



The dogs that kill men and other stories

Description

Father Returns

The baby was born seven, eight months after Okimi's husband ended up in Toyotama Prison. She had to take time off from work at the knitting mill just for the period necessary to deliver the child. The mill wanted nothing more than to quickly get rid of the wife of a man in prison, so here was the perfect chance. Okimi was fired.

Okimi went to visit her husband in prison, for the first time in a while, to show him their baby. His face had become slightly paler, but he was in great spirits. When Okimi spoke about getting laid off, he angrily slammed his hat against the table.

Nevertheless, while fiddling with the number attached to his chest, he narrowed his eyes at the child. And then, he gently poked the baby's cheeks, before laughing in a great voice.

As she was leaving, he said, "With this, have peace of mind. I don't have to worry any more about doing something cowardly in order to get out this place. Because I have a successor now!" He left a space, and, as if it were nothing, said laughingly,

"And that means your role will become even more important..."

Okimi, feeling a tear well up, firmly held it back and showed him a nod. The baby, oblivious to everything, waved around its tired limbs, making cries of *aah, aah, aaa...*

"Give the baby lots of tasty milk and raise it into a strong, healthy child! ...*Ha ha ha*, what, just 'cause you got fired means there's no good milk?"

Okimi mulled over this countless times during her return from the prison. "If there's no good milk then so be it! I'll raise this child on *hatred* for them", she thought.

Due to Okimi's lay-off the young workers at the knitting mill would get together for discussions from time to time. With her husband gone the factory owner no longer had anything to fear and tried to force his own arbitrary demands on the workers. And lay-offs were no longer just Okimi's problem.

On the way back from the prison, Okimi went to the place where everyone was gathering and spoke about how she had just met with her husband. Their breaths were stolen as Okimi, looking into the baby's eyes, reached the part where her husband said, "With this, I have peace of mind. Because I have a successor!" Someone quietly turned to the side to sniffle. Another attempted to say something but their lips trembled and nothing came out. No one uttered a single word. But inside all their breasts was a profoundly steadfast determination that bound them together.

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Apparently there were more lay-offs at the knitting mill. There were no jobs and swarms of hungry people everywhere you looked. While working on strike preparations, Okimi used her spare time walking around in search for work. At this time, the baby's belly was strangely bloated while its arms, legs and neck were getting thinner and it cried all the time. Okimi was extremely worried. No matter what happens, she thought, I must not let my baby die.

The capitalists blamed the recession on the labourers and continued the lay-offs. In order to safely get away with that they took our vanguard and stuck them in the hole. By this point, Okimi understood it all very well. They used the same tactics at the knitting mill. If only her husband were to return now!

On her way back from an employment office, Okimi casually glanced at a flyer on a telephone pole that said, "The public hearings of the Communist Party are about to begin again. Through strikes and demonstrations, we shall take back our vanguard!"

Through strikes and demonstrations, Okimi tried to repeat it in her mouth, we shall take back our vanguard. If factories all across Japan started striking for that reason, of course, that's gotta be it, she thought. Okimi suddenly started running. She felt like she couldn't just stand there any longer. I must get to the place where everyone is gathering, she thought.

"Well boy, your daddy's coming back. Your daddy!"

With the child bouncing on her back, Okimi took flight under the blazing sun.

A letter

"Those who enter and exit through here must read this letter."

When Kimi's Papa was sharpening a file at the ***, the spinning grindstone flew off, struck him in the chest and knocked him over. He was carried home. The doctor said to cool the affected area with ice but no one could afford it. A number of times Mama would go out of her way several blocks over to a certain well to draw water. That well has the coolest water. In tears Kimi's Mama was always saying, "why can't it be winter right now?"

Papa also wept and wept. Kimi asked if his chest hurt and he shook his head saying "said no". Later, she asked again and he silently closed his eyes saying "there's nothing wrong with my chest." Papa was silently wiping away his tears as he looked at Kimi's face.

Mama too lost weight, her eyes sunk, and her hair fell out. Everyone was starving. The inside of the house was so humid that your feet would stick to the tatami when you walked around. Visitors from the factory would often say how much it stinks. But even from the beginning people from the factory stopped by less and less. By the time Papa died he had already been completely forgotten about. Papa spent half a year in bed and passed away when everything in the home had finally disappeared.

And so, Mama ended up in bed the day after Papa died. She was even skinnier than dead Papa, her hair had fallen out and she could no longer get up. A little money came from the factory but it wasn't enough. Kimi and her family eventually had to move into the smallest room on the top floor of an old, crooked, three-story house. They would have to take many breaks climbing those stairs in order to catch their breath. Dozens of people were crammed in the house, constantly making a clatter. When a fight would break out in the night, the entire house would shake violently.

Kimi's Mama was stuck in bed, her eyes were sunken in and when you watched over her in silence it was almost impossible to tell if the futon was moving when she breathed. One day, Mama said to Kimi, "when you wake up in the night, be sure to shake me awake, because we never know when I might suddenly die." And so Kimi would awaken during the night, shivering in fear and without saying a word she would reach out her hand and shake Mama. Once Mama's voice broke through the darkness Kimi would feel at peace again. She wasn't dead. With a sigh of relief Kimi would turn over, curl up her legs and fall asleep. This happened every night.

However, Mama gradually stopped responding so quickly. As Kimi shook Mama awake every night, she noticed Mama's body getting thinner and thinner. When she finally woke her up, Mama said, "aah... aah... it's not long now."

One night, Kimi was suddenly startled awake. She quickly reached out her hand towards Mama but scared to raise her voice in the night, first shook Mama without saying anything. Only, Mama's eyes would not seem to open. Even so, still in silence, she shook Mama harder and harder. Finally, Kimi called out to Mama. But just her voice echoed through the night. Mama did not move.

With a sudden shriek Kimi jumped up and ran outside. Missing her footing she made a terrible noise as she fell down the tall staircase in the middle

of the night. Kimi's Mama was dead.

And so, just Kimi, her little brother and little sister were left behind. Furthermore, Kimi herself was stuck in bed from the terrible fall she took down the stairs. Lots of people from the house got together and somehow put on the funeral. "Since we're all poor" they were saying, "what a pity it would be if we couldn't help each other out."

There was a great commotion on the night of the wake. When the people who came woke up later in the night they found that all the offerings to the deceased had disappeared. This wasn't the doing of some cats or rodents. Who on earth would do something like this?

I was also at the wake. When I casually walked into the room where Kimi and her siblings were sleeping, I saw something that stopped me in my tracks. God, of all things, Kimi, her little brother and little sister, practically in a daze, were eating the offerings to Mama. I unintentionally cried out. That's why everyone came in. "What happened, what happened", they said. At that time, I couldn't help but feel as though Kimi and her siblings looked like little demons with their mouths torn open all the way to their throats.

Everyone asked Kimi what was the reason for this. Kimi turned pale and didn't respond. Then she suddenly started wailing. While shedding tears, Kimi spoke. Kimi and her siblings had had nothing to eat since almost four or five days before Mama's death. They were having dizzy spells, their chests twitched and they couldn't even get out of bed. Seeing the funeral offerings show up in a place where they hadn't seen any food for such a long time, they couldn't take it. Their eyes glazed over, and while feeling terrible about their dead Mama, Kimi, with her tiny little brother and sister, found a chance and devoured everything in a daze.

As the people of the tenement house were listening, one by one they joined each other in tearful grief. As of now, Kimi also doesn't have very long. Still, from time to time she says something like this to me. Us *** people, why the hell is it that our Papas die, our Mamas die and that even we are forced to die. When I get better, I will become a *** and will walk the path for *** to ***.

Mother's and daughter's way

They say that Kenkichi, the most devoted, most kind and most studious person around, committed the most dreadful act imaginable in this world. There was just no way mother could comprehend it.

Sometimes during his patrol, the chief of the local police box, red-faced and in a good mood, would drop by for a chat.

"In this world there is a terrible crime called murder. Burglary, rape and so on are also crimes. But nothing is as terrifying as the horrific crime of attempting to overturn Japan," he said. Of course, it was sending him off to Tokyo where it all went wrong, thought mother.

When Kenkichi took off, he said with a laugh that all the families in our village just keep getting poorer by the day. He said that once he gets to

the city he'll work real hard to make things easier for the family..

One of mother's eyes, always filled with mucus, became red and inflamed from days without sleep and would secrete tears for no apparent reason.

Oyasu worked at The Shack, the miscellaneous goods shop owned by the landlord of that region. Some spare time finally came her way since her big brother's incident.

"Oyasu, what did Ken do?"

With tears dripping from that one eye, mother asked this to her daughter who had just returned home with a single baggage.

"It was something like the Kommenist Party.."

"What, Kommen... Kom-men what?"

"Komm-e-nist, Party"

"Hmph...?"

But mother forgot that name in no time.

"To think your big brother's stuff is starting to affect you... Ken what on earth did you do?" Mother grumbled this as if she were speaking to herself.

Oyasu, who had always been on good terms with her big brother, felt that she would at least visit him in prison in Tokyo this fall. By working at The Shack, Oyasu was able to understand just how wretched and unjust life was for common people like her, compared to the daily life of the landlord's family. Therefore, Oyasu wasn't nearly as bothered as mother when they suddenly became *the outcasts* of the village.

Letter cards pressed with Kenkichi's seal would come from time to time. Because mother couldn't read, he would write the letters in large *hiragana* and *katakana* so that a neighbour or his sister could read them to her.

When a letter came, mother would have Oyasu read them out loud. Mother would start to look *upset* whenever Oyasu would unwittingly start to rush her reading, whereupon Oyasu would slowly read over the same part again.

She would have to read the same letter over and over until the next one came. Once the harvest was finished, mother and daughter went off to visit Ken.

Mother had never ridden a train for that long before and everything she saw struck her with great curiosity. Sticking her head out the window, looking at the fields as they passed by in front of her eyes, she kept saying things like "ah, it's still not cut here" or, "now this crop sure looks nice!"

At the courthouse, the two had trouble finding their way. After getting lost and taking a few of the wrong sets of stairs, they finally obtained a permission slip from the preliminary judge before heading off to the prison.

The prison was on the outskirts of town. On the way, at least two vehicles with iron bars covering their windows passed the mother and daughter from behind. At first, mother looked at the vehicle in a strange, unfathomable state, before suddenly shivering.

"Oyasu, ain't that a prison car?" Upon arriving in front of the prison, she suddenly crouched by the side of the road and covered her face, thinking god knows what. Despite coming all this way by train, it was simply too much. The prison's concrete walls were thicker and taller than she could have ever imagined. It was enough to make mother lose her head.

Furthermore, when she thought about her devout son Kenkichi wearing those "red clothes", staring up at a window outfitted with tall thin bars, something suddenly made her chest heavy. Her eyes were spinning. Her body could not handle it.

Reluctantly, Oyasu had her mother wait on a table at the supply drop. Oyasu was forced to meet with her brother alone.

Oyasu, her face dirtied from tears, returned with a city-style woman she didn't know. Oyasu vigorously wiped her nose with her upper arm.

That woman talked to mother about the work she does and said there is no need to worry about Kenkichi. Even though, as the police box chief was saying, her son committed such a terrible deed, when she thought about how there were mysterious people in this world that were looking after him, she couldn't put it all together. While Oyasu was off to the side wiping her nose, the city-woman said she worked for the Aid Society and that they support people who end up in prison for helping poor people like labourers and farmers. They also work to help out with the families that were left behind. On the way back the city woman gave Kenkichi five postcards.

Mother took the trouble of coming all that way, only to leave without seeing her son in the end. Along the road, she talked about various things with the woman. When they finally parted, Oyasu thanked her many times over.

"Hey Oyasu, how was Ken...?"

In the train, mother asked timidly as if she were about to touch on something dangerous.

"He said, it's a whole lot better than the stupid village where no matter how much you work you still can't get a bite to eat, this place is piece of cake. He said tell mother to take care of herself until I get out..."

Mother listened intently, as if not to let a single word get past her. "That place is a piece of cake? My, what a thing to say!"

Mother pressed a hand towel to her face.

When Oyasu saw her kind brother wearing a braided hat with a number attached to his lapel, her chest welled up and despite having prepared all the things she was going to say, she ended up at a total loss for words.

"I don't know what the people outside are saying about what I did but think about the kind of life you live and the work you do each day. Then make up your own mind about it. You understand...?"

Her brother said this while fidgeting with his hat. Oyasu thought constantly about the things the person from the Aid Society and her brother said. Around half a year later, the woman from the Aid Society received a letter from the countryside written in pencil. The letter was from Oyasu.

"I now understand 'loud and clear' what it was you were talking about. Everyone's in good health here. A tenant farmer strike has begun. I'm also a part of it. What you talked about really made sense. Even mother stopped resisting and now she makes me rice balls. Despite that, she still can't say 'the Communist Party' right. Starting now, I will write letters to my brother in prison. This letter I'm writing will make him happier than anything. A letter about this strike will tell him that I've come to understand everything. Well, keep your head up. I'll keep mine up, too."

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