shun's every move. Shun was shocked to learn that Kioshi had been stalking him for weeks before they met in the cafeteria.

In the manga, Kio-chan had poured his heart out to Shun. On page after page, he described his feelings about how much his father had taken away from him, how empty he felt inside and how painful living in a boy's dormitory was for him. Shun realized at last that his guess about Kioshi before summer break had not been that far from the mark.

The last few pages had been particularly difficult for Shun to read without openly weeping. On them Kioshi had accurately and graphically chronicled the events of the last few hours before his death. Included were his writing the fake letter to his parents, sneaking out of the dorm through the kitchen, his lonely walk down the darkened streets to the station, buying the ticket that would forever let his parents think that he had been coming home to them and the hardest of all to see, the moment when he stepped off the platform.

Shun closed his eyes as he prepared to turn the last page. He wasn't quite sure what might be waiting for him there. When he finally felt strong enough he took one quick look and then he quickly shut the book. A cry caught in his throat, "Oh Kio-chan..." he moaned out loud.

A noise from above alerted him that Kazuya was awake and he quickly wiped away his tears on the sleeve of his pajamas.

"Shun?" Kazuya's voice came from the bunk above his head, "Are you awake?"

Shun tried to control his voice as he said, "Yes, I'm just reading."

"You sound like you've been crying."

Shun sniveled once, fighting back more tears, "The manga I'm reading is really sad. It's about a lonely girl who can only have her dearest wish granted by becoming a ghost."

"Is that one of those shoujo things your mother always sends you?"

“No, it’s one that Kio-chan left for me.”

“Well finish it tomorrow, will ya? Classes start in the morning and I need some sleep.”

“Okay, I’m on the last page right now.”

Shun took a few deep breaths to calm himself before opening the book again. The last page consisted of one large panel on which Kioshi had drawn a strikingly detailed portrait of Shun. Standing behind Shun was the ghostly form of a girl with long shiny dark hair and a beautiful smile. It was the eyes that gave away the girl’s identity. Shun had no doubt that this was Kio-chan’s ghost, at last transformed into the girl he had always wanted to be.

<<< FINI >>>

All characters in this story are a work of fiction. Any resemblance to any person, living or dead is purely coincidental.

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Author’s Notes:

Kioshi translates to “quite man”
Kioko translates to “happy child”