

A Lightning Bug

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Recommended Citation

Aminifard, Deborah () "A Lightning Bug," *The Tuxedo Archives*: Vol. 2016 , Article 14.
Available at: <https://scholar.dominican.edu/tuxedolit/vol2016/iss1/14>

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A Lightning Bug

By Deborah Aminifard

Staring out the window at long shadows cast by the setting sun, she peeled the last potato. She wiped the sweat from the back of her neck as she hurried to get her father's dinner ready. Pushing the smoke-stained curtains out of the way, she opened the window and waited, waited for relief from the oppressive summer heat. Suddenly her father called from his worn out recliner, loud enough to be heard above his blasting television: "When will dinner be ready?" She felt that knot tightening in her stomach again as she rushed to get his dinner on the table. Glancing at the clock, she quickly placed the salt and pepper by her dad's plate. Finally, she could leave.

"You're not eating?" he asked. She grabbed her purse and answered: "No, I'm not hungry. I'm going out to meet a friend." He stared at the empty chairs around the table. After a few moments he said: "Don't forget to stop at the market; I need cigarettes." She glanced at the clock again, said goodbye and flew out the door.

She felt the heaviness lift the moment the screen door slammed shut behind her. At last she was free, free from the burden of caring for her disabled father, free from his neediness that demanded more and more of her. It was dusk. The small country town that had lazily lingered in the suffocating heat all day began to stir once again. She heard children laughing as they ran through the yards with their jars full of tiny yellow flickering lights. Suddenly a child screamed: "I've got another one!" She stopped and watched the small child drop the lightening bug into the jar, fastening the lid tight. She watched the bugs climbing to the top, desperately trying to find a way out.

She turned away and walked quickly down the road that led out of town. She thought of him as she walked, of his dark brown eyes and olive skin, of the way his eyes always seemed to smile, and of the plans they had made. She walked faster. As she passed the blooming honeysuckle, the heavily perfumed air triggered memories of a day long ago when she had picked the fragrant flowers for her mother. She could still see her mother standing at the stove carefully turning the chicken in the frying pan, the grease sizzling and spitting, as her father sat perched in his chair like a plump cat waiting for his meal. Her mother's face lit up when she gave her the handful of tiny flowers. Quickly arranging them in a small cup, her mother said: "Little Jo, put your beautiful flowers in the center of the dinner table." She missed her mother.

Finally, she reached the tobacco field on the edge of town. The full moon had risen from behind the hills, filling the valley with soft, pale light. In the moonlight, she could see tobacco hanging in the barn, drying. The road that leads to the covered bridge where she would meet him was just beyond the barn. She felt a wave of excitement mixed with fear as

she turned and walked down the narrow windy road. In the pale light, she could see the old worn out bridge, a relic from another time. The creek beneath it was silent.

She waited on the bridge, listening to the crickets singing the way that they do on warm summer nights, singing as if they too were overjoyed that the heat of the day had passed. She waited, her eyes fixed on the spot where the road bends, waiting for the moment when he would appear. She waited until the anticipation that had risen like a swollen river about to overflow its' banks slowly began to recede back into hopelessness. Finally turning away, she looked down into the dry creek bed where tiny yellow lights flickered on and off in the grass that had grown tall along its banks and cried.

Suddenly, she heard something coming through the woods. A moment later, old Blue, her neighbor's dog came running up to greet her. He had gotten loose again and had been roaming in the hills. She gave him a big hug, and together they walked back to town. Slowly they walked down the quiet country roads, passed fields of corn and tobacco and sleeping farms. In the distance she could see the faint orange glow of light coming from the window of her house. The windows in the farmhouses were dark now, but one remained on. Her father's eyes met hers as she walked through the door; he didn't say a word; he just opened his arms.