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Sample Excerpts from *The Shrine of the Siren Stone*

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Sample excerpt 1:

Ishiro and Yuko have gone on their first date:

As they left the restaurant, Ishiro said, "Yuko, I'll walk you home."

"Thank you, master," said Yuko.

"Where do you live?"

"At Nikkou Café."

"You live in the café?"

"Yes, master. Where else would I live? Mr. Endo owns me."

"Mr. Endo owns you? Of course, he does," Ishiro said.

He knew he shouldn't be surprised that Endo owned Yuko. She was a machine, and all machines have owners. It was easy to forget that she was an android.

He watched the way she moved her legs, swayed her hips, and turned her head. She imitated human movement perfectly, better than an L-3 could.

They walked through Akihabara. Christmas celebrations were reaching their peak in the Electric Town. Christmas songs played from shops. Couples dined in restaurants decorated with paper hearts and Santa Clauses. Shoppers bought anime movies and books. A group of teenagers, dressed like anime characters, laughed as they entered a cosplay café. Lone males played for toy robots at *pachinko* parlors. Mechanical Santa Clauses waved at them in the windows of toy shops.

Some people gathered in front of a *koban*. They watched a television that broadcast police

bulletins.

The policeman stood in the *koban's* doorway. He said, "Watch the next report. Tell me if you see any suspicious activity like this."

A police woman read the news on TV. "Another android was attacked and destroyed in Shinjuku earlier this evening. The android was delivering parcels for Japan Post. No parcels were stolen. If you witnessed the attack or have any information about it, please report to the police."

The TV showed the wrecked android. Like the others, this one looked like an attractive young woman. Again, someone had torn its clothes and smashed a hole in its body. Black hydraulic fluid gushed out of its belly.

A teenaged boy giggled. "Stupid robots. They're so easy to kill."

A man said, "I used to work full-time until my company got an android to sweep the floors. They shouldn't let androids take our jobs."

"I don't mind industrial robots, but androids are creepy," a woman said. "It's the way they look at you. And they have that weird skin. Creepy."

Yuko tugged on Ishiro's arm. "Let's go," she urged.

They walked on, leaving the small crowd to talk about the news.

As they approached Chapel Christmas Love Hotel, a couple waved at them to come over. They were young, no older than twenty-five years. They dressed well. The man wore an expensive blue suit and tie. The woman wore a red party dress.

"Could you please take our photograph?" the man asked, holding his camera to Ishiro.

"Yes," Ishiro said, taking the camera.

The couple posed beside the Santa Claus robot and made peace signs with their hands. Ishiro pressed the shutter button, and the camera flash ignited. The Santa Claus laughed, "Ho, ho, ho!" and sang "Super Funky Holy Night."

"Thank you," the man said, taking the camera back from Ishiro.

The woman looked at Yuko and said, "That's a beautiful costume. Your boyfriend must love it."

Yuko smiled. "Yes, he does. Thank you, ma'am."

Ishiro felt startled. The woman had thought he was Yuko's boyfriend. Had Yuko actually agreed with her? Did Yuko consider him her boyfriend?

It was too good to be true.

"It's so nice to see people dress up for Christmas," the woman said. "It's the most romantic time of the year!"

The man said, "Merry Christmas!" to Ishiro and Yuko. Then he escorted his girlfriend into the love hotel.

"Have you ever been in a love hotel?" Yuko asked.

"No," Ishiro replied.

"I have not gone into a love hotel, but some of the girls have," Yuko revealed. "They go there with their boyfriends."

"I imagine so."

"I want to go to a love hotel to gather data. What do you think?"

"Ah, uh, ah, uh —"

"I'll do it on another day, after I recharge my battery," Yuko said.

They watched several more couples enter the love hotel.

"People enter the love hotel in pairs," Yuko observed. "Nobody goes alone."

"There's no reason to go alone," Ishiro said.

"Therefore, when I go in, I'll need to bring another person," said Yuko. "Master, will you go with me?"

Ishiro gasped and coughed. "Uh, ah, uh, ah —"

"Not tonight. My battery is running low. But will another night be fine, master?"

"Yes, yes, thank you for asking me!" Ishiro blurted.

"Thank you, master," Yuko said.

"Ah, Yuko?"

"Yes, master?"

"Can you, ah, can you — can you perform as a woman in love? You know what I mean."

"No, I don't know what you mean. Please explain."

"Do you have the, uh, the correct parts?"

Yuko looked puzzled. How much programming was needed to make an android look puzzled, Ishiro wondered?

"Uh, can you, can you — have sex?" Ishiro finally asked.

"Oh, reproduction," Yuko said. "I can't reproduce biologically, but I have the anatomical features to simulate the act of reproduction with a human male."

The robot Santa Claus laughed, "Ho, ho, ho!"

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They entered the Nikkou Café, which was open for business on Christmas night. Like last night, customers filled the café, and the maids walked from table to table.

Ishiro saw Mikita put water into the coffee machine. Androids were supposed to be like the coffee machine, the rice cooker, and the vacuum cleaner. Equipment did not get days off, but somehow, Yuko did.

"How did you get the time off to go out with me?" Ishiro asked.

Before Yuko could answer, Ami greeted them. "Yuko, you're home!"

Next, Ami bowed to Ishiro. "Mr. Sato! Welcome home!"

Yuko turned to Ishiro and said, "Thank you for dinner."

Ami's eyes widened. "No, not Mr. Sato! Mr. Sato was your date?"

Yuko nodded. "Yes, younger sister."

Ami gasped and giggled. "Oh! Oh! No wonder you didn't tell me who it was! Hah, I thought it would be another android! Like the cute male one at Mamoru Candy Palace."

"That android is an L-3 and can't help me with my research," Yuko said.

"Do androids go on dates with other androids?" Ishiro asked.

Yuko shook her head. "No, they don't."

"They don't go on dates with humans either," said Ami. "Androids don't go on dates at all. Not until now."

Mr. Endo came to them. He greeted Ishiro first. "Welcome home, Mr. Sato."

Then he said to Yuko, "You've come home. Did you enjoy the evening?"

"Yes, Mr. Endo, it was pleasant," Yuko said. "However, my battery charge is down, and it's dark outside, so I can't get solar energy. May I recharge in your office?"

Ami smirked and said, "You're exhausted, eh?"

When Yuko nodded, Ami giggled and nudged the maid's shoulder.

"Yes, go to my office," Endo said.

Yuko turned to Ishiro. "Thank you for dinner, master."

Ishiro nodded. "Yes, thank you for coming with me."

"Perhaps we will go out again, if you wish. I look forward to going to a love hotel with you."

Endo gasped. A look of horror appeared in his eyes. Ami burst out laughing. Ishiro wished he

could disappear.

Yuko smiled and walked away. Ami and Endo turned to Ishiro. He saw the look on their faces. Did they feel shock, surprise, horror, disgust, or pleasure? Or was it a combination of feelings?

"Oh, this is a shock," said Endo. "It was bizarre enough that Yuko asked for time off for a date. She didn't tell me who it was. It was you, wasn't it?"

Ishiro mumbled, "Yes."

"Ah, so that's why you asked me for advice about girls," Endo realized. "I thought you were going on a date with a real girl."

"I did too," Ishiro said.

Ami's face became serious. "Ah, Mr. Sato, did you know she is an android?"

"No, I didn't know," Ishiro admitted.

"Oh."

Endo said, "Mr. Sato, perhaps we should talk. I'm quite busy tonight, but can you come tomorrow night?"

"Yes."

"Good. There are some things you should know. Yuko is not an ordinary girl, and she's not an ordinary android either."

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Ishiro returned to Nikkou Café the next night. This time, neither Ami nor Yuko greeted him at the door. Instead, Mikita rushed to him and said, "Welcome home, master! Mr. Endo is expecting you. Please follow me."

As he followed Mikita, Ishiro did not see Ami or Yuko in the café.

Mikita led him to Endo's office. Unlike the rest of the café, the office lacked anime posters, character figurines, and toy robots. Instead, Mr. Endo had decorated his office with mementos of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force: a class photo of new officers, models ships and submarines, the naval flag, and a sword in a display case.

Family photos hung on a wall. They showed Mr. Endo, Masako, Ami, and Yuko. Yuko appeared like one of the family.

Endo stood up and welcomed Ishiro. "Thank you for coming, Mr. Sato." He pointed at a chair. "Please sit down."

He turned to Mikita. "Please bring us two chocolate teas. Close the door behind you."

Mikita curtsied and left. Endo closed the accounting spreadsheets on his computer and turned to Ishiro.

"I asked my daughter to take Yuko to buy some clothes," he said. "I didn't want Yuko to hear us talk."

"*So desu ka,*" said Ishiro.

Endo sighed. "How do I start talking about Yuko? That girl's a mystery. Well, she's not even a girl."

"Was I the only person who didn't know that?" Ishiro asked. "Do the girls know she's an android?"

"Oh, they all know," Endo said.

Ishiro moaned softly. "How embarrassing! I've been coming to this café for two years and never knew Yuko is an android. And I'm a computer science graduate!"

"Don't be so hard on yourself," Endo said. "Everyone's fooled at first. A new girl doesn't realize that Yuko's an android until they talk for a while. Then they realize that she has gaps in her life experience, like no childhood, no schools, and no family. The customers seldom have conversations with her long enough to discover the truth. And the girls never tell the customers. That would spoil the illusion. Yuko is very convincing. She has always let others discover by themselves that she's an android. You're the first person to whom she's told her secret."

"I still can't believe how advanced she is," Ishiro said. "She speaks like a well-educated woman. Her movements are smooth. She even simulates breathing. She's the most human-like android I've ever seen."

"She wasn't always like that," said Endo. "When I first got her, she could only play the violin and make basic conversation. But her learning program is incredible. It's always making her learn about the world around her. Now she can dance like a ballerina, talk about hundreds of subjects, and learn new things. She had some basic social skills programming, but she learned much more about etiquette and social behavior on her own. I'm very happy about her development."

He picked up a framed photo. It showed Yuko and Ami wearing summer dresses at a park. As Endo stared at the photo, he smiled.

"Watching Yuko develop is like watching another daughter grow up," said Endo.

He put the photo back down. "However, I thought there would be one big difference between a daughter and an android. I didn't think that an android would be interested in the one thing that interests all daughters when they grow up. But I've seen her read romance manga, and I've heard her talk to the girls about boys."

"She told me she's gathering experiential data about emotions," Ishiro said. "She's starting with love. Dating is a sort of data gathering exercise for her."

"Yuko is still developing intellectually and socially. She continues to surprise me," said Endo.

Someone knocked on the door. Endo went to open it, and Mikita came in with their chocolate teas. After serving the tea, the maid left Endo and Ishiro alone again.

Ishiro took a sip of tea. "Where did you get Yuko?"

"Keep this secret," Endo replied. "I got Yuko from Dr. Hayase Midori."

"Dr. Hayase, the android designer?"

"I knew you would recognize her name. Yes, that's her."

"How did you meet her? How did you know her?"

"I first met her in my university days."

Endo pointed at the photo of naval officers on the wall. "That's me. When I was in university, I joined the Student Reservist Corps. That was during the Korean Crisis, and the Self-Defense Forces wanted students who could be part-time officers. I joined so I could work in the Maritime Force's robotics division.

"One summer, the Maritime Self-Defense Force sent me to see the new androids at Victor Robotics..."

Sample Excerpt 2:

Japan has won its first naval battle since the twentieth century:

Captain Yamane Michiko became a national heroine. All news media showed her photograph beside those of Fleet Admirals Togo and Yamamoto. Newspapers published full-page photos of Yamane, suitable for framing. For the first time in years, newspaper sales exceeded newsweb downloads.

At the Gakushuin, the principal assembled the students to sing patriotic songs of the Showa Era. As in the past, TV and radio stations broadcast the recital. As Masako listened to her

students, she received a message on her pocket computer. The principal wanted her to teach about the sinking of the *HMS Prince of Wales* and the *HMS Repulse* in 1941.

General Morita, always near a TV camera, urged the Prime Minister to promote Yamane to admiral. Then he announced his upcoming anime trilogy: *Ensign Yamane: The Naval Academy Years*, *Commander Yamane: Mission to Venezuela*, and *Captain Yamane: Victory at Sea*.

A toy company made *Yayoi* toys overnight. They sold well, and collectors asked for more toy ships. The company's next toys were the historic battleships *Yamato*, *Musashi*, and *Shinano*. All had been lost in the Greater East Asia War.

In Ginza, NHK's giant screen showed the message:

THE GREATEST NAVAL VICTORY SINCE PEARL HARBOR!

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Unconfirmed news reports said that the Emperor would appear in public to celebrate the victory. Endo, Masako, Ami, and Yuko set off to see His Imperial Majesty.

Since it was April, the cherry blossoms were blooming. The white and pink flowers were everywhere on the way to the Imperial Palace.

"That's what I love most about the spring," said Masako as they walked past a park filled with cherry blossom trees.

"The cherry blossoms will be blooming at Yasukuni Shrine," said Endo. "They don't live long, so they symbolize the short lives of the soldiers, sailors, and pilots."

"They also symbolize love," Ami added.

"I'll remember that," said Yuko.

An *Asashi Shimbun* photographer stopped them. "You look like a patriotic family — except for the maid, but you're very cute," he said.

Endo wore his Navy Supplementary Reserve uniform. Ami wore a grey Red Cross uniform, which she had recently received after first aid training. Masako wore civilian clothes, but she held a small national flag.

Yuko wore her French maid costume. Ami considered it a fashion statement.

"May I take your photograph, please?" the photographer asked.

"Uh, I'm fine with it, but you should ask the ladies too," said Endo. "Ladies, are you okay with that?"

Ami and Yuko grinned, hugged each other, and jumped up and down. "We're going to be

famous, we're going to be famous, we're going to be famous!" they squealed.

"I guess that means yes," said Masako.

"Ah, if you could look this way, please," said the photographer.

They posed for the photo, with Ami and Yuko making peace signs with their hands.

The photographer pressed the shutter button. "Thank you, thank you. Look for it in *Asashi Shimbun*, both the newspaper and newsweb editions."

He showed the photo on his camera's monitor. "Ah, it looks like a historical photo from the Greater East Asia War. I should publish it with a sepia tone. Thank you again!"

After the photographer left, Endo said softly, "Everyone's talking about the Greater East Asia War. That was so long ago. Why don't they talk about a more recent mission, like U.N. peacekeeping in Venezuela?"

Masako shrugged. "Wasn't that mission a total failure?"

They joined the crowd gathering at Kokyo Gaien, the large park in the Imperial Palace grounds. In front of them was the moat. Over the moat was the Nijubashi Bridge to the Main Gate. In the distance were the green trees and white and pink cherry blossoms of the East Gardens.

Thousands of people waved the national flag. Endo had seen more flag-waving in the last year than in the previous decade.

"I can't remember the Emperor making a spontaneous appearance before," said Masako. "His appearances are usually scheduled months in advance."

"We don't even know for sure if he'll be appearing," said Endo.

An old man wearing a Naval Veterans Association hat approached Yuko and Ami. "Hey, we've met before," he said.

"Yes, we have," said Ami. "You're at all the rallies."

"It's the least I can do. I wish I could do more," he said. Once again, he gave national flags to Ami and Yuko. "Please have another flag."

He glanced at Endo. "Ah, who's this fine young officer?"

Ami giggled. "That's my father."

The veteran saluted. "I'm pleased to meet you, sir."

Endo returned the salute. "Thank you, I'm pleased to meet another Maritime Self-Defense Force veteran."

Strangers bowed to Endo and said, "Congratulations, congratulations! Thank you, sir, thank you!"

Ami laughed and said, "Father, they think you're a war hero!"

"Wow, who knew that the Supplementary Reserve was the elite squadron of the Navy?" Endo joked.

Suddenly, the crowd cheered with a deafening roar.

"Look! The Prime Minister and the Emperor are coming out!" said Masako.

Fujiwara and the Emperor walked on the Nijubashi Bridge and waved to the crowd. The Prime Minister wore a business suit, but the Emperor wore a Navy uniform.

"I didn't know the Emperor was in the Navy," said Endo before he stood at attention and saluted.

"No Emperor has worn a military uniform since the twentieth century," said Masako.

"This is exciting!" said Ami as she waved her Red Cross cap at the Emperor.

"What do we say to the Prime Minister?" asked Yuko.

The crowd yelled, "Banzai!"

"Banzai!"

"Banzai!"

"There has been nothing like this since the Showa Emperor rode his horse on the bridge after the fall of Singapore," said Masako.

Lieutenant Commander Endo Hideki, still silently saluting, remembered his days in the Maritime Self-Defense Force. He felt a surge of pride.

But he wished people would stop comparing the current war to the Greater East Asia War.