

Onatsu and Seijuro

In the Edo period of the 17th century, there was a wholesale rice store called Tajimaya in Himeji, now in Hyogo Prefecture. The owner Kuemon had a 16-year old daughter named Onatsu, a girl of exceeding loveliness. She got flooded with offers of marriage, but turned them all down.



One day, they hired a new employee Seijuro---a son of a sake brewer in Murotsu, west of Himeji. He used to be the brewer's heir, but his father disowned him as he had been tempted to commit a double suicide with a prostitute. Although his counterpart had died, he'd failed to die. He was sent to a temple for a while, but one of his relatives was so worried about his future, and gave him advice to work at Tajimaya as an employee so that people would forget the case someday. He reformed himself, and tried to forget what he had done before. He acted as if he had been a totally different person and worked hard for the store.

One evening, he asked a maid working at the same store to fix his obi (a broad sash). When the maid unsewed it, she found some letters in it. As the letters had been sent to him by lovesick-prostitutes, she and her fellow maids were excited and read them in turn.

The maid showed those letters to Onatsu, the rice wholesaler's daughter. Onatsu became interested in him, and wondered what Seijuro was like who had been loved by prostitutes. She began to picture his handsome face on her mind. In a nutshell, she fell in love with him.

Meanwhile, Seijuro became more popular among maids since they'd read love letters sent to him. In fact some of them started sending him letters. Onatsu also wrote to him. She kept writing one after another. That affected his daily life. He was captivated by her purity and beauty, became absent-minded and neglected his work. But they seldom had a chance to meet each other as there was a social barrier between them; one was a daughter of a rice wholesaler, while the other was only their employee. They spent every day and night just longing for their beloved one.

One day in spring, people working for the rice wholesaler went on an outing to see the cherry blossoms near the beach. Onatsu accompanied them. It was a fine day and the cherry trees were in full bloom. They stretched a long rope between trees to make a square space for them. Then they hung some beautiful kimonos on the rope like curtains, so that they could enjoy drinking, eating, and chatting inside without being disturbed by other parties.

Onatsu didn't enjoy viewing cherry blossoms very much. Her concern was only about Seijuro who was standing outside to escort the store-people's party. She

thought it was the chance of a lifetime. But her maids were keeping an eye on her. She became irritated.

Just then, they heard sounds of a drum and a flute a little away from them. That was the music for *Shishimai*, a ritual dance performed in a lion's mask as an exorcism. People rushed to the performers and circled around them. All the women from the store except Onatsu also rushed to the crowds.

No sooner had the maids gone than Seijuro sneaked inside. Without a word, he embraced his master's daughter tightly and they slept together in broad daylight. Their hair was disarray, but they didn't care. They whispered with each other, "I love you, Onatsu."

"I love you, too, Seijuro."

Once love is burning up, it is very difficult to extinguish it. They finally decided to take the plunge to run away to Osaka, the busiest city in the Kansai District. A few days later, they slipped out of the store, hurried to the port hand in hand and boarded a boat bounded for Osaka.

He said to her on the boat,

"People will forget us as time goes by. I won't mind the poverty as long as you are with me. Let's rent a row house on a backstreet, and start our new life there."

She smiled back at him happily.

But things didn't go well for them. A *hikyaku*, or the express messenger, left a bundle of letters at the port and the boat returned back to retrieve them.

As soon as the boat reached the shore, they were caught by their pursuers: Onatsu was constrained into a cage, while Seijuro was taken to a jail.

What was worse, he was suspected of an unexpected crime; they said, he made Onatsu steal 700-*ryo kobans* (oval Japanese gold coins in the Edo period) from her father's store, and tried to run away with her.

He insisted that he hadn't stolen any money, and it might be a frame-up, but they wouldn't listen to him. He couldn't prove his innocence. After all he was executed on 18th of April 1661, at the age of 25.

One day in June, when the maids were airing their clothes in the warehouse, they found that 700-*ryo* in an oblong chest, which the master had completely forgotten. They were more than upset by the fact, but what was done couldn't be undone. In the meanwhile, Onatsu who had been confined to a room without knowing Seijuro's sad news, prayed earnestly for his safe day by day.

One day she heard children singing outside like this:

Since they killed Seijuro, Onatsu should be killed.

She asked her nurse about what had happened to him. Cross-examined by Onatsu--- the nurse shed tears and began to confess that he had been executed. His death was a great blow to Onatsu.

***Is it Seijuro who's going through over there?
'Cause that sedge hat looks like the one he'd worn there.***

Since they killed Seijuro, Onatsu should be killed.

It'd be better for her than the agony in this world.

She didn't feel her father's grief any more. Her eyes were blank and just mingled with children, dancing and singing, with a grin on her face. She visited the mound his body had been buried through wind and rain. Onatsu lost her mind completely. Her mind might be wandering around the cherry trees where they'd met that day.

○「お夏」はどうして気が狂ってしまったのでしょうか。

お夏清十郎

17世紀、江戸時代、姫路（兵庫県）に但馬屋という米問屋がありました。当主丸右衛門には、とりわけ可愛いお夏という十六歳の娘がおりました。お夏は降るほどの縁談に見向きもしないのです。

ある日、この米問屋では、姫路の西、室津の造り酒屋の息子、清十郎という男を雇い入れることにしました。もともとは酒屋の跡取り息子でしたが、遊女と心中沙汰を起こして勘当になったのです。相手は亡くなりましたが、清十郎は死にそこないました。しばらく寺に預けられて



いましたが、将来を心配する親戚の口利きで、ほとぼりが冷めるまで但馬屋の奉公人として働くことになったのです。

清十郎は心を入れ替え、いままでのことを忘れようと、まるで別人のように一心不乱に働きました。

ある晩、清十郎は同じ但馬屋に奉公している女中に帯の仕立て直しを頼みました。女中が、帯の縫い目をほどくと、中から文（ふみ）が数通でてきました。差出人は本気で清十郎を愛した遊女たちからのもので、恋文を見た女中たちは、興奮して読み回しました。

但馬屋の娘、お夏もその恋文を目にしました。遊女たちを本気にさせる清十郎とはどういう男なんだろう、とお夏は清十郎の男前の顔を思い描くようになり、いつしか恋心を抱くようになりました。

清十郎はといえば、恋文を読んだ女中たちの注目の的でした。恋文を出す女中も出てきました。お夏も恋文を書きました。次から次へと。清十郎のお店（たな）づとめに差しさわりが出てきました。お夏の清楚さと美しさの虜になり、ぼーとして仕事もおろそかになってきました。しかし二人にはめったに逢える機会はありません。二人の間には、世間の言う身分違いと言う垣根がありました。一方は米問屋の娘、一方は奉公人にすぎませんでした。二人は互いに恋する人に思いを馳せ（はせ）、過ごす毎日でした。

春のある日、但馬屋の女子衆（おなごしゅう）は海沿いの花見に繰り出しました。お夏も一緒でした。天気もよく、桜も満開でした。木の間に長い綱を張り、場所を確保しました。艶やかな小袖を幕のように綱に掛け、他の衆に邪魔されることなく幕の内で酒や肴（さかな）を楽しみました。

お夏にとって花見などどうでもいいことでした。気になるのは但馬屋の女子衆の付添役として外に立っている清十郎のことだけでした。今こそ千載一遇（せんざいいちぐう）の好機と思いましたが、女中たちの目があります。お夏はいらいらしてきました。

そんな時、少し離れた所から太鼓と笛の音が聞こえてきました。獅子舞の音でした。花見の人たちは駆け出し、獅子舞を取り囲みました。但馬屋の女たちも、お夏を残してみんな走って行きました。

女中たちが行ってしまうとすぐ、清十郎がそっと忍び込んできました。もの言う間もなく、当主の娘をしっかりと抱きしめると、鬢（びん）のほつれも気にならず、二人は結ばれました。二人は小声でささやきました。

「愛しい（いとしい）ひと、お夏さん。」

「お慕いしています。清十郎さん。」

ひとたび燃えあがった恋の炎（ほのお）を消すのは容易なことではありません。二人で大阪に駆け落ちすることにしました。

数日後、店を抜け出し、手に手をとって船着場へと走り、上方行きの船に乗り込みました。船の中で、清十郎はお夏に言いました。

「時が経（た）てば、みんな私たちのことは忘れるでしょう。あなたと一緒になら貧しくてもかまいません。裏長屋を借りて、二人の生活を始めましょう。」

お夏はうれしそうに微笑みました。

しかし順風満帆（じゅんぷうまんぱん）というわけには行きませんでした。飛脚が荷を港に忘れてきたのです。船は引き返しました。

船が港に着くやいなや、二人は追っ手に捕らわれてしまいました。お夏は籠に入れられ、清十郎は牢にしょっ引かれました。

さらに悪いことに、清十郎には思いもよらぬ詮議が待っていました。お店（たな）の小判七百両をお夏に盗ませ、駆け落ちしようとした、という嫌疑でした。

清十郎は、びた一文盗んでいない、でっち上げだ、と言い張りましたが、聞き入れられませんでした。身の潔白を証明できぬまま、1661年4月18日、ついに処刑されてしまいました。清十郎二十五歳の春のことでした。

六月のある日、倉の着物の虫干しをしていた女中が、長持ちの中から七百両を見つけました。当主がすっかり忘れていたのです。その事実みんな慌てましたが、もうとり返しはつきませんでした。

一方、お夏は、清十郎の悲報も知らないまま部屋に幽閉され、毎日清十郎の無事を祈っていました。

ある日、お夏は子供たちの囃子（はやし）を耳にしました。

♪清十郎殺さばお夏も殺せ♪

お夏は、乳母に清十郎のことを尋ねました。お夏に問い詰められ、乳母は涙を流し、清十郎が処刑されたことを打ち明けました。清十郎の死を聞いて、お夏の心は打ち砕かれました。

♪むかい通るは清十郎じゃないか 笠がよく似た菅笠が
清十郎殺さばお夏も殺せ 生きて想いをさしよよりも♪

お夏にはもう父親の悲しみもわかりません。うつろなまなざしで、けらけら笑いながら、子供たちの輪に入り、踊り狂うのでした。清十郎が眠る塚に雨の日も風の日も通いました。お夏は完全に狂ってしまいました。お夏の心は二人が結ばれた桜の木のもとをさまよっているのかもしれない。