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First Story Submission

My Mother's Pots

I woke up like any other morning, my older brother and sister on top of me. We all shared a bedroom while our parents used the only other bedroom in the house. It was cramped but I sometimes liked waking up like this, all of us together in a bundle of arms and legs. I did shove my brothers leg off me though, waking him in the process.

Then I started to hear the morning tunes of my mothers breakfast making. You always knew when she would start making us breakfast because she would always clink and bang the pots so loudly you could hear it anywhere in the house. I’m surprised the neighbors never complained. I knew that she probably liked to make as much noise as possible so that it would wake us up, but I also knew that she just liked to hear the sounds. Father had just bought her a new set of pots and pans so she seemed to be trying to break them in. I turned and threw my pillow over my head, trying to escape the sound. I heard my brother next to me get up and stretch, ready to start his day. Then he kicked me.

I let out a sound akin to a groan or a whimper.

“Come on Aiko get up,” he said. Then he kicked our younger sister. She let out a similar sound as I did.

“You too Fiuko, we’re gonna be late,” he said. We wouldn’t be late. I knew we still had plenty of time before the sun rose and we had to start to trek to school. This was just our brothers way of pretending to be in charge.

I got up wordlessly and slipped both my arms under the still half asleep Fiuko and lifted her up. She was either too tired to resist or just didn’t care. We both stood there rubbing our eyes awake and then I took her hand and pulled her behind me to the kitchen.

The first thing you always notice when my mother is cooking is the smell. Having moved here from Japan with father years ago she still tries to keep our food traditional, the way her parents made it, but that isn’t always possible. She does her best with the spices that she is able to find in the small selection of Japanese stores and the result is such rich smells from a range of different dishes.

I led Fiuko to her spot at the table and then took my place and sat down. We both wished our mother good morning as she placed a bowl of rice in front of both of us, I watched the steam rise from the small wooden bowl and waited. My brother Tak was always the first to rise but the last to the table, and my mother always made us wait for him.

“Where’s father?” I asked. Usually he would be up and about as well by now.

“He stayed at the shop all night, he’s had a lot of work to do,” my mother said as she stirred something in her new pot. The smell of miso soup wafted out. I gagged, I hated miso. She poured the contents of the pot into another set of wooden bowls and placed them on the table. I was right, miso.

“Tak breakfast is ready get over here,” my mother called in japanese. She always spoke to Tak and my father in japanese, never to me and Fiuko. I’ve asked her why and she said we should focus on our english since we both went to an english school. Tak didn’t want to change to an english school. It upset my mother that Tak wouldn’t change from the japanese school but after too many arguments over it she gave up trying to convince him. So now we have to wake up early so Tak can walk us to our school and then he walks alone to our old one. I only spent one year at the japanese school and I didn’t really like it. The english one is much nicer, Fiuko and I are the only Japanese though.

Tak finally came into the kitchen and sat down, but not before wishing good morning to our mother. We all had just started to eat when I heard someone walking up the front steps. I listened and then knew it was father. He always steps lightly so sometimes I don’t even hear him, but when I do I know it’s him.

“I’m home,” he called out as he came through the front door.

“Welcome home,” my mother called back.

“How was work?” she asked. My father was a carpenter. He had been working long hours to finish something for someone he called a “client”. He said this person was important and it would mean good business if he did a good job. Not many people hired Japanese carpenters he had said. My father came into the kitchen and sat down at the table with the rest of us.

“It was good, Mr. Nelson is going to be very happy with what we’ve done,” my father told her.

“I’m glad, you’ve worked too hard for him not to be,” my mother replied.

“At this rate he might get us to do the rest of his house, and he’s already put in a good word with some of his friends that needed some work done. If all goes well we might even be able to move to a bigger house,” my father said excitedly.

“A new house?” Fiuko asked.

“Yup,” my father told her. “With an actual yard and maybe even a room for Tak to have so only you and Aiko would only need to share.

“I would get my own room?” Tak perked up to this new heard knowledge.

“Maybe, depends if the rest of our work goes. Well… and other things,” my father looked up to mother. The look he had was odd, I didn’t understand it. My mother asked him something is japanese. I didn’t catch what it was but I could tell it was a question. My father responded, again in japanese so I didn’t understand much, but I could tell they were talking about the war. Tak was quiet and his face was like stone. I think my mother noticed me listening because she told me and Fiuko to get our stuff ready for school. I got up and Fiuko followed me to our room to get ready. Tak stayed in the kitchen with our parents and I could hear them speaking in hushed tones.

I knew Tak didn’t like walking us all the way to our school every morning, but I think if he knew it was the last time he would walk us I think he would have been a bit nicer. I knew whatever they were talking about at the kitchen table was on his mind and it was better not to ask, Fuiko on the other hand was too young to understand such things. After she got bored of skipping down the dirt road she called out to Tak who ahead of us.

“What were you talking about before we left?”

Tak didn’t respond. Just kept his back to us and walked on. Fuiko ran up to him.

“Come onnnn,” she prodded. “You never tell me anything.”

“It’s none of your business, and if you cared you would bother learn our language,” Tak spouted.

“Don’t get mad at her,” I exclaimed. “It’s not our fault mother never taught us.”

Tak didn’t respond at first. Just kept walking. Then he stopped so suddenly dust flew up from the road.

“Yeah, she would love for you to forget everything about who we are. She wishes you would be just as pale faced as everyone else at that school of yours,” he spat.

“Don’t say mean things about mom,” Fiuko let out.

“I haven’t even gotten started,” Tak told her. “I’ll tell you what father said this morning. He thinks that we’re all going to get locked up. All of us, because we’re Japanese.”

“What are you talking about?” I asked. Tak looked at me and laughed.

“Are you that stupid?” he responded. “Obviously since Japan is at war with the rest of the world they are going to lock us up. Cause they’re scared of us, scared that we’re soldiers for the mainland.”

“We’re not from the mainland, we’re not Japanese. We’re Canadian,” I yelled at him. All of a sudden I was shouting. I don’t know why but I was shouting at him.

“You aren’t Canadian either, at least not to them. But you are right about one thing. You aren’t Japanese either, if you were you wouldn’t be going to that school.”

I tried to think of something to say back, to tell him that the school wasn’t that bad. But before I could say anything he had already started off. I stood there with Fuiko fuming over our stupid brother.

*Add school scene here, adds relationship with non-japanese friends and foreshadows events more*

It was just after lunch when my mother came to the school. We had just started learning about the colonization of somewhere when I saw her walking up the path to the school. I knew it was her, her flowered dress caught my eye instantly. She didn’t walk like my mother does thought, usually she is slower and takes her time. She says she likes to “feel” everything around her while she walks. The woman that I saw heading towards my school was moving fast and frantically. Almost running. Soon there was a knock on the classroom door and the principle entered. When he looked at me I knew the woman I saw was my mother, and that something was wrong.

Mother hurried us home without a word. Everything felt so fast and the neighborhood was in an uproar. It was usually very quiet where we lived, even when someone was throwing a party, but it was loud today. You could hear furious packing and shouting and even some crying through the whole block. Once we got home our father told us to pack. He told us some sweet lie about getting a new job deeper into the country, I don’t understand how he expected us to believe him with everything going on. He sent us to pack while he went to borrow a truck Mr. Okazaki, a family friend. It was then that I first wondered where Tak was.

Fuiko and I had just finished packing when my father returned with Mr. Okazaki’s truck. It wasn’t too difficult to decide what to bring since most of our stuff could fit into a single suitcase. My father hurriedly took our bags from us and threw them into the pack. He then started to load up everything else that he could from inside the house. Fuiko and I helped him with the smaller items, but we couldn’t do much more than that. Once the truck was packed full my father ordered us to get in, we were all supposed to get on a train that would take us to our new home. I never thought to look back at our small house as our father drove us away, I never considered it would be the last I saw of it. Even later after the war I never wanted to return. I couldn’t stop thinking about where Tak was. Father never packed any of his things so how would he meet us at the train. I asked father where Tak was and if he was going to meet us there. Father told me Tak wasn’t coming. Father didn’t say anything when I asked why.

We arrived at the train depot and were greeted by Mr. Okazaki. He was apparently helping a bunch of families transport their personal items to the train that would take everyone away. Father thanked him profusely as Mr. Okazaki helped us unload.

Once we started to unload the car I noticed my mother took all of her pots. I would later learn that each family was only allowed so much space and weight on the train that would take us to our new “home” and my mother had taken all of her pots. It seemed so silly at the time. It had just set in what was happening to us and the memory of my mother taking all of her oriental pots my father had gifted her still makes me giggle. Maybe it was the everything that was happening that made it so funny to me. We were losing almost everything that we had, but not the pots.

We left most of our things to be packed into the storage train.

*Add Closing scene here*