

## Twenty-Four Eyes, Part XIII

Keisuke Kinoshita, Director (1954)

Miss Oishi gathers flowers and carries them with her down a narrow pathway, as in the background children's voices sing "A Night with the Hazy Moon," a school song:

*In the fields of canola blossoms  
The setting sun grows dim  
A thick mist frames  
The distant mountains*

She arrives at a grave with a marker that says, "The late Sergeant Tanko" and she kneels there, leaving some flowers.

The song continues:

*A spring breeze blows  
And you gaze up at the sky  
The evening moon rises  
Amid the faint aroma  
of blossoms*

She stands pensively until a voice interrupts her: "Teacher! Miss Oishi!" She turns to see who it is.

A young woman is climbing up the hill. It's Mi-san. From her perspective, Miss Oishi seems to be standing amidst the grave markers in the clouds.

Mi-san explains, "My daughter said you went home this way."

Delighted, Miss Oishi responds, "It's so good to see you!"

Mi-san runs up to join her.

Mi-san clasps Miss Oishi's hands and exclaims, "I wanted to see you again. What a coincidence that my daughter will be in your class!" Bowing deeply, she adds, "Please take care of her!"

"It'll be my pleasure." Miss Oishi bows back. The women are framed by two grave markers, the sea at their backs.

"When I heard you were back on the cape, I cried for joy. Two generations. It's such a rare thing."

"I owe it to Sanae. She's teaching at the main school. I thought I was too old, but she recommended me."

"Sanae, Kotsuru, Ma-chan and I talked it over. We want to have a party for you at Ma-chan's."

"You're all very kind. Thank you," she says, bowing slightly. "Seeing all of you again... how wonderful that will be!"

Turning to the grave marker, Mi-san comments, "Tanko wanted so badly to be a soldier. I suppose he died happy." She bows, hands pressed reverently together in prayer.

Pointing, she says, "Look over here!" Nearby, the camera pans another marker from top to bottom:

"The grave of the late Lieutenant Takeichi."

Miss Oishi remarks, "He preferred being a soldier to running a rice store. Now he's ended up here."  
She sobs.

"Nita's grave is here too," Mi-san says, leading the way.

On this peaceful bright day, the two women stand before the graves, crying into their handkerchiefs. Pretty wildflowers bloom behind them.

"He was so big and loud," observes Miss Oishi, "but not a mean bone in his body. On our school trip, his uniform was too big, and so were his shoes." She lowers her head and sobs.

Miss Oishi walks in the road with her two sons. Her gait is awkward; she's gotten older. A bus honks and comes roaring up behind them. They stand aside to let it pass.

Daikichi comments, "The bus would be quicker."

"Are you tired already? You're such a weakling," she teases him.

"I'm not tired at all!" boasts Namiki, her younger son.

"I don't mind walking," says Daikichi.

"You're having a picnic today, so we'll walk," Miss Oishi agrees.

"The bus costs money," Namiki adds.

"And it wouldn't be a picnic," agrees his mother. The three figures cluster in the center of the shot, in the background undulating mountains and the vast sky.

Daikichi asks, "Mother, what if your party lasts a long time?"

"You can play on the beach below the restaurant."

So they are on their way to the party for Miss Oishi hosted by her students!

"Will you check on us once in a while?" asks the little brother.

"All right. I'll look out and wave."

In good spirits, they walk on, Miss Oishi and Namiki holding hands and swinging their arms. Under a majestic tree, Miss Oishi says, "Go on now! Don't leave your lunch boxes behind!"

"See you later, Mother!" the boys say, setting off.

Miss Oishi goes in a different direction, walking slowly. In a long shot, with wild grasses in the foreground and the wide open sky, she looks very tiny.

Voices call, "Teacher!" "Teacher!"

Mi-san and Sanae come running towards her, and Miss Oishi bows. But they don't stand on ceremony. In the joy of reunion, they hug her and spin her around.

Jumping up and down with excitement, they tell Miss Oishi there is a surprise guest.

Sanae explains, "Mat-chan came from Osaka."

"Did she really?" Miss Oishi says. "I haven't seen her since the school trip."

From off-screen, a voice calls, "Teacher!" and the friends look to see who it is.

It's Kotsuru! She comes running up. Behind her, a woman in a black and white kimono approaches. Miss Oishi says fondly, "Kotsuru, you're so plump! Just like a midwife!"

At last the woman in the kimono speaks, "Teacher, I'm Mat-chan."

Miss Oishi steps over to her. "I'm so glad you could make it, Mat-chan."

Mat-chan responds, "When Misako wrote to me, I knew I could never face you all again if I didn't come, so I swallowed my pride and rushed here. Teacher, forgive me!"

Looking down toward the sea, we see a young woman run out onto the road. It's Ma-chan, whose family restaurant is the site of the party. "Teacher!" she yells.

She runs down the road, and the women propel Miss Oishi gently forward.

"I could hardly wait!" Ma-chan says, taking Miss Oishi's hands. "Please come in!"

"Thank you for hosting this party today!" Miss Oishi replies.

"What about Sonki and Kit-chin?" someone asks.

"They haven't come yet."

They lead their teacher to an open window at the restaurant, which is set among elegant trees.

As string instruments play "Auld Lang Syne" in the background, Ma-chan says, "It's a gift from all of us for coming back to teach at our school."

Looking inside through the window, Miss Oishi sees the gift and is overcome with emotion.

Face in hand, she kneels, as her students look on. It's another graceful composition, made up of thin branches and foliage, with the eternal sea and mountains beyond.

The gift sits on a raised platform in the restaurant, behind the tables awaiting the guests: a shiny new bicycle.

Kotsuru leans over and says, "Teacher, let's sit down and relax."

Miss Oishi stands, faces the bicycle and bows deeply.

"Sonki's here!" Ma-chan runs to meet him.

"Sonki's blind now," says Miss Oishi. "It must be hard. It was kind of him to come."

"He made it back alive, but it's tough," comments Kotsuru. Over their heads, a leafy branch sways in the breeze, framing the shot.

Mi-san says, "He's studying to be a masseur. He lives at the tofu merchant's."

Sanae adds, "He's said a few times he'd rather be dead."

"Poor boy," says Miss Oishi.

Ma-chan approaches with Sonki, her hand on his arm. Mi-san scolds him teasingly, "You kept us waiting."

"Sorry I'm late," Sonki says, walking slowly with his white cane.

Miss Oishi says, "Sonki, it's been so long."

"Teacher!" he exclaims, bowing deeply. "Yes, it's been a while."

"Five years", Miss Oishi adds.

"That's right. And look what a sorry state I'm in."

"Enough of that," Kotsuru chides. "This is a cheerful occasion. Sonki, you'll sit next to Mrs. Oishi."

Inside, Miss Oishi pours some sake for Sonki. “Thank you all for the bicycle,” she tells him. “It was so thoughtful.”

“Don't thank me. I couldn't give much.”

“That doesn't matter.”

“Thanks to you all, I can ride to school now,” Miss Oishi says, turning to look again at the bicycle. We're aware that this group of former students is smaller now than it was eighteen years earlier, when she first met them.

From off-screen, a voice says, “You're all here?” Kit-chin has arrived! He's carrying a huge fish.

Kneeling and setting the fish aside, he bows to Miss Oishi. “Teacher, it's been so long!”

“Yes, it certainly has.” She returns his bow.

Ma-chan picks up the fish, as Kit-chin explains, “I caught it especially for Miss Oishi. That's why I'm late.”

Ma-chan takes the fish to the kitchen.

“Thank you for going to all this trouble,” says Miss Oishi.

As the former students begin singing the old “Mother Crow” song, the group photograph of the class fills the screen.

*Mother Crow,  
Why do you cry?*

Kotsuru conducts them, as the photograph is passed around.

*Because I left  
My seven precious babies  
Back on the mountain  
They're precious, so precious  
Mother Crow sings*

They finish their song, laughing.

Sonki asks. “May I see the picture?”

He runs his hand over the image.

“It's as if you can see it!” Sanae tells him.

“Yes, I can see it perfectly,” he replies. “Teacher is here in the middle. Takeichi, Nikuta and I are in front. Ma-chan is to the right, and Fujiko's over here. Mat-chan is clasping her hands with her pinky sticking out.”

Miss Oishi is sobbing.

Ma-chan stands outside, weeping quietly, her hand covering her face.

Then she begins to sing. In close-up, we see Miss Oishi, sad and weary.

*Walking along the beach  
In the morning light*

*I'm reminded  
Of things from times past*

Miss Oishi looks down, her hands clasped loosely in her lap.

*The sound of the wind  
The shapes of the clouds*

She watches as Sonki holds the photograph close to his face and runs his fingers over it.

*The tide coming in  
The colors of the shells  
Wandering the beach*

As the song continues, we see close-ups of those who remain from Miss Oishi's group of twenty-four eyes.

*In the evening light  
I'm reminded  
Of people from times past*

*The tide coming in  
The tide going out*

Miss Oishi's sons are playing at the beach while she's at the party. They're skipping stones, as her young pupils used to do, small figures under the sky.

*The color of the moon  
The light of the stars*

It's a rainy day, and Miss Oishi is riding her new bicycle to school.  
We hear a song:

*We look up to our teachers  
So grateful for their kindness*

She rides through fog, across empty mountain roads.

*The years on the playground  
Have passed so quickly*

*We look back  
On those precious days  
But now we must part  
and say good-bye*