

## Twenty-Four Eyes, Part V

Keisuke Kinoshita, Director (1954)

Over scenes of natural beauty, we see a series of captions:

*The color of the sea and the silhouette of the mountains remained the same as day followed upon day. Over the next five years, the Manchurian and Shanghai incidents\* took place and the world suffered through the Great Depression, unaware of what lay in store...*

*\*Conflicts instigated by Japan in order to justify its invasion of China, paving the way for the Sino-Japanese War and, eventually, the war in the Pacific.*

*The children passed their days caught up in their own joys and sorrows.*

A final image of pennants against a background of rugged mountains says: Land of the Rising Sun.

The children, five years older now, come sail on the inland sea in a small boat.

They sing:

*Moonlight once shone*

*Upon our planted swords\**

*That moonlight of olden days*

*Where is it now?*

*\*The idea here is that soldiers with swords in the castle – now in ruins – used to be as plentiful as trees planted in the forest. The reference is to the lost power of the feudal lord, which the song laments.*

*Will you choose to shine above us*

*Even to this very day?*

*High above the castle ruins*

*Oh midnight moon!*

The children dock the boat and run up on shore. One yells, “There's the principal!”

Bowing, they say, “Good morning, sir!”

“Why are you all here?” he asks.

“To greet Miss Oishi's fiancé.”

“How did you know?”

“From Kotsuru's father”

“He's an engineer on a tourist ship. Everybody knows that!”

“We want to see his mug.”

Everyone laughs.

“Is Miss Oishi coming?” someone asks the principal.

“She's getting prettied up at home,” he says, prompting laughter. Evidently, it is Miss Oishi's wedding day.

Mat-chan looks down, “I'll get yelled at if I don't get home.”

“Why? This is a special day!”

“It was hard enough getting out to join you.”

“Yes, go home and help your parents,” the principal tells the kids. “School starts in five days.”

“That's why we have to have fun now!”

“Is that any way for sixth-graders to talk?” he scolds. “You're practically grown-ups! Get to work!”

“The boat's coming!” cries one of the boys, and everyone runs to see.

We arrive at the pier through a dissolve, the director's familiar way of signaling a change of time and place.

As the passengers disembark, we notice that some of the kids – those who can afford it – wear western clothing: for the girls, sailor suits; for the boys, black school uniform jackets with metal buttons and long pants. The kids from poorer families wear their traditional kimonos.

Watching the arriving passengers, Nikuta observes, “He's so fat.”

“No, her fiancé's behind that man,” Mi-san corrects him. Tall and thin, the fiance wears a kimono and *geta*, but carries a western-style fedora. He bows to each member of the wedding party, all of whom are in traditional Japanese clothing.

Balding, in wing collar and tie, the principal leads the visitors past the gawking kids.

The students follow at a polite distance.

Finally, Nikuta offers the verdict: “He's all right.”

Pulling his wooden cart, the porter approaches the kids on the pier. He calls out, “Mat-chan!”

“What do you want?”

“Stop playing around. Your mother's having the baby.”

“Really?”

“Hurry home.”

Mat-chan's home sits on a curved coastline, with misty mountains behind. The image is framed by the tips of pine branches, as if it were a classical Japanese painting. Roosters are crowing.

In the dark little house, Mat-chan and her father sit at a table by the window, eating. In the foreground, her mother lies in bed, waiting to give birth. She says, “Mat-chan, pack your father's lunch box tight, but leave room in your own.”

“Mother, I'd like a new one with a lily on it. When will you get me one?”

“When I can get up.”

“That same day?”

Her mother has second thoughts. "Wait a minute. Who's going to pay for it? Wait until your father earns some money."

Putting on his shoes to go to work, her father promises, "I'll buy you one."

"You will?"

"Just be patient."

His wife says, "I wish you'd stay home today. I don't feel so good."

"Mat-chan can stay. Times are too tough to take a day off." He leaves.

"Hurry or you'll be late for school."

"You don't need me here?"

"No, don't stay home. It's your first day in sixth grade. But come home right after school." And she adds, "Don't mention the lunch box again in front of your father. He's having trouble finding work."

"But Ma-chan and Mi-san have lily lunch boxes. You promised to buy me one this year. I'm ashamed of this old one." In closeup, we see her battered straw lunchbox.

At the main school, students are carrying buckets of water to the large building.

Here's Mat-chan. She calls, "Teacher!"

And Miss Oishi appears on the screen! She's carrying water, too. Now that they are in sixth grade, her former pupils are joining her at the main school, as she promised. "What is it?" she asks.

"My mother had a baby girl."

"Congratulations! What's her name?"

"Nothing yet. I'm going to choose it."

"Have you thought of one?" the teacher asks, putting down the bucket.

"Not yet."

"I see. What would be a nice name...?" She takes out a handkerchief and wipes her hands, musing.

In the background, students wash the school windows, while others run back and forth supplying water.

"You seem happy," comments the teacher. "What is it?"

"Mother's going to get me a new aluminum lunch box with a lily on the lid."

"That's nice. A lily, eh? Wait! That's a good name for the baby," the teacher says, leaning towards her.

A boat glides swiftly across the sparkling water of the inland sea: it's a peaceful scene. Noticing the boat, the girls from school walk to the shore. Mat-chan stands at the front of the group, easily visible in her pale kimono.

"What's going on?"

"They're rushing someone to the hospital."

Mat-chan takes off suddenly, and her friends follow close behind. We notice the compositions of the shots, elegant and uncluttered.

"Mat-chan, what's the matter?"

Once again, Mat-chan has to run home because of family problems.

The girls are tiny figures, running through a space divided by jagged horizontal lines of fields, mountains and clouds. For one of the few times in this film, the screen fades to black, bringing to an end this scene – and with it the first chapter of this movie, lyrical and carefree as the children.