

The Light of a Firefly

Minakami, Japan. June 1, 1945.

Kiko's bag was small but there wasn't much to put in it. Meanwhile her mom was stuffing as many mementos into the miniature suitcase as possible.

"Save space, we need to bring food," begged Kiko's father, watching his wife pack frantically. The scratchy radio reported: "The airstrikes continue to push Tokyo citizens into small towns. Minakami is overwhelmed with this flood of people as their own citizens have begun to flee."

After her mother pulled the busting zipper shut on the suitcase, she smoothed Kiko's hair.

"It will be all right. You are our hope, Kiko." Kiko tried to smile for her worried parents but she herself had little hope.

That evening as the sun began to set, the three stepped out of their empty house for the last time.

Numata, Japan. June 15, 1945.

It had only been two weeks since Kiko left home, but it felt like ages. The family walked from city to city, but no one believed a family who couldn't pay for bus tickets would be able to pay rent. Her parents slept outside an old shop, and Kiko gazed at the dark sky. What hope did they have? No money, little food, just their feet to keep walking. As she searched for the missing hope in the dimly lit stars, Kiko was stunned by a little yellow light. It flew around and landed on her nose, her big eyes focusing on it. In Minakami there were lots of fireflies; she knew this one was called a genji-botaru, meaning biggest and brightest. The little firefly took Kiko back home. She envisioned herself on her front porch while her mom cooked a big meal, and she counted fireflies as their lights shone. The girl touched the firefly on her nose, catching it midair. Peeping into her hands she watched the yellow light bead on and off. She swiftly transferred the bug into an empty food jar and poked holes in the lid with her pen.

“I’ll name you Hikari, for light and hope. You will help us along our journey.” Kiko told Hikari about her hometown, and how he would have loved the firefly festival. Eventually, her eyelids fluttered shut as she hugged the jar close to her stomach.

As the family walked from landlord to landlord, Kiko reminded them that they should occupy a family of four, because Hikari had joined. Every night she talked to Hikari, and he listened. Whenever she remembered home, his light shined brighter, and when she cried, his light dimmed in sympathy.

“Mom, Dad, Hikari is our hope to share. He will bring us a comfortable home,” she would say as he glowed. The family chose to believe in any hope that they could hang on to.

“Hikari, I miss home. I miss the comfort of my small house, the Sundays where all the women make a big feast and we fill our bellies with meat, my friends, the firefly parade. But that home is in the past. I have no home now. I’m left to circle this world until there is nothing left for me.” The firefly who usually dimmed his light when Kiko was sad, shone his light brighter than ever. He zoomed around the jar, telling Kiko to not lose hope. As long as he was there, she had a home. That night, Hikari shone his light tirelessly until the girl's eyes closed.

The next morning, rain pelted the family as they woke up and collected their things, running for cover. As Kiko wrung the water from her bag she realized something was missing. “Mom! I left Hikari. I have to go get him,” Kiko frantically exclaimed.

“Not now, you're already wet enough,” her mother responded. Kiko shifted in her shoes nervously and decided to go.

“Kiko! What did I just tell you?!”

Kiko collected the jar and as she looked inside the glass, her face drained of color. The girl stood, incapable of moving a muscle while the rain hammered against her.

“Kiko, get back here!”

Kiko didn't hear. Everything in the world had stopped.

"KIKO!" The world returned to her and she carried back a jar full of water. Her parents tried to comfort her, but the tears flooded out.

"Kiko, you know that fireflies only live a few weeks. This would have happened soon anyway." She threw the glass to the ground letting the water pour out. Picking up her friend on her finger she imagined his yellow light beaming.

"Goodbye Kiko. Keep the hope that is with you," she almost heard him say.

"Goodbye Hikari," she whispered back as the final tear rippled down her cheek.

For the rest of Kiko's journey, her friend's yellow light gleamed inside of her, and she carried his hope to a new home.