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Early Spring (Soshun), 1956, black & white, 144 minutes

JAPAN SOCIETY
"OZU"

Screenplay: Kogo Noda and Yasujiro Ozu. Photography: Yuharu Atsuta.

Art Direction: Tatsuo Hamada. Music: Takanobu Saito.

Cast: Chikage Awashima (Masako Sugiyama), Ryo Ikebe (Shoji Sugiyama), Keiko Kishi (Chiyo Kaneko), Teiji Takahashi (Taizo Aoki), Chishu Ryu (Onodera), So Yamamura (Kawai), Haruko Sugimura (Tamako), and Kumeko Urabe, Kuniko Mivake, Eijiro Tono, Koji Mitsui, Daisuke Kato, Chieko Nakakita, Seiji Miyaguchi, et al.

Although Ozu made numerous films about the relations between parents and children--and their mutual concern about intentions of marriage--he made only a few films that centered on husband-wife relations. What Did the Lady Forget?, from 1937, is a comedy on marital misunderstanding. The Flavor of Green Over Rice (1952) is darker, about the disaffection that settles over a childless couple in middle age. Early Spring is another film about marital disillusionment. In this case the marriage in question is threatened not by its own internal inertia, but by the outside world: The husband, enthusiastic and hopeful as a young man, is discouraged for not having made enough of himself and his career. He is bored, going nowhere. An attractive young woman (nicknamed "Goldfish") in his office offers a pleasant diversion and they begin an affair. When the inevitable domestic difficulties ensue, he accepts a transfer by his company to one of its rural outposts. He and his wife are reconciled and they decide to begin anew.

Early Spring was one of Ozu's most time-consuming efforts. It took nearly three months for him to write the script and the project became something of a joke at the studio: "They kidded me at the company saying I'd better call the film Raishun (Next Spring)..." Another of its notable features was its star-studded cast, probably the largest collection of big-name talent in his cinema.