

## **The Peach Boy**

"Take care, honey. I'll see you later tonight", her husband said. The woman gave him a quick peck on the cheek. "You too Vernon." The front door closed and they parted ways on the street.

Susan and her husband had their day-to-day. Her husband worked for a prestigious woodcutting company, which meant she was free to do whatever she liked. That usually entailed sitting by the river, enjoying the sunlight that would stream past the skyscrapers onto her radiant smile.

This particular day, however, was a bit different. Once Susan had gotten settled in her favorite spot - a tiny bend in the river that resulted in a small beach, which, despite its promise of sand and fun, was usually unoccupied - she began to relax. A twinkle in the river called her attention just as she was dozing off - something... pink. Susan saw a peach bobbling down the river. It swayed with the current, its pink exterior sometime hidden underneath the water, sometime seemingly floating above it. As it approached the bend, the peach landed on the beach. Susan picked it up and took a bite and - it was the tastiest peach she'd ever had! A fireworks show of flavor, a moist symphony, a juxtaposition of sensation, from the tips of her hair down to her toes! The woman thought of her husband and how he would love having such a delicious peach. She thus sang a song,

"Tasty, tasty peach, you come hither; bitter, bitter peach, away you slither"

As if by prayer, she saw another peach bobbling down the river. However, as it approached her, she quickly realized this peach was far, far bigger. Once again, the floating traveller landed on the shore, and the woman picked it up. Her arms outstretched around the peach, she could barely hold on, but she managed to bring it back home.

When her husband arrived from work, she immediately told him about her day and the peach she'd found. "Well then, let's try this peach out!", her husband said, and she cut the peach with a knife. Suddenly, from within the massive peach, they heard a cry! Pulling apart the two halves of the peach, the pair found the peach was hollow and inside - a tiny baby boy! They quickly found a towel and got some hot water to bathe the baby in. "That's definitely a surprise!",

the husband joked, and the woman agreed: "He's so full of life!".

The baby was named **MOMOTAROU** and was brought up with much love and care by his foster parents. Whenever **MOMOTAROU** ate one bowl of cereal, he'd grow; if he ate two bowls of cereal, he'd grow twice as much. Not only that, whatever the couple taught him, **MOMOTAROU** would promptly learn. He was soon helping out with household chores and even with the husband's job. The couple was extremely proud of having such a jewel for a child, and every day they would love **MOMOTAROU** more and more.

Around that time, the bustling city was overtaken by the *ONI*. With their large muscles, red skin, long canine teeth and horns sticking out of their green hair, the city was driven into chaos. The *ONI* set cars on fire, broke windows, plundered shops and removed all semblance of order. Upon their departure, the *ONI* left behind a destroyed city. **MOMOTAROU**, hearing of this incident, decided he would restore order and defeat the *ONI* so that they would never haunt his hometown again.

**MOMOTAROU** broke the news to his parents at the dinner table. "Mom, dad, I'm going to the *ONI* island to defeat them." Both his parents were incredulous that **MOMOTAROU** had even had that idea. "Are you sure? There's no way you can defeat the *ONI* alone!", his adoptive mother told him. "Mom, could you make me some of your cupcakes? You know they're the best around and I will definitely need some for my trip!" **MOMOTAROU**'s parents, unable to persuade him, did the only thing they could: they helped **MOMOTAROU** prepare for his voyage. Susan made some cupcakes, Vernon brought out a special bandana and an ancient sacred sword that had been passed down through the generations of his family. **MOMOTAROU** tied his bandana tightly around his forehead, put the sword and cupcakes around his waist, and was soon beaming like a strong young man. "Try very hard and come back", his parents pleaded, their hands entwined, helping each other hold back their tears.

With his chin held up high and his chest puffed out, **MOMOTAROU** bravely left his home. As he approached the city limits, a dog ran up to **MOMOTAROU**. "Where are you going, Mr. **MOMOTAROU**?", he barked at the boy. "I'm going to the *ONI* island to defeat the *ONI*." The dog pawed at **MOMOTAROU** and asked, "What is that hanging from your hip?" **MOMOTAROU** took a cupcake from his bag and replied, "These are the number one cupcakes around." The dog excitedly told **MOMOTAROU**, "If you give me one of those number one cupcakes, I'll join your voyage." **MOMOTAROU** handed the dog a cupcake and they went off

on their merry way.

The companions soon approached the mountain that separated the city from the sea. Close to the base of the mountain, a monkey hanging from a mango tree called their attention. "Mr. **MOMOTAROU**, where are you going?", the monkey inquired. "I'm going to the *ONI* island to defeat the *ONI*." The monkey, noticing the cupcakes hanging from **MOMOTAROU**'s hip, asked what they were. "They're the number one cupcakes around." Swinging down to the ground, the monkey told **MOMOTAROU**, "If you give me one of those number one cupcakes, I'll be your attendant." **MOMOTAROU** gave the monkey a cupcake and the party increased in size.

At the top of the mountain, **MOMOTAROU** saw the sea. They were very close now. As they were on their way down, a pheasant flew close to **MOMOTAROU**. "Mr. **MOMOTAROU**, where are you headed to?", the pheasant asked. "I'm going to the *ONI* island to defeat the *ONI*." "What's that on your hip?" Once again, **MOMOTAROU** took a cupcake out and said, "These are the number one cupcakes around." The pheasant crowed: "If you give me one of those number one cupcakes, I'll help you on your quest." So **MOMOTAROU** gave the pheasant a cupcake, and the travelers were now four.

When they reached the sea, the pheasant called out, "Look! There's the *ONI* ship!", and indeed, there was an *ONI* ship by the shore. **MOMOTAROU** and his friends quickly commandeered it and were off to the *ONI* island. After some time, once again the pheasant called out, "There's the *ONI* island!" They landed the ship and were greeted by a large gate that the *ONI* had put up. **MOMOTAROU** knocked on the gate, but nobody replied. The monkey adroitly climbed the gate and unlocked it from the inside, rushing the companions in. **MOMOTAROU** cried, "*ONI*! I am **MOMOTAROU**, and I have come to defeat you. Prepare yourselves for battle!" The boy unsheathed his sword and took on a battle stance. The surprised *ONI* were in disbelief at this boy's impudence. They raised their large cast iron clubs and slowly circled around **MOMOTAROU**. One by one, the *ONI* were struck down by **MOMOTAROU**, whose strength increased to that of a hundred men due to his mom's cupcakes. The pheasant flew around, pecking at the *ONI*'s faces, the monkey clawed at their backs, and the dog bit the *ONI*'s ankles and knees, rending them immobile. With their help, **MOMOTAROU** defeated all of the *ONI*.

"Please spare my life", begged the chieftain *ONI*. **MOMOTAROU** and him rivaled

David and Goliath. The *ONI*, with both his hands on the ground, pleaded for mercy: "We won't come to spread chaos anymore. We'll even give you all our treasure - just please forgive us!" **MOMOTAROU** found it in his heart to spare the *ONI*'s life and proceeded to take all of their treasure, so as to leave them with a lesson taught. Together with his friends he loaded all the treasure onto the *ONI* ship and sailed it back to the city, landing on the very river beach his mother had once found him in.

The people were amazed at **MOMOTAROU**'s courage and skill in defeating their tormentors. "**MOMOTAROU** really is special!" "Yeah, he's the best!" "Definitely the number one around!" Susan and Vernon were there to receive him too. They hugged their boy amidst clapping and laughter. "Just as we thought, you are truly the best boy around!"

**MOMOTAROU** divided up the treasure he'd brought back from the *ONI* island with everyone and he and his family lived happily ever after. That's why you should eat your cereal, just like **MOMOTAROU** - because maybe you'll save the city someday!

Guido Petri / Sid

## Author's Notes

**Fairy tale chosen:** Momotarou, the Peach Boy

**Version/Year/Author/Region:** Okayama version; between 17th and 19th century; Unknown; Japan, Okayama prefecture

**Images from the original:** Boy being born from peach, animal companions, “Oni” devils, swordfighting, wheat dumplings. I tried to keep most of the original images in the story, but still wanted to modernize a lot of it. I scratched the millet dumplings in favor of something more “American”, opting for cupcakes as representatives of our culture. I felt a lot of the mysticism around the peach-birth and the Japanese Oni devils could be kept in order to maintain a distinction from a completely real-seeming story; I still wanted to keep the “fantastic” element in there somehow.

**Foreword for the anthology:** I'd like to think an English professor would introduce this as a modernized version of a classic story that is still true to its roots. I think I made this more accessible and more relatable with my changes to the aforementioned images, and hopefully more entertaining/more fleshed out in my descriptions than the original in Japanese. (Trust me, their descriptions are pretty lame.)

**Critical ideas explored:** Honestly, I don't think I went too much in this direction, but rather I chose to bring something from the past to a more present situation.

**De-/Reconstructions:** Mainly in the form of the imagery, but also in the setting; the original takes place in a village, for instance, and the couple who adopts Momotarou is an older man and woman. The original also has the old man go to the mountain to chop wood and the old woman go to the river to do laundry; I tried keeping a little bit of that but didn't want to fall back into the old “housewife” role (simply because I think that's a little lame). I don't think I did a particularly good job avoiding it; perhaps the initial few paragraphs could be changed so the woman and the man are interchanged. This wouldn't affect the story too much. Other than those deviations, I also provided a bit more emotion and explained the reasoning of the characters more than the original story, hopefully giving some more voice to them.