A whisker away

by; Mari Okada

Miyo Sasaki is an unhappy middle school girl living in the town of Tokoname, Aichi Prefecture who does not get along with her stepmother Kaoru after her mother Miki Sasaki left. Each day at school, she goes out of her way to flirt with her crush, Kento Hinode, in spite of his repeated rejections. One day, Miyo receives a magical Noh mask from mysterious mask seller, which lets her become cat. As “Taro”, she spend time with Hinode at his home, keeps him company while he studies Japanese pottery, and listens to his problems. She longs to confess that the cat that he loves and the girl that he will reject same person, but is afraid that he will reject her and refuse to visit with Taro anymore.

One day, Miyo overhears a pair of boys at school talking trash about Hinode, and loudly intervenes by jumping off the school building to defend hid honor. She hurts herself during the jump, and for the first time, Hinode shows warmth to her as he takes to the nurse and shares his lunch with her. Later that evening, as Taro, Miyo learns that Hinode’s kindness towards her, combined with a need to cheer him up at the loss of his hobby inspires Miyo to confess her love in the form of letter. The next day in class, a boy snatches the note before she can deliver it and reads it louds, embarrassing both Miyo and Hinode. Hinode saves face by publicity telling Miyo that he hates her. Miyo later visits Hinode as Taro and spends the night with him. In the morning, she decides that life with Hinode as a cat is better than life without him as a human, and her human face falls off in the form of porcelain mash. The mask seller appears to claim Miyo’s face and tells her will give it to a cat who wants to become human. Miyo’s friends and family begin searching for her, including Hinode, who confesses to Taro that he doesn’t really hate Miyo. Trapped in her cat body, Miyo begins losing her ability to understand humans and regrets her choice. Kinako, Kaoru’s cat, obtains Miyo’s human face form, but Miyo’s human face from the mask seller and takes over her human life. Miyo implores her to return her face, but Kinako refuses, explaining that she is approaching the end of her natural lifespan but wishes to continue living and bringing happiness to her owner. Miyo follows the mask seller to the secret Island of Cats where she hopes to convince him turn her back into a human. Meanwhile, Kinako comes to understand just how much Miyo’s stepmom loved her cat and has a change of heart. She reveals the secret of mask to Hinode and takes him to the island to save Miyo before her transformation becomes permanent. Kinako gives Hinode a cat mask, which turns him into a half-cat but only the hands. Kinako and Hinode are trapped by the mask seller but are rescued by Miyo and another cat who used to be human. when Kinako is about to give Miyo her face back, the mask seller takes Miyo. While Hinode eventually finds Miyo, the mask seller takes them to the “promise place”. Miyo finally realized her selfish mistake and started to tackle the mask Seller demanding her human face back. The mask seller attempts to finalize Miyo’s and Hinode’s transformation by extracting their lifespan, but is foiled by all of the resentful humans that he had previously turned into cats. As they travel back to the human world, Miyo and Hinode confess their love to each other and Kinako returns Miyo’s face, returning her to normal. The credits show Miyo telling her friend about how Hinode loves her, Hinode telling his mother that he wants to pottery, and Hinode doing Miyo’s signature “Hinode sunrise attack” to her.