

LISTENING TO FIREFLIES

By Jessica Bolluyt

FADE IN:

INT. HOTARU'S HOUSE - DAY

We watch HOTARU run out the front door of the house to a mailbox at the sidewalk. He opens the mailbox, pulls out a handful of letters, and closes it again. He runs back into the house and down the hall to the kitchen.

In the kitchen Hotaru flips through the mail and finds three letters addressed in the same handwriting. One is addressed to him.

He does not open it but runs up the stairs to his bedroom. He passes his MOTHER, who is carrying a basket full of laundry, and his little sister EMIKO, who is playing with a doll on the floor. Hotaru runs into his room and leaves the door open.

He sits at his desk and studies the front of the envelope for a moment before he turns it over and opens it. Hotaru pulls from the envelope a neatly folded piece of paper with many photographs inside it. He takes the stack of photographs out and reads the letter.

We see open journals scattered around the room; each page holds a photograph with writing underneath it.

Hotaru puts the letter down and picks up the stack of photographs. He looks through them, thoughtfully, then takes down a journal and a bottle of rubber cement and begins pasting the photographs into the journal.

Emiko comes down the hall and stands in the doorway of Hotaru's room. She watches him silently, holding her own opened letter. After a few moments she leaves.

Hotaru does not notice Emiko but continues his work.

INT. HOTARU'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mother and Emiko are sitting at the kitchen table with their letters open on the table.

Hotaru walks into the room, carrying the journal that holds the photographs from his letter. Mother and Emiko look up at him.

MOTHER

I knew you'd brought the mail in. Did he send you any new ones?

Hotaru nods and carefully opens the journal. He offers it to his mother.

Mother begins to look through the pages holding the latest photographs.

Each now has writing underneath it. Emiko looks curiously over Mother's shoulder.

MOTHER

You've already written poems for them, Hotaru?

Emiko eyes Hotaru.

MOTHER

Emiko, look at Daddy's picture of the seagulls.
And Hotaru's poem, too.

Emiko looks down at the journal again. Hotaru watches both Mother and Emiko for a moment.

Mother and Emiko turn to the last page. On it is a photograph of a field of hovering fireflies. They notice that it does not have a poem written underneath it.

EMIKO

How come there isn't a poem for this one?

Hotaru walks around to stand behind Mother's chair and look at the photograph. He looks at it for a moment and shrugs his shoulders.

MOTHER

I think that sometimes one of the pictures can
be a little harder to understand.

Emiko looks up at Hotaru again. She seems a little puzzled. She walks around to the other side of the table, where she sits down and toys with her doll.

Mother looks a moment longer at the photograph. Then she closes the journal and hands it back to Hotaru. She motions for him to sit down at the table, which he does.

MOTHER

Well, Daddy sent me a letter, too.

She pauses momentarily.

MOTHER

He's finally coming home!

Both Hotaru and Emiko immediately jump up.

EMIKO

When? When's he coming?

Mother smiles at them.

MOTHER

Tomorrow night.

Hotaru fingers his journal excitedly, holding it close to his body as Emiko jumps up and down.

MOTHER

He says that he can't wait to see you!

Hotaru is smiling. He looks down at his journal.

EMIKO

Yay! Daddy's coming home!

Emiko gallops around the kitchen.

Mother laughs.

MOTHER

Why don't you guys go outside while I fix dinner? Okay?

Emiko bounds out the door. Hotaru follows after her. Just before he goes through the door, he looks back at Mother and smiles. He closes the door.

EXT. BACKYARD OF HOUSE - NIGHT

Hotaru and Emiko are sitting in the grass in the backyard. Fireflies flicker across the lawn. Hotaru is holding the journal and looking at the page with the photograph of the fireflies. Emiko is sitting impatiently next to him, watching him.

Hotaru gets up and goes inside. Emiko stays on the grass, looking after him. In a moment Hotaru returns, holding a glass jar in one hand and its metal lid in the other.

EMIKO

What are you doing, Hotaru?

Hotaru kneels down and picks up the journal from the grass. He shows her the picture of the fireflies and motions as if he is catching something in his hand.

EMIKO

Oh, lemme help you!

Hotaru puts the journal down again. As he straightens, Emiko bounces up.

Hotaru walks across the lawn through the cloud of fireflies, simply looking around for a moment. Then he tries to catch one of the many fireflies between the jar and the lid.

Emiko jumps for it and trips him. Hotaru remains focused.

Two children about Hotaru's age walk by on the sidewalk along the yard.

CHILD 1

Look at Hotaru!

Hotaru glances over at them but obviously decides to ignore them.

CHILD 2

What's he doing?

The two children stop to watch for a moment.

CHILD 1

I dunno; I think he's trying to catch fireflies.

CHILD 2

Weird.

They both laugh and continue walking.

Hotaru stops what he is doing. Emiko continues bouncing around the lawn. Hotaru looks after the two children and then almost continues to try to catch a firefly. Thinking better of it, he leaves Emiko and sits down in the grass nearer the house again.

Hotaru lies down on his back in the grass and looks up at the fireflies and the sky. He picks up the journal and holds it above him, looking at the photograph.

Emiko bounds over and sits down next to him.

EMIKO

Why'd you stop, Hotaru?

Hotaru puts the journal down and closes it. He sits up, and as he picks up the jar to put the lid on it, he and Emiko see that there is a firefly that has flown inside it.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Time for dinner!

Hotaru twists the lid onto the jar. He stands up and picks up the journal and the jar. They walk together into the house.

Emiko walks in through the door. Hotaru pauses on the porch, looking at the jar and the firefly inside of it. Gently he tips the jar, and the firefly zigzags out of it. Hotaru watches it for a moment, then goes inside and closes the door.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Mother and Emiko are outside in the backyard the following night. (They are all wearing different clothes from the night before)

. Mother is holding her letter, watching Emiko chase the fireflies that dot the yard.

Hotaru comes out of the house, holding the journal from the night before.

MOTHER

Hey. He should be home any time now.

Hotaru nods. He sits down next to Mother and leans his head against her shoulder. She looks down and gently takes the journal from him.

MOTHER

Hotaru, Daddy will be so proud of you for these.

She looks through the pages for a moment.

MOTHER

Do you even remember the last time you saw him? Before he had to leave, he wondered what you'd be like when he came back.

Emiko continues to run around the lawn.

MOTHER

You know, neither of us could have asked for anything more.

Hotaru looks up at her, thinking about what she has just said.

A car pulls up by the house. A man, Hotaru and Emiko's FATHER, gets out of the passenger seat and takes a suitcase out of the trunk. He nods and smiles to a man in the driver's seat, who then drives away.

Mother, Hotaru, and Emiko hurry to meet him. Hotaru is still holding his journal.

Father stands for a moment in the street, looking up at the house and his family. He has a camera around his neck.

Hotaru is the first one to reach Father. Father puts his suitcase down in the street and kneels down, eye to eye with Hotaru. Hotaru drops his journal.

Hotaru looks long and earnestly into Father's face. After a few moments, Hotaru shakes slightly. He strokes Father's shoulder and, blinking, speaks haltingly.

HOTARU

I love you.

Mother breathes sharply. (O.S.)

Father smiles.

FATHER

I love you, too, Hotaru.

Father speaks in distorted language.

Hotaru looks confused by his father's speech. Gently he touches his father's lips.

Father smiles and touches his own ears.

FATHER

I cannot hear, Hotaru.

His hands sign as he speaks. His eyes are soft.

Hotaru looks up earnestly at his father. He reaches up to give Father a long hug. After a moment he pulls away. He takes a pen out of his pocket and picks up his journal from the ground.

Father stands up and hugs Emiko and Mother. Hotaru leans against Father and begins to write in his journal.

Emiko jumps up into Father's arms. He settles her on his hip.

After a moment, Hotaru hands the journal to Mother, who reads:

MOTHER

"Fireflies/ Don't speak/ With words./ They/
Were given/ Another way to speak:/ They speak
to the night/ With the whisper of wings/ And
the Morse Code/ Of flickering light:/ A silent
dialect/ They are teaching us/ To hear."

Emiko looks at Hotaru. Mother hands the journal to Father, who holds it in one hand, reading silently.

Emiko looks around at the fireflies hovering around them. Then she looks at Hotaru again. She smiles, and Hotaru smiles back.

Emiko hugs Father. Hotaru picks up Father's suitcase. Mother places her hand on Father's shoulder. Together they walk up onto the lawn, Father carrying Emiko.

Afer a moment, Emiko tugs at the shoulder of Father's shirt.

EMIKO

Mommy, listen to the fireflies.

Hotaru signs something to Father. They all stop. Emiko pauses for a moment.

EMIKO

I think I can hear them talking.

Hotaru smiles up at Emiko. They walk up the lawn and into the house, leaving behind them the expanse of flickering fireflies.

FADE OUT

THE END