

## Twenty-Four Eyes, Part X

Keisuke Kinoshita, Director (1954)

In an aerial shot, we see the islanders march in formation, holding banners aloft. They wave red and white Japanese flags and sing praises to the soldiers about to go off to war. The road is a white strip cutting diagonally across the grid of tidy fields.

*Our soldiers have no peer  
Let's send them off with a cheer  
"We won't return alive  
unless we've won!"  
They vow with courage  
in their hearts  
They'll crawl  
through the grass  
They'll dive  
into the sea...*

Captions on screen note the passage of time:

*The color of the sea and the silhouette of the mountains remained the same as day followed upon day.  
But the lives of the people of Shodoshima were carried along on the vast waves of history:  
The war with China and the pact with Germany.*

*We'll support our engineers  
with hoes in their hands  
Our army's shells  
will silence the enemy*

While the marchers sing, a caption tells us that eight years have passed.

*The enemy's resolve will falter  
We will dance  
to the top of their forts  
Despite their barbed wire...*

As the singing continues, we see a dark interior, not unlike Mat-chan's house. On the floor, a figure lies on a futon. A white rectangle on the wall attracts the eye: it's the group photograph of Miss Oishi and her students after she injured her leg.

Slowly, the camera zooms in on the figure on the futon: it's Kotoe. A tear is running down her face. Suddenly, a visitor enters: Miss Oishi! Kotoe sits up, but Miss Oishi says, "No, don't get up!"

The teacher takes a seat. "I wanted to visit sooner, but the baby keeps me so busy."

Kotoe gives a polite little bow. "Thank you for coming."

"Are you home alone?"

"Everybody's out fishing. I'm always alone during the day. I'm really glad you came." Turning her head, Kotoe seems about to cry. It's a warm day. Miss Oishi pats her face with a handkerchief as she looks around the dark room. Behind her, the doorway gives us a glimpse of elegance and light.

"I wanted to see you," says Miss Oishi.

"Me too. I always want to see you. All I do is look at that picture."

"Ah, that picture!" exclaims Miss Oishi, looking towards it. "I often take it out too."

She turns around so that she can look directly at the photograph.

"You were all so young!" she exclaims.

"I hadn't eaten when we set out. I got so hungry on the way. I was the first to cry."

"You were all crying when I ran into you. It makes me laugh to think about it." Still overheated, she begins to fan herself.

Leaning forward, she fans Kotoe, who says wistfully, "The noodles you gave us were so good. I still remember the taste."

"Now all of you are grown."

"I heard that Misako found a husband and had a wonderful wedding."

"That's right."

Kotoe adds, "And Sanae's now a teacher at the main school."

"She graduated with honors from a teacher's college," adds Miss Oishi, still fanning Kotoe.

Kotoe has more news. "I ran into Kotsuru in Osaka. She's an honors graduate in midwifery."

"That's right. She writes to me sometimes."

Kotoe looks down, with a pained expression. "I'm the worst off of all. Teacher, I don't have long to live."

Miss Oishi sets the fan down and gazes sadly at her.

Kotoe starts to sob, her head falling helplessly forward.

"What are you saying?" asks Miss Oishi. "You have to keep your spirits up."

"Teacher, I've suffered so much."

"I know. You've been through a lot." She brings her handkerchief to her eyes.

The camera pulls back and we see the two women facing each other in the gloom, the white rectangle of the group photograph on the wall behind Kotoe.

She asks, "Do you remember what we talked about during recess that day in the sixth grade?"

"I certainly do," answers Miss Oishi, fanning Kotoe again.

"I wanted to grow up and pay my mother back for all her kindness. I was happy to go to Osaka and become a maid."

"Yes, I remember. You were the brightest girl in the class, so I hoped you'd go on to high school. But you went to work for your family's sake." Unable to go on, she weeps into her handkerchief.

“Teacher...” The camera moves in so that she is in the center of the frame, sobbing. In the window behind her, we see a graceful tree in silhouette flooded with light. “I worked so hard that I got sick and had to come home. My parents won't even come near me. I'm left alone all the time because I have tuberculosis.”

The two women shed tears together, as the camera moves still closer.

Composing herself at last, Miss Oishi leans towards Kotoe and says, “But you know... you're not the only one who's suffered. I saw Mat-chan eight years ago on our school trip. She had a hard life as a waitress. Fujiko's family went bankrupt. Kotsuru's been writing to me. She's now working in a café in Kobe. I imagine that her life isn't easy either. You'd think Masuno would be happy at her parents' restaurant, but she runs away to sing and always gets dragged back. So don't think you're alone. Try to cheer up. I'll come visit as often as I can.”

She goes on, “It's nothing, but I brought this for you. Please eat it.” Opening her carry cloth, she presents some food to Kotoe.

“Thank you.”

Taking a last look at the photograph, Miss Oishi presses her handkerchief to her face, to quell her tears.

We hear the children singing the song about the mother crow in their light high voices as the camera pans over their faces, one by one, beginning with the girls.

Finally, the camera settles on the front row. These are the boys, who, grown into adolescence, are now soldiers going off to war.