

Waiting Room

Category: Across Borders and Cultures
written by Ruth Harimoto | March 7, 2017

In front of me, on one of the narrow, plastic, brown hospital waiting-room benches facing the payments counter, sat a mother with a young girl. Next to them sat a very old woman. I guessed the young girl to be about three years old, out of diapers but not yet into kindergarten. The old woman was somewhere between seventy-five and one hundred.

The old woman was called to pay her bill, and upon returning to gather her possessions, she paused to say good-bye to the girl. I surmised that they had held some sort of conversation while waiting.

When the old woman stood up to leave, the little girl stood up also, and walked a few steps with her. The old woman paused, turned to face the small girl, and bent down even lower than her normally bent frame to give a gentle farewell.

Sayonara. Iiko de ite ne. Okasan no iu koto o chanto kiite ne. Goodbye. Be a good girl. Listen to your mother's words.

Turning to leave, the old woman noticed the tiny girl silently holding out the little finger of one hand. *Nani? Yakusoku suru no? Hai. Wakkata. Jya.*

What? You will promise me? OK then.

Yubi kiri genman, uso suitara hari senbon noomasu! Solemnly the very old woman and the very small girl hooked little fingers and chanted the promise together.

Then, finally, the woman left, leaving behind her a child who knew that if she did not fulfill her promise to be a good girl and listen to her mother's words, she would have to swallow a thousand needles.

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