

Hikari / Light

by Momo Akashi

SAMPLE

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CHARACTERS

HIKARI: Age 27, a Japanese woman. She was an elementary school teacher in Japan and came to Nepal to help establish a new elementary school there.

ANIKA: Age 30, an elementary school teacher in Nepal. Her sister is Hikari's host mother. She speaks English fluently, with a Nepalese accent.

NIEL: Age 6, an elementary school student in Nepal. He is blind from birth.

Time & Place

Rural Nepal 2001. There is a small elementary school with approximately 20 students. The classroom has a blackboard and five long desks. It's a sunny afternoon in early September, and the classroom is bright from the sunlight entering through the window (stage left).

SAMPLE

There are two women outside the classroom. Anika, a teacher at the school, is showing Hikari the school.

Anika

Hikari, you're looking thin. Is my sister really cooking for you everyday? I bet you're busy getting ready to open your new school. It's difficult to put together the class curriculum, right?

Hikari

I really appreciate how your sister is taking care of me. *(Pause.)* But, you know, I'm thinking about going back to Japan. When I came here, I was enthusiastic about teaching. However, it's overwhelming living here, and now I'm not sure What I can do for the school project.

Anika

You're doing really well, even though Nepal is totally different from Japan. Please don't be so hard on yourself. You can come back to Nepal whenever you want to.

Hikari

Thank you, Anika. I just told my project manager this morning that I want to go back to Japan. I'm sorry to be such a downer. You and your sister have taken really good care of me. And now you're taking the trouble to show me the school today.

Anika

No worries. I asked you to visit because we're so happy when people from other countries come to see our school. Since you're here anyway, may I introduce you to my students?

Hikari

Of course.

(Anika and Hikari enter the classroom. The audience can hear voices of children.)

Anika

Sorry to interrupt your lunch break, kids. We have a special guest, from Japan!

Hikari

Namaste. I'm Hikari, from Japan. Have you all heard of "Japan" before? *(Pause.)* Okay, great, I'm so happy you've all heard of it! Here's how you write my name, Hikari, in Japanese.

(She writes the kanji for her name on the blackboard.)

Hikari means "light" in English, like a ray of light. So, remember what my name means: light. It's so wonderful to come to your school and see all of you today.

Anika

Thank you, Hikari. All right class, get back to your lunch break.
Hikari, I need to go to another class now. Can you stay here 'till I come back?

Hikari

Sure.

(Anika leaves. Hikari starts looking around the classroom. Niel comes to Hikari.)

Niel

Hikari?

Hikari

Hello there, how are you doing?

Niel

I'm Niel. I'm sorry, but what does "light" mean?

Hikari

Light? It means Prakasa in Nepalese. *(Niel doesn't reply.)*

My pronunciation may be wrong. Let's see... There's light coming from the window. *(She points to the window.)*

Niel

Is there light in the classroom?

Hikari

Yeah, look at that table over there. It looks bright, from the light.

Niel

• • • *(He's still facing towards Hikari.)*

Hikari

Over there.

Niel

I'm sorry, but I can't see.

Hikari

(She notices a white stick beside Niel.) Oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't realize. But you're a student in this class, right?

Niel

Yes... I'm sorry.

Hikari

You don't need to say sorry. Everything's fine... It's fine.

Niel

I love the sound of your name. Hikari. Hi-Ka-Ri. So, light must be something very special.

Hikari

That's right, light is amazing. It's a... a miracle that brightens the darkness... Hmm, how should I explain it?

(There is an awkward silence while Hikari and Niel are thinking about what they should say. And they start saying something simultaneously.)

Hikari

Go ahead.

Niel

I'm sorry. What did you write on the blackboard?

Hikari

I wrote Hikari, in Japanese writing.

Niel

(Niel gives his right hand to Hikari.) Can you write it on my hand?

Hikari

Well, Hikari is written like this in Japanese.

(She traces the shape of the Japanese word Hikari on Niel's hand with her finger.)

The symbol expresses what light is, through its shape.

(She writes Hikari on his hand again.)

These three lines express fire, and these lines are a human, like you and me. So, "fire is above a person's head". The whole picture shows what light is.

Niel

I know fire! It gets hotter when I get close to it, and I can't touch it.

Hikari

Okay, Niel, can you come to the window with me?

Niel

Yes.

(Hikari holds Niel's hand, and she takes him to the window. They stand under the light.)

Hikari

Touch here.

(Hikari takes his hand to a table in the shade.)

There's no light here. But now, you're gonna touch light.

(Hikari moves his hand to another table in the sun.)

How does this feel?

Niel

It's warm.

Hikari

Good! Light is the thing that makes something warm, because light comes from the sun. You know what the sun is?

Niel

I think so. The sun is a circle, and it's very, very far from here, right?

Hikari

Exactly. Light is born from the sun, and light makes us feel warm.

Niel

Light is born from the sun... So there's no light at night.

Hikari

At night, the moon makes light.

Niel

(Pause.) But the moon is cold.

Hikari

What makes you think that?

Niel

Come closer.

(Hikari moves closer to Niel. Niel whispers in her ear.)

I've touched the moon.

Hikari

Really?

Niel

The moon is cold—and wet.

Hikari

How do you know that?

Niel

My mom let me touch it when we were praying to the full moon. I couldn't understand what the moon was, so she brought over a bucket and told me, "The moon is in the bucket, too. Touch it." I put my hand in, and I felt the moon. It was cold and wet, and it felt so good.

Hikari

Your mom is so sweet. I envy you, because I've never touched the moon.

Niel

(Pause.) Hikari, do you think my mom is a good person?

Hikari

Yes, you have a wonderful mother.

Niel

My mom and I always pray to the moon. "We're trying hard to do good things, as best as we can. So, please forgive us for our crimes in our past life. We're so sorry." Do you think the moon will forgive us someday? Because my mother is a good person, like you say?

Hikari

Why do you think you committed crimes in your past life?

Niel

Because I was born blind. Everyone—my classmates, my neighbors, even my grandma—says the reason I'm blind is because my mom and I did very, very bad things in our past lives. We're being punished for our past.

Hikari

(Hikari holds Niel's hands.)

Niel, listen to me carefully. You don't need to apologize. Please remember what I'm about to tell you, and repeat it to yourself, okay? There's no relation between the fact that you can't see and you and your mother's past life. Niel, you and your mother have never done bad things. Never.

Niel

What makes you so sure?

Hikari

I know Japanese people who have visual disabilities: Japanese people who can't see. But absolutely no one thinks that's because of their past sins.

Niel

But why was I born blind?

Hikari

(Pause.) I'm not exactly sure, but visual disabilities like blindness are caused by diseases, viruses... things like that. Your past life doesn't matter.

Niel

(Pause.) Are there any people who can't see in Japan?

Hikari

There are. I know a blind person who's a great student, and another who is a great worker that others depend on.

Niel

They can work, even though they can't see?

Hikari

Of course they can work. I know a blind person who became a teacher.

Niel

I wanna go to Japan. I learned in my class that there's bullet trains, skyscrapers, and the Tokyo tower there. And there are opportunities to work, even for people with disabilities.

Hikari

You can go to Japan someday, but you can also find ways to work in Nepal.

Niel

I can get a job?

Hikari

Absolutely. If you study hard, you can be a teacher or anything. So, please believe what I'm telling you. There's no relation between the fact that you can't see and you and your mother's past life. You and your mom have never done bad things. Never.

Niel

My mom and I have never done bad things. Never.

(Tears stream down his face. Hikari holds him, warmly.)

I find the light now.

Hikari

(Niel's tears fall onto her shoulder.)

I find the light too, though my shoulder feels cool right now. You've taught me that cold things can have light, too.

(The sunlight, which comes in through the window, brightens them, and the other lights dim.)

(Anika reenters, and the classroom is lit up again. Niel pulls his face from Hikari's shoulder, and he wipes away his tears.)

Anika

Sorry, I'm late.

(Anika notices that Niel is wiping away his tears.)

Niel, are you okay?

(Niel nods with a smile.)

Hikari, may I introduce you to the school principal? She wants to see you.

Hikari

Sure.

Anika

(To her students.) All right everyone, it's about time to start. Please prepare for your next class.

(The audience can hear the children's voices)

Niel

(To Hikari) Will I ever see you again?

Hikari

Absolutely. *(Pause.)* I'm going to be a teacher in this town.

(Hikari and Niel smile at each other. The stage dims, while a spotlight illuminates Niel and Hikari. The spotlight gradually fades into darkness.)

End of play