I had been thinking of upgrading some of our kitchen appliances to make life a bit easier for the two of us—an elderly couple; but for some reason or other I had delayed doing so.

It was in early October and an unusually cold day; but on returning home I found it was unexpectedly warm inside.

‘It is very cold this evening. I’ve got the kettle on,’ said my husband, who did not usually do any housework.

When I opened the door to the kitchen, however, I found it was surprisingly warm. I saw a red, round thing floating in the darkness. ‘What is that? Is that a human soul I have often heard about? Quite unbelievable.’

After a moment I realized it was the kettle we use every day. I switched on the light. Sure enough I found the stainless-steel kettle was red-hot, as if it was going to melt, still on the burning gas hob. The water was gone. I was relieved to find it in time. If I had returned home any later, what would have happened? The mere thought made me shiver.

My husband said, nonchalantly: ‘I forgot about it.’

I felt all the more surprised because he seemed indifferent.

Then and there I decided to buy a new type of gas hob with a safety cut-out device which would automatically switch off after the selected time had elapsed.

I collected catalogues and started looking round show-rooms.

I learned that most of the safety devices were programmed to cut out after two hours, but a period of two hours was too long. The kettle would become red-hot well before two hours had elapsed.
wanted a type with a device which would cut out in a much shorter time. Finally, I found the type of burner I was looking for. It was one integrated into a system-kitchen. The timer could be set at ten-minute intervals between thirty minutes and 120 minutes.

I decided to buy a system kitchen. It cost about 1,200,000 yen. I decided to remodel the kitchen, which would include an underfloor heating system. I arranged with the gas company to remodel the whole kitchen, as I learned that it would do the remodelling as part of the package. As a result I had to take out all the household goods from the kitchen.

‘This is a nuisance, as you know,’ I said.

‘Every one says so. If you like, I will help you.’

The staff member in charge made the offer, but I thought I as a housewife I was the only person who could decide what to keep and what to throw away. Being a housewife for the past fifty years, I was responsible for taking care of the household goods, so naturally I would not leave the selection to others.

I insisted on dealing with it myself, but I was at a loss. There were too many things to make decisions about: the flood of gifts and other things coming from seven cupboards on the walls.

‘You can throw them all away. Almost everything is unnecessary. Don’t be nostalgic, Mum.’

My daughter, who was living next door, said to me coolly, and made no offer of help.

Once the remodelling started, everything went smoothly according to schedule. The old sink was carried away and the tiles on the walls were removed quickly, but it took a week for the floor to be replaced and to have the electrical points in place ready for use.

First of all, I set the timer. I set it at thirty minutes, instead of 120 minutes, which was its default setting. This was the very function I aimed at when I decided to buy a new system kitchen. Within thirty minutes the kettle would not get red-hot, even if we forgot to turn off the gas. We could cook meals within this period.

However, there was one unexpected drawback. The function did not work properly for a metal fibre mat, which I often used to cook stews. I could save gas energy by using it. When I cooked black