

## Captured Dreams

An ordinary day, an ordinary girl. Little does she know that this day will be written in history under ‘tragic’, changing many courses in life and nature, damaging many people, along with their homes and loved ones.

Her mother held her small hand tightly as they walked along the streets of the city of Tokyo. Crowds of people walked by, chatting among each other and workers exhausted from a long days’ worth of work. All around, spring was coming alive. The grass was growing greener, and flowers started to blossom. The little girl skipped cheerfully alongside her mother. She followed her mother, shop to shop, and watched as she focused and purchased a basket of fruit, choosing only the brightest and tasteful of the fruits.

Everything appeared normal, a daily routine of life... until it happened.

At first, it was a slight quivering that most people didn’t even notice. A few seconds later, it grew to something horrendous. Screams of terror mixed with surprise filled the atmosphere, as everybody looked around them with wide startled eyes.

“Earthquake! Earthquake!” The people frantically shouted.

Tall buildings in the distance swayed, some even erupted and exploded, sending big clouds of dust and fire in the air. Cracks began appearing in the middle of the road and cars screeched and collided into each other. The ground turned uneven and it no longer remained steady.

Looking at everything in wonder, the little girl was surprised when the ground split near her, causing new screams. Caught by the surprise, the girl’s hand slipped away from her mother’s. She cried out in alarm as they got separated, and was left scared in the middle of the chaos.

Panicking, she desperately looked around for her mother. The rumbling and shaking grew viciously. All around her, people shoved against each other in different directions, wanting to escape but not knowing where to go. The little girl barely got noticed in the frenzy, and soon, she was pushed around by the crowd so much that she ended up falling on the ground. She limped away to a less-crowded spot. With wide eyes, she searched for her mother, but instead witnessed tragic scenes all around her. Desperate people running all around, getting injured in the process. In the distance, tall buildings collapsing in rubble, falling on cars and instantly crushing them, trapping people under, and causing fogs of dirt to emerge in the air.

Confused, and left alone, the little girl sat by, not knowing where to go or what to do. Tears piled in her eyes as she quickly lost hope of ever finding her mother.

The chaos was still going on and the rumbling and shaking stopped her heart cold, as she thought, *is this the end? Will I go to heaven now...? Will I ever see mama and papa and all my toys again?* She whimpered softly, her young voice lost in the crowd, and looked around her once more. Oblivious to their surroundings, the terrified people tried to escape the earthquake and the pain it brings with it, injuring an elderly man in the process. His wooden cane fell, dropping to the ground, as he stumbled and crashed on the floor. The young girl cautiously crawled over to him, in a way determined to help the elderly man. Her mother had always taught her to be there for others, and would often say, *“Always help those in need of help, my child, for someday, the favour will be returned when you are in need of it.”*

Reaching the man, she realized with surprise that he was injured more than she thought. His right leg was twisted at an odd angle, and a dark trail of red liquid made its way from his mouth down to his chin, which she soon realized with disgust, was blood. His eyes were shut tightly, looking

as if he was experiencing the worst pain imaginable, and his mouth slightly parted.

Hesitantly, she reached for him, not knowing what exactly to do. Putting her small hand on his bigger wrinkled hands, she gave him a slight shake, hoping he was alright. A few moments passed with no reaction from the elderly man. Slowly, his grayed eyelashes, caked with mud and dirt, began to flutter and his arm twitched the slightest under her soft touch. The little girl waited patiently until his eyes fully opened, and then they focused solely on her. The man opened his mouth to speak and winced slightly in the process, pain filling his wrinkled face.

“Who... who are you?” he managed to ask.

“I’m Hana Miyamoto.” She simply replied in a young voice. “Please, let me help you. You are very injured and your wounds need to be treated in any way possible.”

The elderly man eyed her warily, “You are just a little girl. Why would you intend on helping me?” He then looked down at his injured body and winced upon seeing his twisted leg.

Hana just shook her head slowly, “Sir, if I was in your unfortunate place, I would want somebody to do the very same.”

The elderly man watched her as she took out a wad of tissues from her pocket, and then helped him sit him up. Tenderly, she began wiping off some of the blood off of his chin, wincing slightly in disgust, but then the elderly man screamed and groaned in agony.

“No... No point,” he whispered weakly, “I think my end is very near, child...”

Hana's shoulders slumped, and the elderly man watched in disbelief as tears gathered in her innocent eyes. He was surprised that the child would cry for him, even though she didn't know him. She is such a young child with a very kind heart, he thought.

"Dear child, why do you cry?"

Sadness filled the little girl's young face, "I'm... sorry. I'm sorry that I couldn't help you. I'm so sorry..." She sobbed, putting her hands on her face.

Wincing in pain, he took a deep breath and said, "You have taken a risk and tried to help me. Child, for that I am extremely grateful. Do not be sorry..." Straining against the pain, he slowly lifted his weak hands to wipe her tears away.

Hana sat by the elderly man, as seconds turn to minutes and chaos continued on all around them. She watched with growing sadness as his breaths turned slower. He opened his eyes and gave her hand a small squeeze.

Speaking in a very soft tone he told her, "Life is hard, but, child you must learn to accept that. You have to work *very* hard to achieve what you want and what you believe in. Sometimes, it may seem impossible to reach something, but you must learn to *never* give up. Giv- Giving up doesn't help you achieve anything." He starts coughing violently before continuing, "It can weaken you. You must set yourself on a goal and learn to reach it. And... and along that journey, you will make many mistakes. Although you may think making mistakes makes you a weak person, it doesn't. It only makes you weak if you do not learn from your mistakes." His breathes got slower, and his voice quieter as he strained to speak his last words. "Child, face life with courage, and determination... always. Never give up. Chase your dreams wherever they may stray..."

The elderly man looked into Hana's wide young eyes, "Please child, remember and never forget those words. They will... h-help you in life." With a sad smile he asked, "Promise me, Hana?"

Hana nodded her head viciously, her tears dripping from her eyes and falling onto her clothes. "I won't ever forget them. I promise," she said, choking on her words.

The elderly man shut his eyes briefly, but then, in those last moments before his death, he whispered two words to Hana Miyamoto.

"Thank you..."

He then closed his eyes for the last time and slipped away from this world.

Hana Miyamoto gave him one final smile that was filled with sadness and tears.

"Thank *you*," she murmured.

She then gathered her courage, stood up, and began searching for her mother in the crowd, never giving up.