BEFORE SPRING

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. TRAIN - MORNING

A crowded Tokyo commuter train.

LIN (22) stands quietly among the passengers.

She puts on her headphones.

Expressionless.

Outside the window, the winter sun flickers between apartment buildings.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Lin sits alone in the corner of the classroom.

She glances at a graduation notice pinned to the bulletin board.

Nearby, classmates excitedly discuss job offers and apartments after graduation.

Lin quietly listens.

She looks out the window.

INT. LIN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lin sits at her desk.

She opens her laptop.

A job search website.

She scrolls through the job listing.

QUALIFICATIONS.

RESPONSIBILITIES.

LOCATION.

Her cursor moves to "Apply."

It stops.

She doesn't click.

Instead—

She closes the page.

She opens her email.

Mostly promotional emails.

Then—

FLIGHT BOOKING REMINDER.

She stares at the subject line.

A long beat.

She slowly closes the laptop.

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

A Friday.

Customers come and go.

Lin works behind the register.

The second hand on her wristwatch reaches 7:00 P.M.

The entrance bell CHIMES.

AOI, wearing a green coat, walks inside.

Lin looks up

then returns to work.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

Another Friday.

Lin finishes dusting a bookshelf.

She straightens up and stretches her neck.

She checks her watch.

6:59.

The bell CHIMES.

Aoi, wearing the same green coat, walks in.

Without hesitation, she heads for the Art section.

Lin watches her.

Thoughtful.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

Another Friday.

Lin carries a stack of books.

The bell CHIMES.

She nearly bumps into Aoi entering through the door.

LIN
Sorry.

Aoi smiles and shakes her head.

She continues toward the Art section.

Lin glances at the wall clock.

7:01.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

Another Friday.

Lin rings up a customer.

She glances at her watch.

6:58.

Her eyes drift toward the entrance.

The bell CHIMES.

A familiar figure in green appears.

A faint smile forms on Lin's face.

She watches Aoi disappear into the Art section.

Aoi picks up a photography book.

Flips through its pages.

Brushes a strand of hair behind her ear.

Lin quietly watches.

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

Closing time.

Rain pours outside.

Lin flips the sign on the door.

CLOSED.

Outside, Aoi stands beneath the awning, watching the rain.

Lin hesitates.

She looks down at the umbrella in her hand.

Then steps outside.

LIN
You can share mine.

Aoi blinks, surprised.

After a brief beat, she nods.

Together, they step into the rain.

EXT. TOKYO STREETS - NIGHT

They walk beneath the same umbrella.

Silence.

Neon reflections shimmer across rain-soaked pavement.

Without warning, Aoi turns into a narrow alley.

Lin follows, slightly uncertain.

A small café appears.

Warm lights spill through its windows.

Lin slows, taking it in.

Aoi notices.

AOI
The matcha cake here is really good.

Lin nods.

She looks at the café once more.

Silence.

They continue walking.

The city gradually falls out of focus.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Lin exits the station.

Without thinking, she finds herself turning into the same alley.

She stops in front of the café.

A moment.

Then—

She pushes open the door.

INT. CAFÉ - DAY

Aoi sits alone, sipping her coffee.

Lin freezes for a moment, pleasantly surprised.

LIN
You're here. Mind if I join you?

Aoi nods.

Lin takes the seat beside her.

A SERVER approaches.

LIN
A slice of the matcha cake, please.

The server nods and walks away.

AOI
I'm Aoi.

LIN
I'm Lin.

Lin looks around the café.

LIN
I never knew there was a café here.

AOI
Most people don't.

LIN
I've lived in Tokyo for three years.
(beat)
I think I've only ever known the route between school, work... and home.

Aoi smiles.

AOI
Then maybe...
you don't know Tokyo yet.

Lin lets the words sink in.

Aoi stands.

AOI
Come.

LIN
Where?

Aoi is already heading for the door.

Lin hesitates.

She pulls a few bills from her wallet and leaves them on the table.

Then follows.

MONTAGE - LIN WATCHES AOI

Aowalks a few steps ahead.

Lin quietly follows behind.

Outside a bakery, Aoi points across the street.

AOI
Every evening, they give their unsold bread to the flower shop next door.

Lin nods.

—

Aoi crouches beside a stray cat.

The cat rubs against her hand.

Lin waits nearby.

Watching.

—

Inside a second-hand shop...

Aoi picks up an old ceramic mug.

She turns it slowly in her hands.

AOI
Imagine how many mornings this has seen.

Lin studies the mug.

—

At an overlook...

Aoi sits on the stairs, sketching.

Lin looks toward the railway below.

A train rolls in slowly.

She turns back.

Aoi is still drawing.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

Winter sunlight shimmers across the river.

Aoi walks ahead.

She turns.

Raises her camera.

CLICK.

Lin instinctively turns away.

LIN
Did you just take a picture of me?

AOI
Maybe.

Lin walks over.

Aoi tilts the camera toward her.

Lin studies the photograph.

LIN
...Could you send it to me?

Aoi slips the camera back into her bag.

AOI
Do you have LINE?

Lin nods.

They take out their phones.

A moment later

They continue walking.

MONTAGE - LIN BEGINS TO FOLLOW

Outside a convenience store.

Aoi blows gently on a cup of oden.

Lin copies her

then immediately burns her mouth.

Aoi laughs.

She hands over her own skewer.

—

At an ice cream shop.

Aoi folds a paper crane.

Lin carefully follows each step.

Her crane comes out crooked.

They look at each other.

Smile.

—

Walking down the street.

Lin walks beside Aoi for the first time.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. SHRINE - SUNSET

They climb the stone steps together.

Halfway up—

Aoi notices Lin has stopped.

She turns.

Lin is photographing patches of sunlight scattered across the steps.

Aoi smiles.

LIN
Tired?

AOI
A Little.

Lin points toward a bench bathed in the last light of the afternoon.

LIN
Want to sit over there?

AOI
Sure.

They sit.

Silence.

The evening breeze rustles the ema hanging nearby.

LIN
How do you know all these places?

Aoi grins.

AOI
I like getting lost.

LIN
Have you always lived in Tokyo?

A pause.

AOI
Around.

LIN
That's not really an answer.

Aoi smiles.

LIN
Is there anywhere you think of as home?

Aoi doesn't answer immediately.

AOI
Sometimes.

Lin studies Aoi for a moment.

A faint smile.

She lets it go.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Lin sits by the window.

Her phone VIBRATES.

A message from Aoi.

Several photos from today.

Lin smiles.

She opens her calendar.

Next Friday.

She creates a new event.

"Aoi."

She looks out the window.

Tokyo glides by in streaks of light.

INT. LIN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

An alarm rings.

Lin reaches for her phone.

A calendar reminder appears.

She gets out of bed.

Morning routine.

She washes her face.

Brushes her teeth.

In front of the mirror—

she carefully chooses her outfit.

EXT. MAPLE GROVE - DAY

Lin arrives at the grove.

She sits on a bench.

Waiting.

She checks the time.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAPLE GROVE - NIGHT

The place is nearly empty.

Lin has fallen asleep on the bench.

Her phone VIBRATES.

She wakes with a start.

Quickly reaches for it.

A promotional notification.

Nothing more.

The hope fades from her face.

She slips the phone back into her pocket.

Stands.

Walks away.

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

The wall clock reads 7:28.

Lin stares at it.

Nothing changes.

She unlocks her phone.

Her chat with Aoi.

"ARE YOU COMING TODAY?"

Another.

"ARE YOU OKAY?"

Another.

"DID I MAKE YOU UNCOMFORTABLE THAT DAY? I'M SORRY..."

Another.

"WHEN CAN I SEE YOU AGAIN?"

None of them have been read.

Lin lets out a quiet breath.

She tightens her grip around the phone.

MONTAGE - ROUTINE RETURNS

Morning train.

School.

Bookstore.

Home.

(faster)

Morning train.

School.

Bookstore.

Home.

One afternoon—

Lin pauses at the alley where she and Aoi once walked.

She almost turns.

Instead

she keeps walking.

END MONTAGE.

TWO WEEKS LATER.

INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

Closing time.

Lin is tidying the Art section.

She reaches for a photography book—

A SKETCHBOOK slips from the shelf.

It falls to the floor.

Lin pauses.

She slowly picks it up.

She recognizes it.

Aoi's sketchbook.

A beat.

She opens it.

A page:

CAFÉ - 2017.10.5 DAD PICKED ME UP AFTER SCHOOL. THE MATCHA CAKE WAS SO GOOD.

Lin turns the page.

SHRINE - 2018.1.1 ANOTHER NEW YEAR.

She turns the page.

RIVERSIDE - 2021.3.16 THE LAST PLACE I SAW HER.

Lin's fingers pause slightly.

Then turn the page.

SECOND-HAND SHOP - 2023.5.15 PASSED BY GRANDMA'S FAVORITE SHOP.

Another page.

RIVERSIDE - 2025.11.7 GOT HER CONTACT.

Lin holds the page longer.

...

FINAL PAGE

A DRAWING OF LIN.

Standing behind the bookstore counter.

Lin freezes.

At the corner—

a date.

Before the rainy night.

She doesn't move for a long time.

Then slowly closes the sketchbook.

MONTAGE - TOKYO

- A narrow alley.

Lin walks through the place she once followed Aoi.

A flower shop owner hands a small bouquet to the bakery next door.

- A new ICE CREAM SHOP

A tiny wooden storefront.

An antique doll sits in the display window.

Lin slows.

She has no idea what the shop sells.

Curious, she gently pushes open the door.

A soft scent of vanilla ice cream fills the air.

She looks up at the handwritten menu.

Afternoon light slowly settles on the wooden table, on her hands.

- SECOND-HAND SHOP

Lin returns.

She buys the ceramic mug Aoi once held.

Later, it sits on her desk at home.

- RIVERSIDE

Lin walks alone along the river where Aoi first took her photos.

Kids play baseball nearby.

An elderly man walks his dog.

Some couples passes by.

Lin looks up at the sky after the rain.

- SHRINE

Lin passes a shrine she has never noticed before.

The sound of a bell.

She glances back.

A beat.

She takes a few steps back.

And walks in.

Lin draws an omikuji.

She doesn't open it.

She slips it into her pocket.

Keeps walking.

- MAPLE GROVE

Almost bare now.

Late autumn fading.

Lin picks up a single maple leaf.

She places it inside the sketchbook.

Closes it gently.

- FINAL ALLEY

She stands at a crossroads.

One wide road.

One narrow path.

A beat.

Lin looks.

Then turns into the narrow path.

The camera does not follow her.

It stays at the entrance.

Wind passes through the alley.

A long silence.

Slowly—

the frame pans to a camellia flower.

CUT TO BLACK.

A long beat.

The distant sound of a train.

Then—

A familiar train door chime.

A station announcement fades in.

EPILOGUE

INT. TRAIN - MORNING

A quiet airport train.

Almost empty.

Lin stands by the door with a suitcase.

She watches the city pass.

A beat.

She slips her hand into her coat pocket.

Pulls out a folded omikuji.

She unfolds it.

GREAT BLESSING.

A small smile.

The train doors open.

Lin steps out.

FADE OUT.