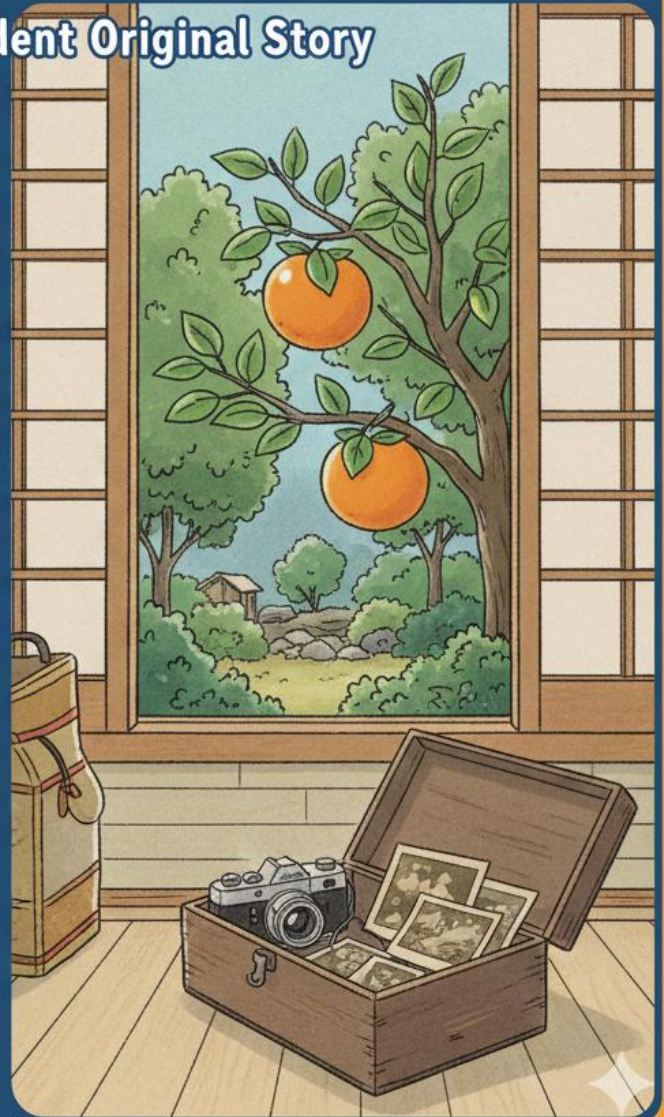


The Osaka Secret

Dan's English Student Original Story



Starter



The Osaka Secret

1. The Long, Quiet Years

Takeru and Akiko are in their small house in Osaka. Takeru is forty-five, and Akiko is forty-three. They are husband and wife, but their life is like two parallel lines. They are next to each other, but they do not touch.

Every morning, the loud train runs near their house. Takeru opens his eyes at the same time. Akiko makes green tea at the same time.

Takeru reads the newspaper in the morning. He reads every word, but he sees nothing. Akiko looks out at the small garden. The garden is quiet.

"Good morning," Takeru says. His voice is flat.

"Good morning," Akiko answers. Her voice is flat, too.

In the evening, they eat dinner. Rice and fish. Every night. They do not talk about the day. They do not talk about tomorrow. They talk about the fish.

"The fish is good," Takeru says.

"Thank you," Akiko says.

This is their life. It is not bad. They are safe. But it is not happy. It is just a long, quiet line of days.

Takeru works hard. He is tired. He thinks, "I do not know my wife anymore. She is a stranger."

Akiko cleans the small apartment. She is tired of cleaning. She thinks, "He never sees me. He only sees the newspaper, the train, and the fish."

She remembers a time when their small apartment felt big with happiness. Now, it feels too small.

2. The Forgotten Fruit and the Fight

One morning, Akiko is looking at the small garden.

In the corner, there is an old tree. It is not a beautiful tree. It is a little sad. Takeru planted it many years ago, when they were young and full of dreams.

Akiko sees a small, bright orange thing high up on a branch.

"What is that?" she thinks. She goes outside and looks up, shading her eyes from the sun.

The orange thing is a fruit. It is a **persimmon**. It is the first fruit this tree has given in three years.

Akiko smiles. It is a real smile, not a flat, quiet smile. "The persimmon is a sign," she thinks.

She touches the fruit. It is still hard. It is not ready to eat. "It is waiting," she thinks. "I did not look at the garden. I did not look at him. Now, I will look."

Takeru comes home very late that night. He smells of work and the train.

"Hello," he says. He puts his bag down.

"Hello," Akiko says. "Did you buy the bread? The bakery closes early."

Takeru stops by the door. He looks at his tired hands. "Oh. No. I did not buy the bread. I forgot. I had a bad day at work."

Akiko feels hot anger in her chest. It is not just about the bread. It is about all the quiet years.

"You always forget things!" Akiko shouts. "You forget the milk. You forget the important bills. You forget *me*! I need the bread for tomorrow's breakfast."

Takeru is too tired to fight. "I am sorry. I will go now to the convenience store. I will find some bread."

Akiko shouts louder. "No! Stay here! Look at me, Takeru! Our life is so boring! Everything is boring because we are boring!"

Takeru sits on the sofa. He covers his face with his hands. "Yes. I know it is boring. I am sorry. I do not know how to change it."

The anger leaves Akiko. Now, only sadness remains.

3. Takeru in the City

The next morning, Takeru does not go to work. He puts on his walking shoes.

"I need a day," he tells Akiko. "I need to walk. I will go to Namba."

Akiko looks at him, surprised and hurt. "You are leaving me alone?"

"No," Takeru says. "I am leaving the house. I will come back."

Takeru walks out of the house and takes a long, fast train ride to the center of Osaka.

Namba is a completely different world. It is busy. It is loud. The air smells like ramen and frying food. There are tall, shining buildings and thousands of people walking fast.

He stops and looks up at the big Glico Man sign. He smiles a little. He remembers the last time he stood here. It was ten years ago, and Akiko was with him. They were laughing because they were running from the rain.

He walks down to the Dotonbori River. The famous yellow crab on the building moves its eyes and legs slowly.

"Osaka is not boring," Takeru thinks, watching the river boats go by. "The city is alive. I was the one who made our life boring."

He sees a couple on the bridge. They are young. The girl is taking a photo of the river. The boy is holding her bag. They are talking and laughing about the picture. Takeru feels a sharp, painful memory.

He quickly goes into a shop that sells sweet, baked cheese cakes.

The woman behind the counter smiles brightly. "Hello! This cake is very good and sweet. Try one!"

Takeru buys a small cake, wrapped in paper. He puts it deep inside his bag. He does not eat it. "This is a present," he thinks. "I must remember her. I must give her something good."

He sits on a stone bench near the river, feeling lost.

4. Akiko Finds the Past

Akiko stays in the quiet apartment. She feels terrible because she shouted. "I was not a good wife," she thinks. "But he forgot the bread. He forgot me."

She goes to the small garden again. The bright orange **persimmon** is waiting on the tree. It looks like a small, warm sun.

She looks down, and under the tree, hidden by some grass, she sees an old, wooden box. It is a cigar box.

She opens the box slowly. It smells of dust and old paper. Inside is Takeru's old camera. And below the camera, there are many old photographs.

Akiko looks through them.

Photo 1: Akiko smiling in Kyoto, ten years ago. She is wearing a yellow dress.

Photo 2: Takeru and Akiko standing by this very river, Dotonbori, holding hands and soaking wet from the rain. Their faces are very happy.

Photo 3: The old apartment. It is new and clean. And in the corner, a very, very small **persimmon** plant in a pot. Not a tree yet.

Photo 4: Akiko's birthday cake. Takeru is holding the camera up and smiling.

Akiko sees the old love. She sees the energy and fun they used to have. "We must find this again," she cries softly to the quiet apartment. "It is not lost. It is here."

She looks at the quiet phone. Takeru is not answering.

She puts on her jacket. She quickly takes her train pass and puts the old camera inside her own bag. "I must go to Namba," she thinks. "I must find my husband and the happiness."

5. The Meeting by the Water

Akiko is fast. She runs in the Namba station. She walks fast through the streets, pushing past people.

She sees the Glico Man sign shining. She sees the big yellow crab.

She gets to the Dotonbori River. The boats are moving on the dark water.

She looks. She looks for Takeru's tired face.

A man is sitting alone on a stone bench, looking at the water. It is Takeru. He is watching the city lights.

"Takeru!" she says loudly. Her voice is full of air from running.

Takeru stands up, shocked. He is very surprised. "Akiko! Why are you here? I thought you were angry with me."

Akiko walks to him and sits down next to him on the stone bench. "I am sorry I shouted. I was wrong. I found your old camera under the **persimmon** tree. The tree has a fruit now, Takeru. Our tree is alive."

Takeru smiles widely. It is a real smile. "It is a sweet **persimmon** tree now. I hope the fruit is ready for us soon. I have been sitting here thinking of the rain."

"We stopped looking at the tree," Akiko says. "We stopped looking at the photos. We stopped looking at anything important. We only saw the quiet."

6. A New Start

Takeru remembers the small cake. He takes it from his bag. The paper is warm. He gives Akiko the sweet cake. "I bought this for you, Akiko," he says. "I was thinking of you."

"Thank you," she says. She eats the cake. It is very sweet and very good.

"I am sorry," Takeru says. "Our life is quiet because I am quiet. I forgot how to laugh. I want to change, Akiko. I want to be happy with you again. I want to look at you, not the newspaper."

"I am sorry too," Akiko says. "I must be better. We must talk every day about more than just the fish."

"Yes. We must talk. And we must go out. This city, Osaka, is big and fun," Takeru says. "We must see it all again. The lights. The food. Everything."

"Yes," Akiko says. "It is a perfect idea. We will look at the persimmon every day until it is soft and ready."

Akiko laughs softly. The sound is new and wonderful. "Good. You are much too thin, Takeru. You look like a leaf in the wind. I must cook the best food for you now. I must **fatten up** my husband. You will be strong and happy. You will have energy to talk and walk!"

Takeru laughs too. "Yes! Please **fatten up** me! I will not be quiet anymore. I will talk all day about the city and the beautiful persimmon."

They stand up from the stone bench. Takeru reaches out his hand. Akiko takes it. It feels new and warm, not quiet and flat.

They look at the river one last time. The lights are bright on the water.

"Let's go home," Takeru says. "But tomorrow, we will not stay home. We will go to Osaka Castle. We will buy a new camera. And we will be happy."

"Yes," Akiko says. "Tomorrow. A new start for us."

They walk away from the bright river lights, holding hands tightly, leaving the quiet years behind them.