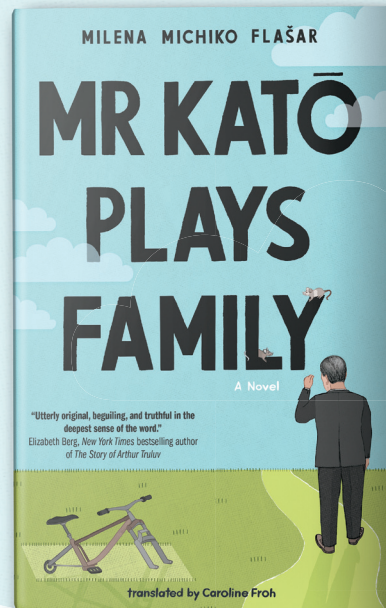


MR KATŌ PLAYS FAMILY

A Novel by **MILENA MICHIKO FLAŠAR**
translated by **Caroline Froh**



1. If you hired Happy Family, what role would you want the stand-in to play? What scenario would you request?
2. When Mr Katō receives his name from Mie (page 75), we're reminded that every aspect of his new job is a performance. Yet we're also reminded that Mr Katō's "real life" is mostly a performance too. What prevents him from giving voice to his true self? Were you surprised to learn about Mie's real life, including her mayonnaise obsession?
3. In the first assignment, as Mayor Katō Ryusuke visits Jordan and Rumi, what varying definitions of good parenting and good grandparenting came to mind for you? As Mr Katō wistfully thinks of his own son, who sat on the couch eating chips and reading a book instead of going outdoors to play catch (page 95), he blames his wife for raising a disappointing son. What do these scenes demonstrate about the effect of multiple generations, and conflicting expectations, on shaping who we become?
4. As the eloquent boss at the wedding of Sakura and Hiroshi, Mr Katō witnesses a bittersweet image of love and mortality. How do his career and marriage compare to theirs?
5. When Mr Katō silently absorbs Chieko's thoughts on marriage and Retired Husband Syndrome, what does he come to understand about his circumstances? How is he affected by his former co-worker, Itō, who appeared to be living the ultimate retirement dream? What does the novel reveal about the impact of workplace culture on identity?
6. Throughout the novel, do gender roles affect the characters' power and their sense of responsibility? Are the expectations for husbands and wives the same?
7. Mr Katō longs for a dog, specifically a Pomeranian named Shiro, while his wife immerses herself in dance lessons. What emptiness is reflected in these yearnings? What is the source of that emptiness, and is it ultimately filled?
8. Watching Mr Katō's daughter interact with her parents, what did you observe about their perceptions of each other? How will the new grandson's childhood be different from his mother's?
9. When Mr Katō's son admits he's on the verge of financial collapse, Mr Katō pats him on the shoulder, something he has wanted to do for a very long time (page 195). What transformations occur in this scene? How does Mr Katō's relationship with his son contrast with his feelings toward his daughter?
10. In the closing chapters, two highly romantic elements—a bouquet of roses and a trip Paris—take center stage. How do those vignettes lead to new understandings about true love? What strengths and vulnerabilities are woven into Mr Katō's marriage?
11. Why does theatrical performance, including streaming shows, often make us feel better? Are stand-ins an equally healthy way to cope?
12. What do you predict for the next chapter of Mr Katō's family?