



Akito and the Art of Grown-Up Glue

By Preeti Bajpayee



The boxes were stacked, the silence was vast. This was it: the start of a life built to last. Akito stood tall in his small, empty room, ready to step out of the comforting gloom.



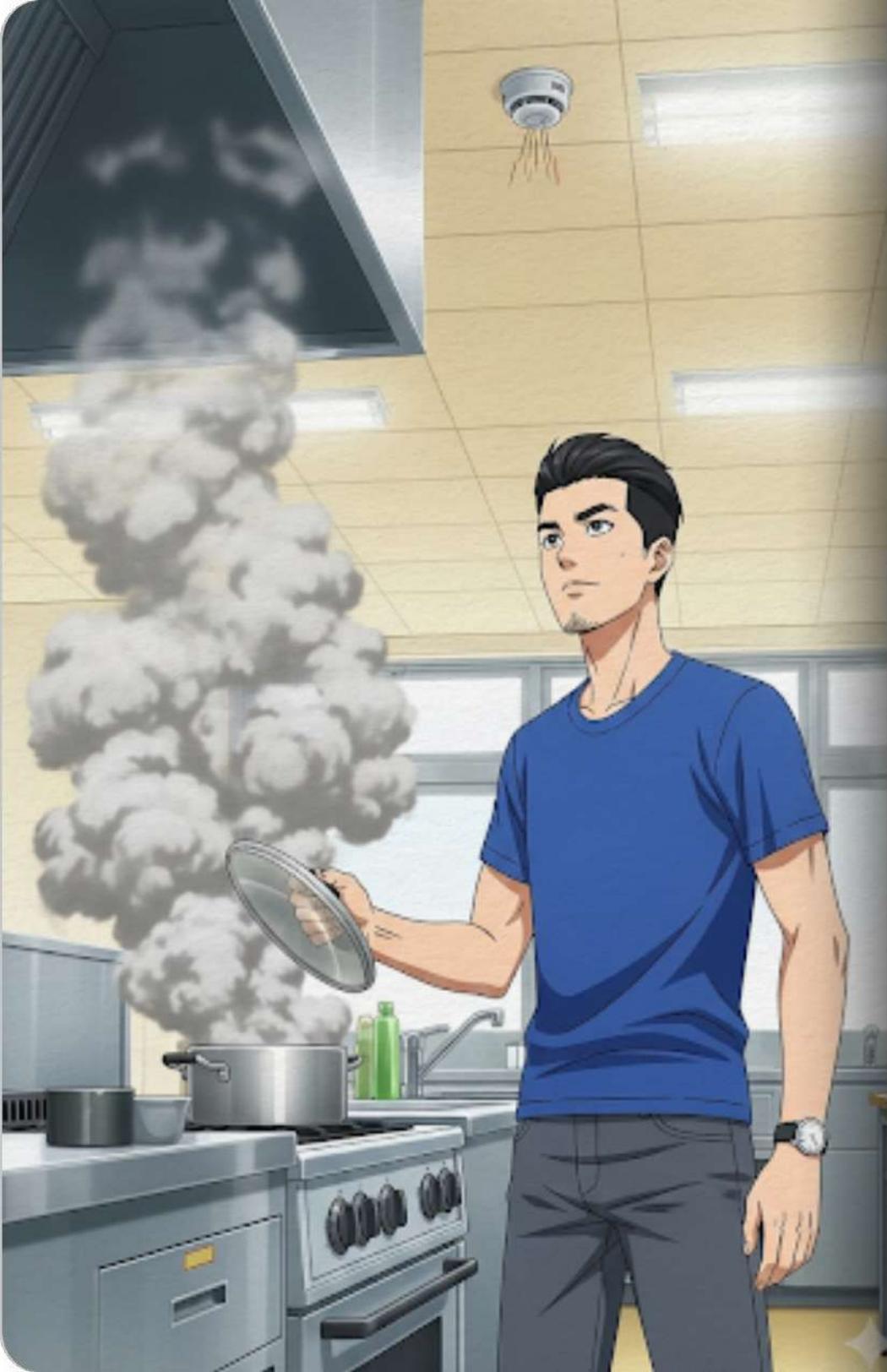
But becoming an adult, he soon learned, wasn't about big leaps, but bridges unburned. It started with clothes, piles smelly and deep, that needed a wash while he tried hard to sleep.



He twisted the knobs, guessing 'Fast' meant 'Good,' and tossed in the pile, as any beginner would. The cycle finished with a triumphant ding, but his favorite sweater was now just a small, fuzzy thing.

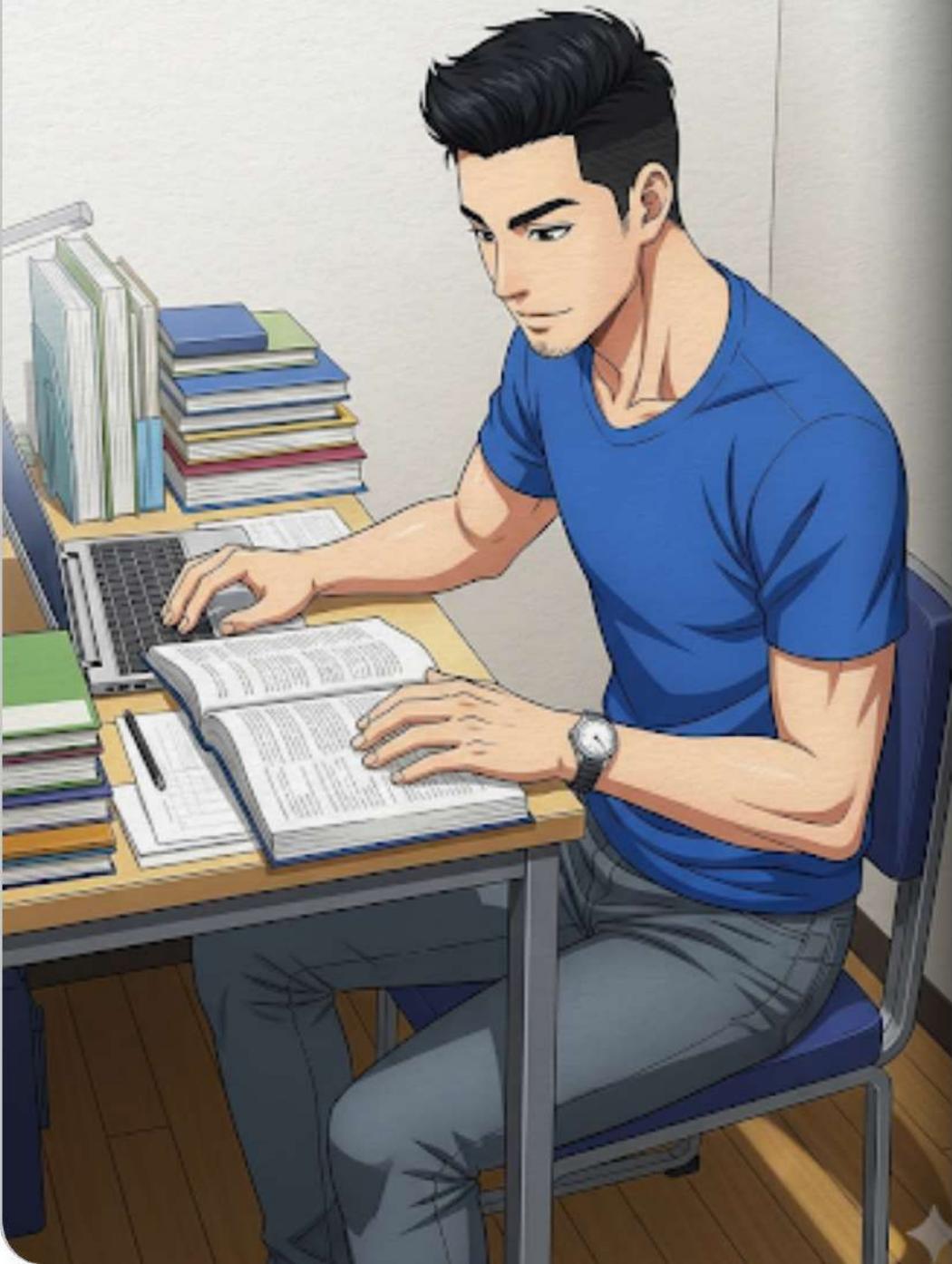


Defeated, he sighed, his chin on his knees, until a voice asked, "You need a small breeze?" Kiko smiled gently, "It's okay to not know, the whole point of college is learning to grow."



Laundry was hard, but dinner was worse. His mother's instructions felt like ancient verse. He stirred a big pot, trying to make pasta, but the smoke detector began singing faster and faster!

Kiko rushed in, fanning the air with a towel, and laughed as Akito let out a small growl. "Pasta's tricky," she said, "for your very first try. Ramen and eggs are the key to survive!"



The next day he studied, and then washed the floor, and folded the clothes he had salvaged, and more. The schedule was tight, the classes were tough, but he found he had time, just enough.



He remembered the sweater, the smoke and the mess, realizing his struggles were actually progress. Each mistake was a lesson, each stumble a guide, showing the strength he had always held inside.



The city lights glowed from the window's dark pane. Akito was a man, again and again. Not all the answers were known, or were clear, but the adult he would be was already here.