Comet Hunter

from *The Poetry of Science*

By: Holly Thompson
Adapted by Fishtank Staff

ever since he was a schoolboy
studying the Great Comet Ikeya-Seki
Yuji Hyakutake had wanted
to discover a comet
so he moved to Kagoshima
with clear mountain air
and night after night
while his wife and sons slept
he aimed his huge binoculars
at one patch of eastern sky

memorizing the stars
their exact locations
sketching positions
of constellations
hoping for a rare
blaze of ice and dust

until late one winter night
he spotted not-so-bright 1995 Y1
then the next month, near
libra and Hydra—another

"I must be dreaming," he thought
as he sketched and photographed
measured and documented
till day dawned on the mountain

"Possible comet," he reported
then waited as top astronomers
at the National Observatory in Tokyo
checked and finally confirmed
he was the first to discover 1996 B2

soon, as the orbit neared earth,
everyone was gazing up
at that glow of ice and dust
with the long sweep of tail—
at the newly named, the truly Great
Comet Hyakutake

Thompson, H. Comet hunter. In Vardell, S. & Wong, J., *The poetry of science: The poetry Friday anthology for science for kids.*(p. 77). Pomelo Books. (2015).