kira-kira (kee'ra kee'ma): glittering; shining

Glittering. That's how Katie Takeshima's big sister Lynn, makes everything seem. The sky is kira-kira because its colour is deep but see-through at the same time. The sea is kira-kira for the same reason. And so are people's eyes.

Even when the family is forced to move from their Japanese community in Iowa to the less welcoming Deep South of Georgia, it is Lynn who still makes things glitter, even when people stop and stare at them.

It's Lynn who, with her special way of seeing the world, teaches Katie to look beyond tomorrow.

But when Lynn becomes seriously ill and the whole family begins to fall apart, it's up to Katie to find a way to remind them all that there is always something glittering - kira-kira - in the future.

“beautifully written... heartbreaking”

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was lost in thought. I looked back at my brother, who was sleeping peacefully. I looked back out at the swamp and thought of Brenda. She was ten when she died. I thought I saw something move out there, but then I didn’t see it anymore.

I tried to stay awake to enjoy the ride in the front seat, but I fell asleep, and when I awoke, we were slowing down and I saw the first light I’d seen in awhile. Four tall lampposts stood near the fence surrounding the plant. Insects were like death to a poultry plant, so the lights were allowed to shine on the building but no lights could be attached to it. Inside, my mother said, everything was made of aluminum and steel. There was no wood, even in the chairs and tables in the reception office. Wood attracted insects. There was no vegetation inside the fence.

Poultry was one of the biggest industries supporting the economy of Georgia, but that didn’t stop many people who did not work with poultry from looking down on those who did. That and the fact that I was Japanese were the two reasons the girls at school ignored me.

Sometimes when Mom and I ran into the girls from my school with their mothers, the other mothers would not even acknowledge mine. My mother did not have to work. My father would have been happy to support all of us; in fact, I think he would have preferred it. But there was the important matter of the house that we needed to buy.

Even within the plant, there was some snobbism. When we first moved here, my mother had started out working in the so-called dirty areas of the plant. That was where the blood and guts and feathers and such were handled. The workers from the clean sections weren’t allowed in the dirty sections, and the workers from the dirty sections weren’t allowed in the clean sections. The dirty-section workers were the lowest of the low.

The previous year my mother had been promoted into a clean section, where she worked cutting drumsticks and thighs off the bodies of the chickens. She was good with her hands and she wore gloves while she worked, but even so, little cuts often marred her delicate hands. And her wrists were so
sore some days, she could hardly move them after work.

She drove into a dirt parking lot outside the fenced area and parked near the few trees. There were already hundreds of cars parked. I looked around. It was so terribly dark. She looked at me. “Keep the doors locked,” she said. “I’ll come out on my break.”

“Okay.” I gazed across the parking lot to the dark highway. “Why can’t we sleep inside while y’all are working?”

“You might steal a chicken.”

I knew she didn’t mean me in particular, but anyone. There were two things the factory manager possessed a morbid fear of: insects and stolen chickens. Where I might hide this stolen chicken was another matter.

My mother looked at her watch. “I’m late for my shower. Stay in the car unless absolutely necessary.” There weren’t quite enough showers for all the employees at once, so everyone was assigned a shower time. My mother got out and hurried toward the plant.

I locked the doors and climbed in back to be near my brother. I laid his head in my lap. When he was sleeping, he was like a rag doll. Nothing could wake him. I ran my hand over his head. I liked to feel his new bristly crew cut. A long truck moved through the gate at the fence. I could hear the clucking and squawking of chickens. The truck moved behind the building. I couldn’t see, but I knew the chickens were being unloaded.

A big man walked slowly around the building. He didn’t see me. Maybe he was checking for people stealing chickens.

Another car drove into the lot and parked near me. A woman about my mother’s age and a girl about my age got out. The girl glanced at me, hesitated, and then walked over. I lowered my window. Her mother glanced over but kept heading toward the plant.

“Hi,” said the girl.

“Hi.”

“What’re you doing?”

“Waiting for my mother. What’re you all doing?”

“I do the laundry every morning. Then my uncle comes and picks me up on his way to