Mariko Miyata-Jancey, *Mieko is dancing*Ill. Skinkeape  
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Sample translation by Jenny Moi Vindegg

Represented by Gyldendal Agency

[Anne.cathrine.eng@gyldendal.no](mailto:Anne.cathrine.eng@gyldendal.no)

[Nina.pedersen@gyldendal.no](mailto:Nina.pedersen@gyldendal.no)

1/2

– OUCH! cries Mieko.  
She tries to wiggle free from Mum’s hands.  
If you want to keep your hair long, you have to brush it, says Mum.  
She tries to brush out a mega-tangle in Mieko’s hair.

Big sister Sayaka walks by.   
– I brush my hair every day, she says. – Sometimes twice a day! First, I brush it in the morning, and then in the evening.

– So stupid! Who can be bothered to spend that much time brushing their hair? says Mieko and tries to kick her big sister in the shin.  
– Sit still, please, says Mum.  
– You do need to put up your hair for dance class, you know that! Do you want to go or not?

Mieko wants to go. Dancing is her favourite thing, and this is the first class after the summer holidays.

3/4

– Why don’t you just cut it? asks Sayaka.  
– Well, sure, says mum. But …  
– Yeah! shouts Mieko.  
– No, we can’t cut it just because of some tangles, says Mum, but Sayaka has already run to the bathroom to find Dad’s shaver.

5/6

– That turned out short, says Mum.  
– That turned out cool, says Sayaka.

Mieko does some dance moves and feels the air rustle around her ears. It feels so nice without all that hair!  
– Oh well, says Mum and smiles.  
– Now, no dance teacher in the world can tell you to put it up with an elastic. Because that is actually impossible.  
Mieko brushes her fingers through her short hair.

7/8

– This one doesn’t fit at all anymore, says Mum while she tries to help Mieko put on the stupid tights. – What about the leotard?

Mieko lifts her arms above her head. She tries holding them just right, to make a good-sized circle.

Like there is a balloon between them, just like she has learned in dance class. But she doesn’t get it quite right, because when she lifts her arms, the leotard digs into her bum and feels tight and uncomfortable.  
– Uh oh, says Mum. – If we hurry, we will have time to stop by the shopping centre. We will get you some new dance clothes there.

­– OK, says Mieko and kicks off the last of the leotard. – Goodbye to you, sillypants!  
No way she wants another one of those if she can avoid it. It has always been too tight and too small, even when it was brand new and actually way too big.

9/10

– Hm, I thought they might have leotards here, says Mum.

– Can’t I use that one instead? asks Mieko and points to a t-shirt with probably a million colours on it.  
– For dancing?  
– Yeah, do I HAVE to dance in a leotard?  
– No … I don’t suppose you do, says Mum, and holds the t-shirt in front of Mieko, maybe to see if it looks right.  
– Yeah, why not. Do you want shorts to go with it? Rather than the tights? Mum finds a pair of shorts too, and Mieko can’t believe that things can be this simple. Of course she wants shorts instead of stupid tights!

11/12

In dance class, they have got a new instructor.  
– Hi, my name is Tom, he says and does a twirl. Everyone is to say Tom! and do the same twirl.

They do the entire round. Everyone gets to say their name and make up a move to go with it.  
– Sofia, says a girl that Mieko doesn’t remember from before the summer holidays. She has got blonde hair in a long braid that flips to the back when Sofia does her dance move.

13/14

It is amazing to be back in dance class, and even more amazing with the new clothes. Never before has Mieko spun this fast or jumped this high. Nothing feels too tight, everything is soft and comfy and super cool. She sees herself in he mirror that covers the entire wall of the dance hall, and sees a million colours shine from her t-shirt.

Yup, she is awesome!

When it is her turn to cross the floor and jump, she does really well. She can feel it. Tom, the new instructor, smiles and gives her the thumbs up.

When Sofia has jumped, Mieko smiles at her and gives her the thumbs up. Sofia lights up and smiles back. Mieko gets a warm feeling in her tummy from that smile.

15/16

Mieko lies on her bed at home, still feeling warm from Sofia’s smile, so warm that she has to write “Sofia” on a piece of paper and draw a big heart around it.

17/18

– Today we will begin rehearsing the dance routine for the Christmas show, says Tom at the beginning of the next dance class. Mieko’s tummy skips, and she sees that Sofia is excited as well. Then Sofia looks at Mieko, and Mieko’s tummy skips again.

– One, two, and right arm out, five six, left arm up. One, two, chassé to the right, pas de bourrée and seven, eight!

Mieko concentrates, and she is placed right next to Sofia! Everything is going well until they are divided into two groups.

19/20

– Pirouette, says Tom and points at Sofia.  
– Jump, he says and points at Fredrik. He keeps pointing and divides everyone in a pirouette group and a jump group. – Pirouette, pirouette, jump, pirouette.  
– Jump, says Tom and points at Mieko.

Sofia is in the pirouette group and Mieko is in the jump group. At first, Mieko thinks it is ok, but then she realizes that ALL the girls are in the pirouette group except from her! The jump group is Lars and Theo and Mika, Noah, Fredrik … and Mieko.  
– It is cool to see so many boys here! says Tom, looking over at the jump group. Mieko looks down. A big lump has grown in her tummy, one that is impossible to jump with.

21/22

When Mieko gets home, she goes straight to her room.  
– Don’t you want some supper? Mum shouts after her as she goes.

Big sister is standing in Mieko’s room, holding the note that Mieko has written on.  
– Oh, sorry, says Sayaka and turns to Mieko. – I was just looking for my golden heart charm, I thought maybe it had ended up somewhere in here. You see, I can’t find it.

Stupid big sister! Mieko wants to shout, but nothing comes out. Mieko is stamping her foot. Sayaka is just standing there looking at her.

– Leave! Leave my room! Mieko finally shouts, and thankfully Sayaka does leave. Mieko only barely has time to close the door before she starts to cry.

23/24

The lump in Mieko’s tummy has caught fire. She grabs the note and tears it into tiny pieces, so tiny that no one can see what was written on it.

25/26

Today, the mirror is mean. Mieko has to face it, even if she doesn’t want to. Hair standing straight up, lumpy clothes, lumpy AND at the same time lanky body! How can everything be SO wrong? She dreads being divided into groups again.

Maybe the boy group is the right place for her? Maybe she has always been wrong about being a girl?

The other girls, the proper girls, are standing in front of the mirror. They are measuring who has got the longest hair.  
– I think Hedvig has got the longest hair, says Sofia.  
– I think Sofia has got the longest hair, says Hedvig.  
– Do you know who I think has the longest hair? says Tom. He has come over to Sofia and Hedvig. – My partner! You can see for yourselves later, today we will get a visitor, he says.

27/28

They have finished stretching and have just started practicing the dance routine when someone walks through the door. At first, all that Mieko sees is wavy, light brown hair. Tom is right! His partner’s hair goes all the way down to the bum, it is super long!  
­– Hi! Tom shouts over the music, before turning it off and walking over to his partner.  
– This is my partner, says Tom, turning to face the class. His long-haired partner turns as well.

29/30

– Kristopher is a dancer too, he is so excited to meet you all and watch the dance!  
Kristopher throws his hair back and smiles at them. Mieko thinks his hair is gorgeous. He is gorgeous all over. Then she feels the lump in her tummy again.

Imagine that he can be that gorgeous even though he is a boy! And here she is, having thought she is a girl, but she is just all wrong.

31/32

After dance class, Mieko just wants to go home as quickly as possible. But all of a sudden, there is Tom’s partner, with all his hair and all his gorgeousness. He is standing right in front of her, blocking her way out of the dance hall.  
– Some people believe that only boys can do high jumps, but that is not right at all, says Kristopher. ­– You are a real jump-girl! Such gorgeous jumps! Tom told me there was a cool girl here who did super awesome high jumps. Now I see what he meant!

Kristopher’s eyes twinkle as he talks, and Mieko can’t help feeling happy and warm inside. He is probably the most gorgeous person she has ever seen.

33/34

But outside the dance hall, Sayaka is waiting for her, and the warmth inside Mieko disappears again. She hasn’t wanted to be around big sister since that stupid thing with the note happened. All of a sudden someone is calling for her.  
– Mieko!

And Mieko’s body turns around, because the voice calling her name is Sofia’s.

Sofia smiles, and Mieko can’t help smiling back.  
– Can you help me practice split jumps next week? asks Sofia.  
Mieko nods and her body grows warm again against her will.  
– Bye, says Sofia.  
And then she is gone again, running back to the other girls.   
Stupid warmth, stupid smile, stupid, cute Sofia!  
Mieko feels her big sister’s eyes on her.

35/36

On the walk back home, Mieko walks a step behind Sayaka. Sayaka with her long hair and tight jeans and a boyfriend coming over. Everything is always just as it should be with big sister.

37/38

– That was Sofia you were talking to, right? She was cute, says Sayaka, and turns around and looks Mieko in the eyes. – Sofia and Mieko, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G!

Sayaka laughs and kisses Mieko’s forehead before twirling her around, spinning and almost throwing her first ahead and then to the sides, so that Mieko almost stumbles. Big sister smiles, and then starts running.   
–Hey! Mieko shouts after Sayaka. That is all she can think of saying before she runs after her.

39/40

Sayaka is way ahead, but that is ok. Mieko is warm again, her tummy feels so light that she has to do a big leap while running after Sayaka. No one has seen a girl jump that high before. Higher than all girls, higher than all boys. Only Mieko can jump as high as that.

Except from Sofia, that is. After Mieko has practiced jumps with Sofia next week, they will probably both be able to jump higher than anyone else in the whole world.   
Everyone can just wait and see.