

A Change of Mind - 1

The rain began as the funeral for the old literary master came to a close. It was an early spring rain.

Two men departed walking under a shared umbrella. Both were indebted to the late master. They talked about his indiscretions with women. The middle-aged man of importance wearing a garment bearing a family crest was a writer. The much younger man wearing Lloyd glasses and a pinstripe suit was an editor.



The writer said, "Like you, he was quite fond of the ladies. It will soon be your day of reckoning? You look exhausted."

The editor blushed and replied, "I intend to leave them all."

The writer always spoke in blunt and vulgar terms. For a long time, the handsome editor had kept his distance, but today he had forgotten his umbrella. He had no choice, but to share the writer's umbrella and get an earful.



He did intend to leave them all. That was not a total lie.

Change has come. Three years have passed since the war ended, and things have changed.

Tajima Shuji, the thirty-four year old editor of the magazine *Obelisk*, speaks with a hint of a Kansai accent, but rarely talks about his hometown. This savvy fellow edits *Obelisk* and manufactures its appearance to the world. In fact, he aids the black market and is always flush with cash. But it was easy come, easy

go. The rumor is that he drinks enough liquor to drown in and has ten or so lovers.

However, he is not single. Not only is he not single, his current wife is his second wife. His first wife died of pneumonia and left a dimwitted little girl. He had sold his house in Tokyo and evacuated to a friend's home in Saitama Prefecture. During that time, he married his current wife. Of course, this was her first marriage. Her farming family doesn't look it, but they are well off.

When the war ended, his wife and little girl were living with her parents. He went alone to Tokyo and rented a one-room apartment in a suburb. He was shrewd and this was just a place to sleep. He was often out and about which allowed him to save quite a lot.

But over the three years, his feelings have changed. He would have feelings resembling homesickness. He wondered if the fault lies in the subtle changes that have occurred in the world, or the recent emaciation of his body due to his daily excesses. No, no, it was simply getting older. All was vanity. He had tired of drinking. He would buy a small house and summon his wife and child in the country to join him. But just as quickly, those feelings would soon pass.

Perhaps, this time he would break away from the black market and devote himself to editing the magazine. But...

There was an obstacle. First, he had to skillfully break up with the women. When he thought about it, this clever man was stumped and could only sigh.

"You intend to break up with all of them...", said the eminent writer who then screwed up his mouth in a wry smile and said, "That's fine, but you seem to have quite a few."

A Change of Mind - 2

Tajima looked to be on the verge of tears. The more he thought about it, he realized that he had neither the strength nor the ability to do it alone. If he tried to pay them off without a reason, he didn't think that the women would back off.

"Thinking about it now, I probably look insane. Unbelievably, they may welcome it..."

The idea crossed his mind to confess everything to this middle-aged hack writer and get his advice.

"I hate to surprise people with praise. However, women may prefer a passionate fellow who is strangely adverse to morality. If you are young, good looking, have money, and moreover, are tolerant in terms of morals, you'll be popular. That's to be expected. Although you intend to leave them, they won't agree to it."

"That's true."

The editor wiped his face with a handkerchief.

"Are you crying?" asked the writer.

"No, the rain has clouded the lenses of my glasses...."

"Well, your voice sounds like you're crying. A hopeless ladies' man."

As the writer pointed out, Tajima serves the black market, is amoral, and has a strange faithfulness to women. For that reason, women seemed to rely deeply on Tajima without the least apprehension.

"You don't have a good plan, do you?" asked the editor.

"No. Maybe you should go overseas for five or six years, but traveling to the West isn't so easy these days. You should call all those women to a room and make them sing *Auld Lang Syne*. No. Better yet, *Aogeba Totoshi* [Respect Your Teacher]. Then hand each one a diploma, act like you've gone mad, leap outside stark naked, and run away. That should do it. The women should be thoroughly disgusted and ditch you."

Completely worthless advice.

"Excuse me, but my train is over there..."

"Not yet. Walk with me to the next stop. You have a big problem. We will figure this out together."



The writer appeared to be bored that day and wouldn't let Tajima leave.”

“No, that's okay. I can...”

“No, no. You can't solve this alone. You'll probably kill yourself. I'm actually worried. Being in love with a woman and dying is not drama, it's comedy. No, it's farce. It's hilarious. No one has an ounce of sympathy. Death isn't an option. Hmm...I've got it. Find a stunningly beautiful woman somewhere and explain your situation to her. Then have her pretend to be your wife as you visit each of your women. The effect will be immediate. All of the women will back off. Why don't you try it?”

A thin straw for a drowning man. Tajima started to come around just a little.

The March - 1

Tajima decided to give it a try. However, there remained one problem.

The stunningly beautiful woman. If she were plain looking, he would encounter about thirty every time he walked a few blocks to the train stop. He doubted a stunningly beautiful women even existed outside of fairy tales.

Tajima had always been proud of his looks, stylish, and incredibly vain. When he walked with a homely woman, he would escape by claiming a sudden stomachache. All of his current lovers were nice looking, but none could be said to be stunningly beautiful.

On that rainy day, that random chatter from the middle-aged hack writer provided a “secret.” Despite being temporarily repulsed by its absurdity, Tajima felt it had the seed of a good plan.

He would try it. That stunningly beautiful woman may have been dropped into some corner of life. His eyes suddenly began to dart around nervously behind his glasses.

The dance halls. The cafes. The lounges. Not there, not there. Only homely ones. Offices, department stores, factories, movie theaters, burlesque shows. No one there. He disgracefully skulked around peeking through the fences enclosing the campuses of women's colleges, raced around to the venues of Miss Whatever beauty contests, and under the pretense of a visitor, snuck into the testing rooms for new faces in cinema. All his wanderings led to no one.

He met his quarry on his way home.

He was dejected as he walked through the black market behind Shinjuku Station at dusk. He had no interest in visiting his so-called lovers. Thinking of them made him shudder. He had to break up with them.



Out of the blue, from behind him, someone called, "Tajima-san!"

He was startled.

"Um, do I know you?" he asked.

"What...don't you remember?" asked this person in a horrible voice resembling a squawking crow.

"Uh...?" he said looking again. Suddenly, he recognized her.

He knew that woman. She's from the black market, no, she's a street peddler. He had only traded black market goods with her two or three times. Nonetheless, he remembered the raspy voice and superhuman strength of this woman. Although thin, she could easily haul around eighty pounds on her back. Usually, she smelled of fish and wore muddy clothes. When she was wearing baggy Monpe pants and rubber boots, it was hard to tell whether she was a man or a woman. She looked like a beggar. After doing business with her, the dapper Tajima felt compelled to immediately wash his hands.

This improbable Cinderella princess had a refined elegance complimented by Western clothes, a slender build, and lovely small hands and feet. She looked to be twenty-three or -four, no more like twenty-five or -six years old with a face bearing a look of sorrow and a pale complexion, like the flower of a pear. This peddler who could haul eighty pounds was, undoubtedly, a stunningly beautiful woman of nobility.



However, that grating voice was a blemish, he had to make sure she never spoke. He could use her.