

Warm Haunted

Kira looked at the clock, then her まま, then at her grandparent's uncomfortably quiet house. It was a weird, creepy quiet, because it shouldn't be. Most of the time the house was full of people talking, the TV playing, someone coming in drop off mail, or sharing food, or asking for a favor, or sharing gossip or, or something, anything!

Even if it was just her and her mom, the house would never be this quiet. She would usually ask her mom questions about the town, or her mom would watch *NHK Music Station*, or they'd play a game, or watch a movie, or do something fun. But her まま was still sleeping.

She tapped her fingers against the coffee table and hummed to the tune of the ちびまるこちゃん opening song.

One, two, threee. One, two, threee. Do, do, deee. Do, do, deee.

The house sounded more, right. Not so cold.

Ah! But her mom said to wake her up in "twenty minutes or something". She checked the clock again and smiled. Now she could ask her mom all of her questions!

Kira poked her mom's sleeping face. "まま, how long did you live here?"

Her mom groaned and rolled over to face her. "Huh? What, Kira-ちゃん. I told you to wake me up in twenty minutes."

"It's been twenty minutes," Kira said excitedly. "So, まま, how long did you live here? Did おばあちゃん and おじいちゃん make the house? Did someone else own it before them? How old is it?"

“Ah, まって。” Her mom blinked and sat up from the couch. “Ah, no. My parents didn’t make this house. They bought it from someone else, I don’t remember who, but it’s pretty old. It’s from the early 40’s I think.”

“When was that?”

“About 80 years ago. But my parents, your おばあちゃん and おじいちゃん, fixed it.”

“Didn’t they say they were going to fix up the old, umm, building? The big one that’s rusting. Me and まりん kick her soccer ball against it.”

“Huh? Oh yeah. They’re looking to see if the old theater could be used for the おまつり in a week.” Then her mom perked up and smiled. “Do you want to go and help おばあちゃん and おじいちゃん? I’m sure they’d love to have you around.”

Kira brightened. “Okay! I’ll go help. Bye, bye まま。”

“Bye, bye. I’m going to finish my nap.”

Kira paused for a second. She could have sworn her まま said that she was only going to take a twenty-minute nap, twenty minutes ago, but shrugged it off.

She got to the front slide-y door, kicked on her new shoes from her auntie, and walked out. She skipped down the street and smiled as she got to the theater.

Back at home, it would take ten minutes in a car to get to the nearest theater, and that was a movie theater. The bad one with barely any movies and sticky floors.

She walked into the old theater and felt a shiver down her spine.

It was massive and super, super old!

The ceiling was so tall, maybe a hundred feet or something, but none of the lights were on. The windows were all open, making the dust in the air look like glitter. It was one big room

and it had a dozen tables and chairs scattered around it. At the end of it was a little raised platform for the theater. Old curtains were drooping on either side that looked like they used to be red purple, like the sour part of a plum, but were now dusty and moth eaten, like the color of the super sweet part of a plum.

A few people were walking around, holding clipboards, and talking to each other. She recognized a few of them from the neighborhood, then saw her grandparents.

“おばあちゃん, おじいちゃん!” Kira waved and walked to them.

Both of them turned the windows and smiled as they saw Kira. Her grandma hugged her. “Kira, どうしてここにきたの?” she asked and looked behind her for Kira’s mama.

“Oh, umm. ままわたすけりにいって, てゆってた,” Kira stuttered out. She hoped she said that right.

“Ha! ままわねてた?” her grandpa asked with a laugh.

Kira nodded. “ままねてた.” And mimed her mom asleep on the couch, snoring. Her grandpa laughed again and patted her on the back.

“いまたすけくれる?” Kira asked, going on her tippy toes, trying to act like she was bigger and could help more than she could.

Her grandparents looked at each other and shook their heads. “Ah, ごめん, いまわだいじおふ.” They both gave her an apologetic frown and patted her head. Then turned to go back to their conversation.

Oh, they didn’t need her help. That was . . . that was okay, she’d find something else to do! Kira walked around the theater.

She blew the dust off of the tables and ran her fingers against the edges of the chairs to make little balls of dust, then rubbed them off. She walked from one end of the room to the other, going toe to heel, toe to heel, and counting how many steps it took, then forgetting how many steps it took. She even climbed on top of the little raised theater platform area and looked around. It was just kind of boring.

“Kira! いま、おくのへやにいく,” Her grandmother said and pointed to a side door that probably went to whatever was behind the theater.

“はい!” Kira said and waved bye.

Then, she was alone, and it was quiet again. But this time it wasn't the same quiet of her grandparents' house, it was a weirder, creepy quiet of an old theater.

Kira sat down and drew in the dust with her finger. She drew a stick figure with long hair and a bow, like her. Then drew her standing on a stage, with some music notes around her.

When was the last time someone stood on this stage? When was the last time someone danced on this stage? Was this a theater where people would dance, or one where people would sing, or where they'd do plays?

If they did plays, was it the old かぶき plays? Or if they played music, then did they have a big たいこ that'd bounce the sound around and be way cooler than the drums in America? Or maybe the long wooden string instrument, she couldn't remember the name of it, but it had a pick, like a guitar pick but in the shape of a flower petal.

Was it made in the “40's” like her grandparent's house? Or was it older? Was it hundreds of years old? Were there ghosts? Is that why it's closed?

Why is it empty?

“Why are you empty?” she asked. “Oh wait, you probably don’t know English. Umm, どうしてだれもえないの?”

But the theater didn’t do anything, didn’t say anything.

Maybe it didn’t like being so empty and quiet? Kira didn’t. Everything felt weird and lonely and hollow. She felt sorry for the theater.

“ごめんね,” she said, her voice ringing throughout the building. It bounced around the theater and hit the tables in the very back. All of the tables and chairs were pointing to the stage.

She should put on a show. Make the place feel less lonely.

Kira stood and clapped her hands. Ooone, two-three-four, one-two. Ooone twoooo threee foouur fiii-iiive. Ooone, two-three-four, one-two. Ooone twoooo threee foouur fiii-iiive.

“どんと, どんとどんとなみぬりこおえてえー。いちよにちょさんちょはちょそでとばあそー!”

It was an old song about, well, something. Probably fishing. Most old Japanese songs were about fishing. But she sang it anyway. And when she couldn’t remember the words she just sang the melody.

She danced a little one two step she learned from tap class and kept singing.

“Na, nana, nanana, na, tata, nananana, どんとどん, どんと。どんとすうけなあーあーあー!”

“Huh, Kira?”

She stopping singing and dancing when saw her mama walking into the theater. “まま!”

She climbed down and rushed her mama, giving her a big hug. “Are you done with your nap? How old is this building? What kind of shows did people do here? Did they do plays? Or was it a music kinda theater? How long has it been lonely?”

Her mom gave her a hug and patted her head. “That’s a lot of questions. Ah, I don’t know how old it is, but it’s been abandoned for a long time. I think it’s because people think it’s haunted, but I’m not sure.”

Kira nodded. “Ooh, okay. I feel bad for the building.”

Her mom smiled and gave her a kiss on the forehead. “That’s nice of you. Do you know where your おじいちゃん and おばあちゃん are? They’re trying to fix up the building, so maybe you can sing and dance in here more.”

“Oh yeah! They’re in the back. Come on!” she grabbed her まま’s hand and lead her to the back where everyone else was.

But now, the theater didn’t feel so empty. Maybe a little haunted, but not in a bad way, in a warm way.