

Firefly Squids

by Lisa Lim

Namerikawa, Japan. It sounded like America. How different could it be?

Area: 54.61 square kilometers

Population: 34, 289

Local fish: firefly squid

Local flower: chrysanthemum

Local tree: pine

Oh, I said.

From my window seat on the putter plane, I saw patterns of rice paddies. Square mirrors of rice paddy water reflecting the sun and green. Lots of flooded green.

Where is the downtown, I asked.

They all laughed. My new teacher friends in Namerikawa, home to rice paddies, chrysanthemum, and firefly squid that always shone bright in the black Japan sea.

When firefly squids are thrown in the air, they light up from fright. To watch this awesome light show, one must sail at 2am and watch fishermen bait tiny squids into nets they must fill and toss into air. It looks a sky lit with fireworks. Hanabi, they call it. Imagine if everyone of us lit up every time we were frightened. We would look like a milky way twinkling with fear. Fear is only pretty in this way.

One firefly squid began to cry. She was told in private by her teacher friend that she ate too much garlic. And it was an odor offending an entire teacher's room full of fifty teachers and two vice principals who were too afraid to say something. She was asked to *maybe*

change her food regimen. *Perhaps* drink milk to neutralize the garlic. She was told *please* don't wear perfume because the teachers will think things. Like you are a whore. That's what happened to a sweet sensei named Noriko. She was transferred in less than two weeks. *Maybe* you could also try to wear nylon stockings and skirts that mop the floors and not too much make up instead of your plunging necklines and electric blue tops and golden hoops and that scintillating gloss that makes you look like you just smeared pork belly on lips. Also, earrings *may* send the wrong message. Students were smacked swiftly on the head if an earring hole was discovered. There were graphic posters increasing student awareness about the frightful outcome of a pierced ear gone bad. It was disgusting - this anti-earring propaganda. Thank goodness, her students were wily enough to cover ears with long black hair. Teachers had to set an example, her teacher "friend" concluded.

The crying girl suddenly felt somewhat satisfied inside. Let them squirm like frightened squids in passive aggression wishing for clothespins tightly pinching nostrils. Maybe they will turn blue from not breathing one day. She will eat more garlic tomorrow.

She was tired of this rural land filled with crows and whistling wind as her only company and teachers who told her not to eat garlic. She was beginning to see ghosts amongst the telephone wires the black crows tightroped waiting for the day's garbage. These apparitions sometimes walked through her echoing these same judgments.

On the fisherman boat, we were told to place the helpless squids in our mouths. I watched cheeks light up like light bulbs and I wondered how barbarism could be so beautiful. Perhaps this is why it rains so much in Namerikawa because there is so much fire from all the fright and crying.

