

In a Bit of a Slump

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Arale's innocent naiveté collapses at the jeers of several cruel men, throwing the android girl for a sudden, emotional spin. Can the friendship and love of Goku bring her back to herself before she abandons all that she once was? Goku/Arale.

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Legend:

() Denotes thoughts.

[] Denotes sound effects.

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In a world of darkness and light
Both will ignore the victim's plight
Will you answer the light's call?
Who will lift you when you fall?

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In a Bit of a Slump
By Reid M. Haynes

Arale-isms:

N'cha: Shortened form of Konnichiwa. When hollered at full blast, it becomes a Dragon Ball-esque beam attack. (a.k.a: the N'cha Cannon)

Bye-cha: Like "N'cha", only for farewells. Also able to be used as a beam blast.

Hoyo: Expression of confusion, astonishment, and various other emotions. (think: "oro")

Hakase: A nickname for Norimaki Senbei, and a general way of referring to someone with a doctorate degree. Can also mean "professor" or "doc."

Go-kun: My own custom Arale-ism. A cutesy way of referring to Goku, similar to "Goku-kun."

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"Hoyo!" the girl cheered, landing on the grass with a brief skid. "That was cool!" Behind her, the wreckage of a shattered police car smashed on the ground, courtesy of the robotic projectile that had collided with it. But she listened not to their angry cries; she just wanted to have fun. And fun was a place far away from dumb ol' cops who probably ate too many doughnuts, anyway.

Norimaki Arale was running, running, down the rolling fields of Gengoro Island, home of the quaint and strange Penguin Village. The four-foot-tall android was moving as fast as a locomotive, if such a thing is possible for the short figure to do. But it was, for she was tearing up the earth far better than her multi-wheeled counterpart, each foot sending up another wave of dust clouds into the air. It served her well, indeed, for she was already well past the borders of her hometown and was swiftly headed towards new adventures and new excitement.

Behind her, a pair of short squeals cut through the air, two singsong little voices almost as cheery as she was. Arale turned mid-dash and smiled mischievously at her distant pursuers, the two Ga-chans. "Betcha can't catch me!" she taunted her friends, sticking out her tongue and making an absurd sort of face. Then with a laugh, she was off again, leaving them in the dust.

The girl continued her run through the island paradise, palm trees rushing past her like expressway cars. Squinting through her glasses, she looked off to the distance, trying to catch sight of her distant destination. "Oh, there it is!" Arale said suddenly, picking out the mass of short buildings hovering just beyond the horizon. "That's Walrus Village!" She giggled and picked up speed, ready to hurry up the trip as much as possible.

Arale's face was beaming with uncontested joy, like a bespectacled little sunrise. "I've never been over this way before!" she said to herself, looking back and forth over the numerous little houses in the area. She then giggled a bit, gritting her teeth in a broad smile. "Today's gonna be lots of fun!"

And [ZOOM!] she was off towards the distant village, laughing and smiling all the way.

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Unfortunately for Arale, she didn't do all of her research heading into this unknown area. The place she was headed was actually a former Red Ribbon Army base, set up after General Blue's encounter with the Penguin Villagers. Though the army had collapsed some time ago, the soldiers-turned-townspople still carried resentment for the weird people that inhabited the majority of the island. Indeed, one of their favorite things to do was to take a hapless little villager and show them just what an oddball creature they really were.

In short, this was Walrus Village, not Penguin Village. And they didn't take kindly to silly strangers.

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Skidding to a stop amongst the entrance sign, Arale let out the deep breath she had accumulated from her lightning-fast jog. "Woo-hoo!" she cheered, raising her arms above her head in a stretching motion. "I'm here!" Straightening the winged cap on her head, the girl prepared herself for another jaunt into the unknown. Then, with a bounce in her step, she pranced on into the town, ready to have some more fun in this new locale.

Walrus Village was quite a bustling place for the small little hamlet it was. Though the domed Capsule Buildings were small, the people were huge, numerous, and mostly men, stomping around town like knights on a march. Sporting many different types of tattoos, these guys were tough customers, much more accustomed to holding guns than they were baskets of bread. Moreover, they were mean, and had

a penchence for playing jokes on their fellow soldiers...and anyone else they could find.

Arale didn't notice any of this, however, and just continued to leisurely stroll through Walrus Village like she was born there. Moving straight through the crowd, she glanced at everyone and everything, looking for the most interesting person or object: that would be her playmate. She did feel the perturbing stare of several of the villagers, sizing her up like a rack of fresh meat. But the android girl just figured them to be looking for a playmate as well, in which case she was always happy to oblige.

Suddenly, a brief whistling sound called out from beyond a stack of barrels. Arale turned her head, and found a young man beckoning her with a crooking finger, a sly smile on his craggy face. She smiled back, and quickly made her way over to him. Maybe he wanted to play!

"N'cha!" she greeted this new person, raising her hand as a means of greeting.

"Yeah, hi," he said slowly, smiling and quickly looking back to a group of people, probably friends of his.

"Do you wanna play?" Arale continued, looking innocently at whom she hoped was to be her new friend.

The man turned back towards the girl, a somewhat suspicious smile on his face. "You're one of those Penguin Villagers, right?" he asked Arale, leaning closer to her and showing off his golden tooth. When she nodded, his smile picked up several notches. "I have a very cool game that we can play," he said, looking over to his side again.

"Yay!" she cheered, raising her arms up in the air.

She didn't notice the wink he gave his chuckling friends.

Reaching over to his side, the man fiddled with some object beyond sight of the girl-shaped robot. When he was done, he showed it off to Arale, who put her hands to her mouth in astonishment. In his grip was a long, sticklike object, standing about two feet from the curl of his fingers. And at the end of the stick was a flair of glorious energy, sparking like a Z-Fighter's charge-up mode.

"This is a 'Magic Rod'" the golden-toothed man explained, making sure the girl got a good look at this wondrous new toy. "It's a source of great magical power." He motioned over to the open barrel to his left, which shimmered with a strange, black liquid. "When you place the rod in one of these barrels, mystical Mana Faeries spring forth from within. They love to play with people carrying Magic Rods."

"Ooh!" Arale almost swooned at the sheer excitement of it all. "Cooooo!"

"Hurry now," the man said, trying to hold back his giggles as he handed her the object. "Don't let the magic fade away!"

Taking the sparkler from his hands, she eagerly strode over to the open barrel, ready for another exciting game with the faeries. Looking at the mass of oil sitting calmly within, she lowered the firework into the container, the sparks flying perilously close to the muddy black goo. Taking a look at her muddled refection, she smiled eagerly at herself, bearing the fabled Magic Rod like a fairytale magician. Then, she plunged it deep into the oil, completely submerging it within its shadowy depths.

Of course, you can guess what happened next.

"Iyaaa!!!" Arale hollered out, the heat overloaded her pain circuits. **"I'm on fire!"** Mentally running over fire drills she learned in school, she rolled about on the ground, trying desperately to snuff out the flames that clung to her clothes. Finally getting rid of the burning sensation that had overtaken her, she lay in a charred heap on the ground, smoking like a burnt barbecue on the Fourth of July. After waiting a moment, she then lifted herself off the ground, wondering what on earth had happened to cause a reaction like that.

The girl then took a look around at her surroundings, maybe for the first time. All around her, there were people laughing, grabbing their bellies with a dark sort of mirth. The golden-toothed man was currently exchanging high-fives with his buddies, the "other" center of attention in this wild scene. Right now, he didn't seem concerned with magical faeries...at all.

"Good job, Marvin!" a dark-skinned man was saying to the golden-toothed one, clapping his buddy on the back. **"You got that weirdo good!"**

"Personally, I thought it was kinda lame," a short, stout man was saying, clasping his hands behind his back complacently. **"I mean, sticking a sparkler in an old barrel, that's just stupid."**

"Well, stupid is as stupid does," the gold-toothed man commented, putting a finger under his nose to wipe away some snot. **"And nobody's stupider than those Penguin Villagers!"** He let out a loud guffaw at his own joke, putting his hand on his head with his sniggers. And the others, including the stout man, laughed along with him, a group of merciless crows preying upon the naivete of one small hummingbird.

Weirdo, stupid. Arale stood there trying to contemplate all of the disturbing images before her. **Why were they saying such mean things about her, when they were supposed to be playing with her? Why were they laughing when she was hurting? Did they know she was hurting?**

(Maybe...this isn't part of a game.)

That was when she realized the truth. The men weren't laughing with her; they were laughing at her. They didn't want to play at all: no, they were too mean for that. They wanted to...make fun of her.

"You guys..." she said quietly, looking down at the ground with strange sort of grimace on her face. **"You guys aren't very nice."**

"Yeah?" the golden-toothed man, Marvin, responded snidely, still whooping it up with his friends. **"Well we think you're nice! Nice and stupid!"** At the amendment to his statement, the group of former soldiers started laughing even harder, slapping their knees with much gusto. **And Arale just stood there and took it, for once at a loss for all actions.**

No, this wasn't how it was supposed to be! People were supposed to be nice to each other, and enjoy playing games! The girl's eyes were quivering in their sockets, and her little fists were clenching up with frustration. This...wasn't fun anymore.

Before they had the chance to launch into another wave of insults, Arale dashed off to the hills, as far away from these people as she could get. And this time, she didn't bother spreading her arms like an airplane, making noises, or doing anything else that was...weird.

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"Isn't this a nice day, honey?" Midori was saying to her husband, as she served him another lump of mashed potatoes.

"Yes, indeed," the man responded, eagerly snatching a spoonful of the fluffy white substance. "Perfect time for a good meal!"

Suddenly, the familiar sound of pattering feet entered the homestead, causing him to drop the mashed potatoes onto his lap. Senbei turned with a low growl to the front door, which was currently blown off its hinges and lying on the grass outside...again. Into the house dashed his android "daughter," once more paying no need to the trail of destruction that seemed to follow her every step. "Damn it, Arale!" the middle-aged scientist yelled out, shaking his fist angrily. "I told you no running in the house!"

The girl acted as if he hadn't heard him at all, too caught up in herself to notice. With a haste unbecoming even to her, she ran straight past both of them without so much as a "N'cha," making for the hallway where her room was located. Yanking wildly on the doorknob, she swung open the door and darted inside, not even stopping to take off her shoes. And just as suddenly, she slammed the door in the first violent motion the good doctor had seen from his "daughter."

"Huh?" Midori said, looking over to where the girl had just departed. "Was that a tear in her eye?"

Having never installed tear ducts in his greatest creation, Senbei had no answer to this.

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Three Days Later...

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The birds were silent this day, seeing fit only to rest in their nests for a spell. Palm trees rustled slightly in the breeze, but aside from that nothing could be heard in the tropical fields that covered the island. It was truly a lazy afternoon in the normally hectic Penguin Village. Not even the clouds could find the strength to move against the pale backdrop of the sheltered city.

Well, save one cloud, but it wasn't your ordinary nimbus in the slightest. It was a Flying Nimbus.

"Woohoo!" Son Goku cheered out, finishing out the loop of yet another somersault on the fabled magic cloud Kinto'un. Then, he swerved and dodged through the skies, catching downdrafts that carried him faster and faster towards the tropical plains below. A streak of greenish vapor trailed behind the cloud as the boy guided it towards his destination with a bright smile on his face. Soon, that destination was reached and he ended his ride with a back flip onto the grass, leaving his steed to continue off into the distance, towards wherever magic clouds went after work.

Straightening up from the strain of his acrobatics, Goku gave out a large yelp that carried from the fields to the township itself. "Hoo, that felt good!" he cheered, raising his arms in a combination of victory and stretching. Putting his hands behind his head, he walked steadily towards the suburban area of Penguin Village, looking for the person that made him return to this obscure little island. A very special friend that could run like the wind, and crack the earth with a single punch.

After his brief feud with General Blue, Goku found himself developing an affinity for the tiny town and its inhabitants. So he made a promise to himself to visit Penguin Village whenever he needed a break from the training and fighting. Sure, some of the inhabitants were kinda strange, but it was no big deal considering weirdoes like Bulma and the old timer. Hey, this was the only place where he found a girl that really knew how to have fun, and something that neat was worth coming back to.

Goku steadily clomped over to the suburban streets, walking in between the lanes on the dotted line. It was no real big deal here, as the roads were seldom used at this time of day. In fact, there was hardly anybody even out now, not even to do the normal household chores. The boy wasn't spooked very easily, but the whole place was starting to feel like a ghost town, something he wasn't prepared to feel in a place like Penguin Village.

Arriving at the Norimaki residence, Goku's eyes turned toward a small, Astro-Boyish kid sitting on the outside deck, petting a small kitten that was nestled in his lap. The boy's eyes were downcast for the moment, but soon swiveled up behind their specicles to greet the new visitor. "Oh, Mr. Goku!" he said, running over to where the monkey tailed lad was standing. (after putting down the cat, of course)

"There's urgent news afoot!" he finished up, skidding to a stop just two feet shy of other boy.

"Hey, O-Man!" Goku said cheerfully, not fazed by the boy's startling entrance. "What's up?"

"An unfortunate event has just..." Obotchaman then halted his speech, and blinked. "Why, pray tell, did you call me 'O-Man?'" he asked, some slight suspicion evident in his voice.

"Because that 'Oblotchy Man' thing is too hard t' say," Goku said innocently, his tail twitching lightly.

"Yes, well...'Father' was never of the sane sort..." Obotchaman considered with more than a twinge of distaste at the memory of his creator. His eyes wandered over to his legs, finding the kitten he had been petting earlier rubbing against him. "Anyhow, I have distressing news considering a mutual friend of ours," he continued, stooping over to pick up the purring cat.

Goku wasn't the most perceptive person, but even he could catch what the shorter boy was insinuating. "Something wrong with Arale?" he asked, a trace of concern washing over his cherubic features. "We were supposed to go poo pokin' today. Y'know, one of those 'date' things people keep talkin' about."

"Erk...!" Obotchaman shuddered a bit at the mention of the word 'date'. "That's nice," he amended, trying to take the higher road concerning the unspoken rivalry he had with Goku concerning the purple-haired girl. "But I'm afraid that she probably won't be coming out today."

"Huh?" the monkey-tailed boy burbled, cocking his head in a somewhat cute manner.

Obotchaman stopped for a moment to scratch his pet behind the ears, then turned seriously towards the other. "She will not leave the house," he said. "Something happened to her three days ago, and now she just holes up in her room. The Norimakis, the Ga-Chans, and even I have done everything we can think of to get her back playing around the village. But nothing is working!"

"Wow..." Goku gasped, leaning against the wood of the patio and looking towards the ground. "I wonder what happened?"

"I question this strange scenario myself," he agreed, nodding briefly towards the boy. Obotchaman then walked over to the front door of the Norimaki residence, cat still in hand. "Please come inside, Mr. Goku," he directed, standing just to the right of the doorframe. "The family will fill you in on the details."

Goku nodded. "Will do," he said, his voice cheerfully determined. Walking casually past the other boy, he placed his hand on the knob and opened the door, letting the aroma of home cooking. This brightened the boy's spirits considerably. If there was such good food waiting for her, he could cheer Arale up in no time.

"Goku?" The aforementioned boy suddenly jerked around to face Obotchaman once again. "Yeah?" he asked, a bit perplexed to what was coming next.

Obotchaman's head, and the cat's head too, raised up to look at the boy. "Good luck," he finished, a solemn twinkle behind his thick spectacles.

Goku took the warning as he did most things: with confusion. But he nodded his head briefly and strode on into the Norimaki residence, letting the door swing behind him, which Obotchaman conscientiously closed behind the boy, determined to be thoughtful even if others weren't.

Inside the pleasant little home, a warm meal was steaming gently on the kitchen table, soft streamers of smoke visible even in the relatively warm island weather. However, there was a distinct lack of family to ingest the tasty food that had been prepared so diligently. Only a stout man seemed to have enough stomach to sit at the table, and even he wasn't going through the food very well. And yet, the woman doing the cooking continued to cook and cook, as if she couldn't survive without going through at least the motions of caring for her family.

Upon hearing the distinctive sound of kung-fu shoes, the woman turned around to acknowledge the boy, brighten with an almost-smile. "Oh, Goku-kun!" she said cheerily, her voice carrying with it the soul of a mother. "You're here again!"

"Hi, Ms. Senbei..." Goku started saying with a smile, which wavered when he discovered his mistake "I mean...Ms. Midori." He almost wished Bulma was here to slap him at mistaking the young woman for her husband again. Even after all this time, he still got the two mixed up.

Norimaki Midori paid the boy's slip of the tongue no mind, and continued to drudge up some more cheer. "Well, hurry up and sit down for a spell!" she directed kindly, motioning towards one of the empty chairs surrounding the kitchen table. "I know how that little belly of yours loves to be filled!"

The mere thought of gobbling up some (all) of that food was enough to bring a streamer of drool from his lower lip. But this time, he managed to suppress it...for the moment. "I wish I could, but I gotta go talk to Arale right now," he politely declined, subtly slurping up the drool before it hit the floor. "Where is she?"

"Oh?" Suddenly, Midori's expression lost some of that blithe joy, as the tint of concern made itself present in her eyes. "Did Obotchaman tell you the news?" she said perceptively, looking seriously upon the boy like the mother she was.

"Kinda," he told her, staring up at her earnestly. "He didn't say a lot, so I don't really know what's goin' on."

Midori regarded the boy's interest for a second more, then slowly turned back to the boiling pot and picked up the spoon again. "It's been hard here for the last few days," she started, stirring up the frothy mixture in an almost distracted way. "Arale won't talk to anyone, so we really don't know anymore than Obochaman-kun does. Occasionally, I hear noises like a videogame coming from her room, but that's it. I think it's the same game all the time, too."

"Huh," Goku said, not entirely sure how this was going to help.

"I'm really worried," she admitted, turning to the boy and folding her arms in front. "Arale's always been such a happy person, and to see her act like this...well, it's too much for a mother like me to stand!"

"Serves her right," the man at the table growled, jabbing his fork violently into his meal. "No one can run around happy all the time and not get a big backlash afterwards."

"Oh, hush!" Midori snapped, her first harsh tone for the evening. She then leaned forward to whisper into Goku's ear. "Don't pay him any mind," she informed the boy, throwing a glance back at the belligerent man eating silently. "He talks like that, but he's just as concerned about the poor girl as we all are. It's just his way."

Senbei harrumphed stubbornly, obviously hearing his wife conspirator comments. But a small frown was on his face as he continued to pick at his food, not truly interested in any of it.

Midori ignored her husband's defensive attitude, instead putting down the spoon and preparing to pour the stew into a small bowl. "Goku-kun, you know where Arale's room is, right?" she asked, as the hot liquid began to fill. When he nodded, the young woman put down the pot and reached for an object on a shelf. "Take this to her for me, would you please?" she finished, placing it in the boy's grasp. "She'll need this."

Goku gaped at the baby bottle he had received, suddenly remembering the last time he saw Arale drink something. "This again?" he exclaimed, twirling it around in his hands. "What is it?"

"This is Robobitan A, the energy drink Arale must have to keep going," Midori informed the boy, watching him continue to examine the bottle like a baby with a new object to fiddle with. "I think she has some in her room, but the way she's acting, I don't know if she's been drinking it. It won't last her must longer, anyhow."

The monkey boy stared at the Robobitan A one moment more, seeming to come to a realization about the situation. When next he looked up, his face was full of cheer and determination. "Don't worry, I'll give it to her!" he said, clenching the bottle like a sword hilt. "And I'll get her out of her room, too!"

Midori smiled her first real smile of the day. "Arale's always so happy whenever you decide to visit," she said sunnily. "I have every confidence in your abilities. Go get 'em!"

Goku smiled his own broad smile. "Will do!" he said with a nod, raising the bottle up like a trophy. With a rushed start, he took off for Arale's room at the other end of the house. Behind him, he could hear Midori trying to convince her husband that Goku was going to come through for their daughter. The boy was already gone before he could catch how much this meant to Senbei.

Arriving at the hallway where Arale's room was, Goku stopped halfway when he came across some very curious creatures. They were two green, cupid-like creatures with cherub faces accustomed to smiling, though now their mouths bore very unsuitable frowns. The boy looked around him once more, and found that there were small marks alongside the doorframe, indications that they had eater parts of the wall trying to get in. But for whatever reason, they were unable to pierce whatever barrier Arale had set in their path, so they just sat there, looking as despondent as the family downstairs.

"Hey, little bird guys," Goku greeted Ga-chans 1 and 2, kneeling down so he could look them at eye level. "You aren't feeling so hot either, huh?"

The two angels nodded unenthusiastically, looking like they hadn't slept for days. "Peep peep?" the first one spoke up, looking up hopefully at the boy.

Goku strained his ears in order to catch Ga-chan 1's full statement, then smiled with understanding. "Yeah, I'm here to help," he answered them, putting his hands on his hips in what he hoped was an encouraging gesture.

The two cupids looked at each other, as if telepathically communicating between themselves. Then, Ga-chans 1 and 2 started cheering, waving their hands in a ballpark-style cheer. "Peep peep!"

The boy chuckled good-naturedly. "Okay, okay!" he said, rubbing the back of his head in slight embarrassment. Turning away from the amiable angels, Goku proceeded towards the door, and grabbed hold of the knob. "Here I go!" he said outloud, for the benefit of the Ga-chans as well as himself.

Though the door was, of course, locked, Goku found he could bypass the metal hook with a deft turn of the knob. The lock gave way easily enough, and the boy swung open the door. The Ga-chans both shielded their eyes to the sheer amount of unhappiness radiating from the forbidden room. And the boy himself had to take a step back in shock at the shroud that had turned the formerly robust living-quarters into a nightmare zone.

The room was dark, real dark. Even though it was still very much daytime, only a crack or two of light managed to make their way through the billowy curtains and closed blinds. All of the toys and games were giving off evil shadows, a clown doll being the biggest culprit in this house of horrors. It was like some scene in a detective novel, where the heroic young P.I. wanders into the home of the slain to find a paint of blood darkening the puzzle board that the child had once tried to put together.

Goku's mind wasn't quite as sharp as the aforementioned investigator, but he had noticed two things as he proceeded into what might as well been Bizzaro Arale's room. The first thing was a Nintendo machine with its red light turned on, creating one of the few bright spots to the room. Fed into the television was "Bubble Bobble," a game Arale had dragged him through all the way until the end. But this time, the girl obviously hadn't the motivation to go all the way with it, for she had gotten the Bad Ending, the one you get if you don't take the special shortcut.

It was the second thing that truly disturbed Goku, a boy could look death in the eye with only a grimace. Hunched up on the bed was the small figure of a despondent girl, hunched over with the Nintendo controller in her lap. Her hair was mussed up even more than usual, and she looked like she had been wearing the same clothes for days. But most disturbing of all were her eyes; lonely, saddened things that had seen the world for what it was, and came out crying.

Those shadowed eyes slowly turned to face the boy, still clad in their rounded spectacles. Then, her lips turned up in a pale reflection of her usual smile, as a small sparkle glimmered through her tear strained eyes. "Hello."

Goku was taken aback by her uncharacteristic welcome, and nearly took a step back. (No 'N'cha'...) he wondered, putting a hand to his chin in contemplation. (I wonder what's up with her?) "Hey, Arale-chan, let's go outside and play," he tried anyway, giving out his best encouraging grin. "It's a great day!"

"No thank you," Arale responded, shaking her head and turning back towards the television. "No time to play."

"Huh?" he gaped, knowing that didn't sound right coming for her. "But you said earlier that this would be the perfect day to go out!" he persisted, waving his arms as means of exclamation. "Said that we were gonna play 'Giant Monsters' an' everything!"

"Sorry, Go-kun, no play," the girl persisted, lowering her head back down to the sheets. "Playing is bad."

"Playing...is bad?" Goku parroted uncertainly, not knowing where his friend was going with this.

"Playing is bad," she repeated, dropping the controller and letting it hit the ground. Then she grabbed her knees and started rocking back and forth like an easy chair. "Bad, bad playing, playing bad play..."

By now, Goku had had quite enough of this foolishness. Comic antics the boy could handle, but moping depression he couldn't stomach for a second. "Now you cut that out and just tell me what's wrong!" he exclaimed, moving over to Arale and taking her by the shoulder. "Did you find out that professional wrestling wasn't real?"

Rather than responding to his question, the kid simply turned to him with one of his own. "Do you think I'm strange, Go-kun?" she asked him, looking into his eyes in an almost pleading way.

"Huh," Goku was taken off guard by her odd (for her) remark. But, as usual, he could only give an honest response. "Well, you are kinda weird," he told her, trying in his own way to soften the blow.

Apparently it wasn't soft enough, for Arale's posture fell as if bludgeoned with a ten-ton weight. "But hey, that's okay," he amended to his statement, the seriousness of the situation outweighing his own impressive naivete. "I still like you."

"Those people didn't think it was okay," she continued, still not seeming to notice Goku's hand on her shoulder. "They said it was dumb. Said I was dumb. And they didn't like me." She shook her head again. "They didn't like me at all."

The boy knelt down to look the girl in the eyes. "Arale-chan, what are you talking about?" he asked her more seriously, honestly wanting to know what had happened to his playmate. "I don't understand."

Arale looked up to Goku, his face non-assuming and innocent. And for the first time in three days, she felt there was someone she could say anything to.

So she told him everything. About the trip to Walrus Village, the golden-tooth man, and the horrible, horrible laughter. When she was finished up, she was closer to tears than Goku had ever seen her. Yet still she held back from crying, unused to expressing anything but happiness in her rather short life.

"So now, I think I'm just going to be a boring girl," she finished up, looking off into space like a zombie. "Be like Obotchaman-kun, and keep a bunch o' cats." She stared at the open doorway, where the Ga-chans had been hiding behind the door. "Hakas...I mean the doctor would be much happier this way. And no one would laugh again."

Goku frowned disapprovingly at watching his friend act so moody and depressing. How could he get the

old Arale-chan to come back? And then he had an idea: bring out his old, sweet side that had lain in dormant for so long. That famous Son sensitivity that could break through even the toughest of walls and bring back the true person within.

"You're crazy!" he shouted out, suddenly letting go of her shoulder.

"Hoyo?" she asked, startled out of her funk and stepping one step closer to her old self.

"That's right!" Goku said angrily, putting his hands on his hips. "You're gonna turn into a boring girl just because of some meanies? That's what's really dumb!"

"I mean, so what if you're weird?" he continued. "I know lots of people who are weird! Bulma spends all her time playing with her hair and trying to 'look good.' And then there's this Oolong pig person who keeps buyin' swimsuit magazines even though he can't swim. And you remember what I said about the old timer, right?"

"Is he the one that looks like Kami-sama and acts like Hakase?" Arale asked, remembering the old man that the boy had mentioned.

"That's the one!" Goku nodded, a confident smile coming to his lips.

"Old people are funny," she commented with a smile, laughing through her depression. "Kya ha ha...!"

The two chuckled silently, remembering their respective old geezers with a smile.

After they were done, Goku sat down on the bed with the girl. "Arale-chan, ya shouldn't go changin' into an Obochy...Oboti...O-man thing just 'cause of some mean guys," he started, his touching speech tempered somewhat by his inability to get the android boy's name right. "We all like ya just fine! Just ignore those jerkheads and stay 'way from 'em. They're the real weirdos!"

The sermon of young Son Goku touched Arale all the way to the core of her mechanical heart, causing her to turn her head to look at the boy. He was smiling benevolently, confident of his advice in all ways. Slipping an arm around her shoulders, he gave her a one-armed hug. This gave the girl the conviction to bring back a little of her old cheer, glancing at her friend with a renewed spark in her eye.

"Maybe t'morrow, I'll do that," she said, putting her own arm around him.

"Yeah," Goku agreed, sobering up somewhat from his impassioned speech.

Arale grinned up at him, a smile that was much more characteristic of the girl that preferred to play in the fields rather than worry about anything serious. They remained together like this for a while, enjoying the comfort of each other's presence. It took Goku all of twenty seconds to realize that the girl was still staring at him, making all sorts of pseudo-romantic faces at him. His arm was still around her, and they had not separated since the boy had brought her close for the embrace.

(Oh yeah,) Goku supposed, blinking a bit. (I'm supposed t' kiss her now.)

Arale confirmed his suspicions with a request of her own "Kissy kiss," she cooed, making a heavily-exaggerated smacking motion with her lips.

Goku looked almost intimidated by this very forward request, leaning his head away from her beckoning facial features. "Um, okay," he responded, nervously rubbing the back of his head. Arale nodded eagerly to this, scooting up a little closer to the boy. The two stared at each other a little longer, then started to move in closer.

Arale quickly landed her lips on his before he even knew it, nearly sucking off his face in the process. Soon though, she settled down and began to go more slowly with the monkey boy. Goku kissed his myopic jinzouningen back, running his hand through her messy purple hair and knocking the winged cap off her head. And the girl slowly started to stroke the cheek of her protector and savior, a surprising amount of care in her normally hyperactive hand.

All too soon, Goku and Arale separated, their lips disengaging with a resounding pop. A blush was growing on Goku's face in spite of himself, and he giggled slightly from their brief intimate encounter. Arale was smiling unabashed, though the hand on the back of her head indicated she was embarrassed as well. "Kissy kiss is fun," she commented enthusiastically, though her voice was still a few decibels under her normal speaking tone.

Goku just stared at his friend (girlfriend?), not quite knowing what to say to this. Eventually, he settled on a confused sort of smile, nodding his head in hesitant agreement. Kissy kiss was kinda fun, after all.

Then, Arale quickly moved away from the boy, crawling over the bed and moving to the pillows. "Gonna go t' bed now," she said, grasping one of the pillows and fluffing it repeatedly. "Night, night, Go-kun."

"Are you sure?" Goku asked her, even as she pulled open the comforter and started to snuggle under the sheets. "It's only 5:00, ya know."

"No, no, gotta go to bed," she repeated mechanically, grabbing a stuffed duck from the pile beside her. "Gotta go to bed." Cuddling close to the duck, Arale yawned into the empty air, lying still for just a moment. Then, she quickly fell into slumber land, snoring loudly with open-mouthed gapes.

Goku stared in astonishment at the girl, who looked as if she could've been sleeping for hours. Could she really have fallen asleep that quickly? Then, the boy suddenly remembered the "Robobitan A" bottle that he still held in his grip, even now. (Did she turn off without this stuff?) he wondered, staring at the bottle with curiosity.

Carefully, Goku rose up from Arale's bed and walked over to her side, propping the android girl's head up in his hand. He checked the energy pulse at the nape of her neck, and was surprised to find the feedback loop was still running. "Guess she still must have power, then," he determined, putting his hand to his chin. "I'll just leave this 'Robob' junk right here."

Placing the "Robobitan A" on the desk next to the bed, Goku next walked to the door, rubbing a hand lazily over his hair. "Better get some sleep, myself," he said to himself as he pushed open the door, slightly ajar from when he had first crept in. Immediately thereafter, the two Ga-chans flew in from the hallway, peep-peeping their way to the girl's bedside. They hovered over her for a moment before

settling down by the bed, nesting amid a tumble of pillows, sheets, and Arale-chan.

Goku stood motionless at the doorway, contemplating the sweet scene before him. Then, his mouth upturned into a short smile. "Good night, Arale-chan," he said sincerely, closing the door as softly he could behind him. And behind him, the purple-haired girl smiled, safe in the house of her closest family and friends.

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"It's evening in Penguin Village!" Mr. Pig's enthusiastic call sounded out from his treetop position, alerting the village-folk of the current time. Indeed, it was a fine dusk in the island paradise, nearing the conditions for a sweet, tropical sunset. The trees sparkled with the red-orange light, becoming like fiery sentinels standing guard over the grass and flowers. And the Norimaki house stood shining among all of this, a citadel of silent beauty in this strange land of robots, monsters, and such.

"Aww!" Goku cried out, rubbing the back of his head with a grimace. "I have bed hair!" It was true; the boy's hedgehog locks had been flattened by his brief rest, looking more like the palms that covered the island area. He tried stubbornly to get his hair to stand up in his correct position: one lock standing up, and another bending. However, he finally gave up the ghost when he saw it wasn't going to stand up without a can of hairspray, and that was Bulma's thing.

The boy had slept on a futon in Senbei's room, wanting to get a little rest after his pep talk with Arale. As evening came, Senbei had gently coaxed Goku out of the room with the soothing cry of "get your monkey-tailed @\$ out of my bed." It was just as well, anyway, for he was about to get up on his own. It was training time, after all, and he couldn't let his brief holiday make him soft for the next tournament.

Goku slowly headed down the stairs that lead to the front door and his things. The Nyoibo and Dragon-Ball radar, his most important possessions, were resting right in the corner of the foyer, having been abandoned for his brief rest. He grabbed the pole, slung it on his back, and reaching over next to pocket the radar.

...suddenly, his danger sense fired off like a klaxon in his mind, making his hair stand on end. Goku's eyes hardened in a heartbeat, and he quickly curled into battle-position, one hand resting on his Nyoibo. Had the Red Ribbon Army returned, or was it Pifal again? He heard a sound from behind, and turned...

"N'CHAAA!!!" And Goku was suddenly barraged by 98 pounds of little girl robot, knocking him from his feet and sending him barreling into the wall. The boy looked up from his staggered position to find Arale smiling down at him, kneeling down on his chest as if he was a foot mat. No sign of her previous struggle showed on her face, and her eyes shone with innocence and naivete once again. It was Arale as she should be: 100% energy, 100% optimism.

"Gee, Go-kun, you're kinda slow," she said with a smile, her face not two inches from the boy's own. "Betcha I can beat you in a race!"

Goku paid no attention to the light jibe. "So you're feelin' better about yesterday?" he asked, smiling back at her sunshine face.

Arale put a hand to her chin, as if deep in thought. "Well, I got ta' thinkin' about what'cha said about the bad people," she said, her gaze going off into the distance. "And then I thought about what the bad people said, and how mean they were." She then turned back towards Goku, her smile renewed with considerable interest. "But I wanna run and play and poke interesting things! I'm just gonna stay who I am: Norimaki Arale!"

"So let's go have fun!" she cried out, raising her fist as if in a war cry. "And then have more fun!"

Goku smiled his best grin, happy for the girl, yet disappointed that he had to let her down. "That's great, Arale-chan," he said, chuckling a bit. "But I was gonna train now."

"But this game's an easy one," she insisted, finally crawling off of Goku and moving around him. "It's called 'Pin the Tail on the Monkey.'" Pushing the boy from the wall, she moved over to his behind. "Y'see, you start by grabbing the monkey's tail." She grabbed said tail in one hand, opening the front door with the other.

"And then you run!" Arale then dashed straight out the door, dragging Goku with her. The boy's head hit each step with a clunk, and skidded along the concrete, sending a streak of dirt and debris behind him. The girl paid the boy's plight no mind, and continued straight down the driveway off into the street, moving over the crosswalk. Soon, she was making off for the fields, ready for some more poo-poking fun, and perhaps some Giant Monsters.

"Ow, ow, ow!" Goku complained, his head just starting to hit the really big rocks in the area. "Slow down!"

"Kya ha hah!" Arale laughed off his concern, moving no slower than before. "It's good training!"

Goku was about to comment to this, but instead smiled lightly, even as his noggin continued to scorch the earth with its notorious hardness. Arale was happy again, and that's all that mattered to him. Maybe some people would object, maybe some people would laugh, but now she would always find a way to be herself and be happy. It was that boundless confidence that he loved most of all about his friend, something he was sure to emulate in himself.

A smokescreen of dust and dirt followed the duo as they headed towards new journeys and adventures. Even though the boy seemed unwilling, he was just as excited as she was. Traveling with a beloved friend, ready for anything...

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Moral of the Story: Be yourself, even if you're a crazy, purple-haired android.

HAPPY END

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Note about - The Kami-sama Arale is referring to is different from the green-skinned Namek we know. In the Dr. Slump manga, God is actually an old man that looks identical to Kame-Sen'nin, save the lack of

sunglasses. It is from his heavenly home that the Ga-chans originated from, the angels that they are.

Oh yeah, and Senbei is a perv, just like the Turtle Master. Msut be a Toriyama thing to have someone like him in the works.

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Until next fanfic, bye-cha! -(^)_(^)-