

## Princess Lily

Objects with like charges will repulse each other. Objects with opposite charges attract each other. That's what Miss Powers said. She was the Physics teacher at Kubasaki High. I was afraid to ask the question that kept rolling around in my head: What happens when a charged object meets a neutral one? Like when Justin cornered me outside of the gym. Like the surprise of his tongue down my throat, choking me with his musky smell in the humid Okinawan spring. Like when I was both repulsed and attracted, a neutral object caught in his electric charge.

Mr. Drake taught geometry. He loved his angles and proofs. By the end of class, his glasses were always dusted with chalk. According to Mr. Drake, two parallel lines can never meet. Never, ever.

But that isn't true. What could be more parallel than the lives of my dad, Col. Nathan Scott, and Mr. Sugimoto, the wiry, ageless man who pedaled his black bicycle on base every Wednesday to give me piano lessons? Their lives intersected when my dad sat Mr. Sugimoto in the living room and explained to him my "condition." They struggled to communicate because Mr. Sugimoto only knew English words like "middle C" and "again." But when my father said, "*ninshin*," Mr. Sugimoto began to understand. Mommy cried while I stared down at my lap.

Did you know that a doorsill is not safest place to be when the earth moves? That's what we learned during our emergency drills at Kubasaki High. During an earthquake, you should get far away from everything that makes you feel safe. Your shelves of Nancy Drews, your framed posters of ballet dancers, your daisy mirror—they all become projectiles that could hurt you. When that tiny life quaked inside me, the panic shook our whole house, and I was dropped off at the only place that was safe, far away from all that I loved. Mr. Sugimoto's family let me sleep

on a tatami mat in a room of oiled paper walls. There I stayed for months, away from flying debris.

I'll tell you a secret. Although I'm fourteen, I still play with dolls. My favorite festival on the island is Hinamatsuri because it's Girls Day and everybody shows off their doll collection. Daddy had bought me all the dolls for a proper display: the Emperor and Empress, court ladies, musicians and even servants. But I wasn't allowed to take them with me when they packed me up to live with the Sugimotos. "We'll ship them to the States with us," Daddy promised. "You'll have them when you put all this behind you."

They let me hold her for a few minutes on the morning she was born. With her round head and skinny body, she looked like a *kokeshi* doll. She probably knew I would be leaving her behind, so the little thing refused to open her eyes. The Sugimotos didn't complain when I wouldn't stop crying. They fed me sweet bean paste rice cakes and tea.

During World War II, the sweetest, smartest little Okinawan girls were chosen to be candy-strippers on the battlefield. They worked in the airless caves that served as hospitals, picking maggots from the soldiers' festering wounds with chopsticks. Some of them got to take the soldiers' severed, gangrenous limbs and throw them out of the mouth of the caves and into the sea. They were called Princess Lily Girls. They had entered the war the most sheltered and refined girls on the island. But when it was over, those who survived were soiled with knowledge and horror.

Most of the Princess Lily Girls never made it home.