



1 GOOD LUCK SIGNS

Sadako was born to be a runner. Her mother always said that Sadako had learned to run before she could walk.

One morning in August 1954 Sadako ran outside into the street as soon as she was dressed. The morning sun of Japan touched brown highlights in

her dark hair. There was not a speck of cloud in the blue sky. It was a good sign. Sadako was always on the lookout for good luck signs.

Back in the house her sister and two brothers were still sleeping on their bed quilts. She poked her big brother, Masahiro.

“Get up, lazybones!” she said. “It’s Peace Day!”

Masahiro groaned and yawned. He wanted to sleep as long as possible but, like most fourteen-year-old boys, he also loved to eat. When he sniffed the good smell of bean soup, Masahiro got up. Soon Mitsue and Eiji were awake, too.

Sadako helped Eiji get dressed. He was six, but he sometimes lost a sock or shirt. Afterwards, Sadako folded the bed quilts. Her sister, Mitsue, who was nine, helped put them away in the closet.

Rushing like a whirlwind into the kitchen, Sadako cried, “Oh, Mother! I can hardly wait to go to the carnival. Can we please hurry with breakfast?”

Her mother was busily slicing pickled radishes to serve with the rice and soup. She looked sternly at Sadako. “You are eleven years old and should

know better," she scolded. "You must not call it a carnival. Every year on August sixth we remember those who died when the atom bomb was dropped on our city. It is a memorial day."

Mr Sasaki came in from the back porch. "That's right," he said. "Sadako chan, you must show respect. Your own grandmother was killed that awful day."

"But I do respect Oba chan," Sadako said. "I pray for her spirit every morning. It's just that I'm so happy today."

"As a matter of fact, it's time for our prayers now," her father said.

The Sasaki family gathered around the little altar shelf. Oba chan's picture was there in a gold frame. Sadako looked at the ceiling and wondered if her grandmother's spirit was floating somewhere above the altar.

"Sadako chan!" Mr Sasaki said sharply.

Sadako quickly bowed her head. She fidgeted and wriggled her bare toes while Mr Sasaki spoke. He prayed that the spirits of their ancestors were



happy and peaceful. He gave thanks for his barber-shop. He gave thanks for his fine children. And he prayed that his family would be protected from the atom bomb disease called leukaemia.

Many still died from the disease, even though the atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima nine years before. It had filled the air with radiation—a kind of poison—that stayed inside people for a long time.

At breakfast Sadako noisily gulped down her soup and rice. Masahiro began to talk about girls who ate like hungry dragons. But Sadako didn't hear his teasing. Her thoughts were dancing around the Peace Day of last year. She loved the crowds of people, the music, and fireworks. Sadako could still taste the spun cotton candy.

She finished breakfast before anyone else. When she jumped up, Sadako almost knocked the table over. She was tall for her age and her long legs always seemed to get in the way.

"Come on, Mitsue chan," she said. "Let's wash the dishes so that we can go soon."

When the kitchen was clean and tidy, Sadako tied red bows on her braids and stood impatiently by the door.

"Sadako chan," her mother said softly, "we aren't leaving until seven-thirty. You can sit quietly until it is time to go."

Sadako plopped down with a thud on to the *tatami* mat. Nothing ever made her parents hurry. While she sat there a fuzzy spider paced across the

room. A spider was a good luck sign. Now Sadako was sure the day would be wonderful. She cupped the insect in her hands and carefully set it free outside.

“That’s silly,” Masahiro said. “Spiders don’t really bring good luck.”

“Just wait and see!” Sadako said gaily.