



## by the water's edge

---

On Sunday, I had lunch with my mom. It was the first time I had seen or talked to her in nearly three years. It was a warm Spring day, with a nice cool breeze to take the edge off. The sun was shining, the flowers already in bloom. No exceptions, this was a pretty nice day.

We ate at a familiar haunt of mine—a place called Tatsu's—where the food is quick and decent, and the service good. I met her there—she was early, already seated. I sat down opposite and said:

Hi, mom.

What, don't I get a kiss? Why haven't I seen you in so long? You're looking a little pale... are you eating healthy?

I'm fine, ma. Just been busy, that's all.

Trying to hide a slightly weary gaze, I stood up and gave her a peck on the forehead. Sitting back down, we made menial smalltalk. Work, weather, what to order. It was when the food arrived that she started up.

So... how's she doing?

She—Kayla—is fine, mom.

Okay, I'm just asking.

My mother—like a lot of mothers, I suppose—is quite protective. Her traditional ways meant she wanted a good Japanese girl for me to marry. She even had one picked out. I threw a spanner in the works, in a very big way. Kayla is a *gaijin*—a Westerner.

Why don't you come back home, dear? You're welcome to come back.

What for? So you can slowly niggle your negative thoughts into my head, get me to break up with my wife—

Wife? You married her?

Yeah, mom, I did. We love each other.

She was practically in tears at this point. She began to mumble, or grumble, about it being a big mistake, about leaving the family, about all my decisions. Wouldn't it be better if we rented a house rather than bought one? That way, if things didn't work out, there

wouldn't be messy ownership problems. Very romantic. It's here, at this point:

Don't you think that's a bit hasty? Couldn't you just have stayed like you were for a little while, until you're really sure, because—

... that point, where I snap.

You did this, mother. You and everyone else. Nobody tried hard enough to make her feel welcome. You all, every last one, would have rathered that I break up with her. That this matter went no farther. She tried—*tries*—but still it's never good enough for you. No, she'll never really understand why she's not allowed to wear shoes inside the house, or why after all this time she still has to call you by your surname, but she understands me.

She loves me. She cares about me. And yes, we fight, a lot even, because sometimes we are very different, but we always try to make things right. We're still here, aren't we? We've survived everything so far.

You say you want the best for me, and me to be happy, and this is it. I'd much rather my family got along with Kayla, and vice versa, but if it's a choice between her or the family, you can be sure as hell it won't be the family.

We're your blood, son, and blood is—

Enough... that's enough.

I took a few deep breaths. Put my fingers to my lips, in part to stop myself from saying any more, but also to stop them from trembling. Looking off into the distance, I blinked hard.

I dropped a few 1000-yen notes on the table and walked out.

—

As I walk towards the train station, I recall a conversation—argument—that I had with my mother, several years previous. One thing she said stuck, and probably always would:

*Don't get too attached; don't be too serious in your relationships. If it works out, that's fine, if it doesn't, you won't be too hurt.*

I angrily shot back. That, I said, would be like being by the water's edge. One foot in the water, one foot on the shore. Always safe. Wanting to get wet, but at the very same time, not wanting to.

That though, is not what love is. Love is taking that plunge, not knowing whether it will be cold and uninviting, or warm and cosy. You just have to take that risk.

So I wade into the water. And we don't look back.