

KEEP YOUR SONGS IN YOUR HEART

Book Excerpt:

Chapter One: Aiming for the Stars Seattle, December 6, 1941

It was the Saturday before the Sunday that changed everything, but my best friend Emiko Fujiwara and I didn't know it yet.

"Shine little glow-worm, glimmer, glimmer,
Shine little glow-worm, glimmer glimmer!"

We were walking along our block on First Avenue North in Seattle, heading for the movie theater, inhaling the clear December air, tinged with the scent of pine trees. We were also rehearsing the songs we would perform later that month at the Sixth Grade Talent Show - at the top of our lungs. The show was set to happen right before Christmas vacation.

"Lead us lest too far we wander," Emi, as everyone called her, sang her solo part as we walked in step with one another.

"Love's sweet voice is calling yonder!" I belted mine, not realizing that this particular bright Saturday was one I would always remember, later, as the last day of normalcy. That afternoon we had no idea what was coming, and neither did President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, not to mention the United States Army and Navy. It wasn't love's sweet voice.

The date was December 6, 1941.

Within twenty-four hours there would be trouble. Lots of it. We continued on together:

“Shine little glow-worm, glimmer, glimmer,
Shine little glow-worm, glimmer, glimmer,
Light the path below, above,
And lead us on to love!”

Love was actually the last thing that was on the way. We passed by a house where a man busy working on his car in the driveway, a spanking new Pontiac, growled, “Pipe down, you two, will ya? I can’t hear myself think to fix this radiator with you girls making such a racket. You’re disturbing the peace!”

“Hooray!” Emi replied merrily.

“The peace has been officially disturbed!” I declared. “By us!”

Laughing, we moved along and went right on singing as loud as we could. That man didn’t realize it, but piping down was not in either one of our natures. My father always said that Emi and I were born boisterous. He was right, though it was Emi who was the real expert at it. She didn’t go down steps one at a time if it was faster to jump the last three.

She sometimes cartwheeled across the lawn from her house to mine instead of just walking. I even remembered how, when we were about four, she wouldn’t get into her father’s car through the door if he left it parked with the window open. She’d let out a war whoop worthy of Tarzan, approach the car at a run, take a jump, and then dash in through the window.

After she did that a few times and wound up needing stitches for cutting her head somehow, her father had to make sure he always shut the car window, and it wasn't because of the Seattle tendency for rain. It was to keep Emi from breaking her neck.

That song was the first of two we were singing in the talent show so we continued on, swinging into the other, even louder:

"Be my little baby bumble bee
buzz around, buzz around, keep a-buzzin' 'round
We'll be just as happy as can be
You and me, you and me, you and me..."

Then we got to the best part, the big finish:

"Honey, keep a-buzzin' please
I've got a dozen cousin bees
But I want you to be
My baby bumble bee!"

Mrs. Manning around the corner was out in her front yard, as usual, raking the leaves dropped by her maple tree. She cheered us on, "You sound great, girls!" The day was cold, and damp in the piercing way late autumn days in the Pacific Northwest could be, where a chill seemed to enter straight into your bones, stay there, and not get back out again. We were wearing woolen skirts with matching cardigan sweaters, mine red, Emi's royal blue, over heavy blouses under winter coats, but still, it was raw and damp. We skipped down the street. It helped keep us a wee bit warmer.

But even if the weather had been a lot more pleasant, Emi and I probably would have been scampering along at a fast

pace anyway. We liked a lot of activity, and so much the better if we could sing at the same time as we ran.

Those two songs, "Glow Worm" and "Be My Little Baby Bumble Bee," were not our first choice to perform in the talent show. They were very old songs, not the new ones showcased every week on the radio program Emi and I and just about everyone else we knew loved to listen to, *Your Hit Parade*. Emi and I both thought these two numbers were rather babyish for sixth graders like us, but our fabulous teacher, Mrs. Rivington, had asked us to sing them because they were two of her favorites. We liked her too much to say no.

The one we had really wanted to sing was suggested by another teacher, Miss Bryce, who lived on our street, a few houses away from us, which she seemed to think gave her the right to regularly butt into our conversations and business. Miss Bryce looked and talked a bit like Popeye the Sailor Man from the cartoons and had taught us in the fifth grade. She overheard Emi and me wondering in the schoolyard what to sing in the show, so she made her way over to us and said, "May I suggest my all-time favorite? It's called 'A Good Man Is Hard to Find!'" She cackled like a pirate at that and strode away in her long forest green skirt and square black ugly lace-up shoes, never expecting we'd find sheet music for the song at the music store and would actually want to sing it.

We did find it. We loved it! It sounded sophisticated, like something our favorite movie stars, Carole Lombard and Marlene Dietrich, might sing in a movie. The song went:

"A good man is hard to find,
You always get the other kind

Just when you think that he's your pal,
You look for him and find
Him fooling `round some other gal..."

Mrs. Rivington clutched her double strand of pearls, the way she did when something worried her, when Emi and I sang it for her. She said if she were to let us perform such a number it might get the parents in an uproar, and she didn't want a riot on her hands in the school auditorium. That's when she suggested "Glow Worm" and "Bumble Bee," telling us she and her own best friend used to love to sing them when they were young, which must have been at least thirty long years ago, maybe even forty. "My best friend and I weren't very good singers, I'm afraid," Mrs. Rivington said with a twinkle in her pretty green eyes when she suggested Emi and I sing the two "bug" songs in the class show. "I think you two, who are so much better at carrying a tune, could sing them with a lot more style and pizzazz."