Sakura started to cry. "No Tora-san! You can’t leave again! I know that life is hard for you here. But when you leave, it’s harder for me." Tora-san watched Sakura cry and wipe her tears. He felt so sorry for her, but he didn’t say anything. He couldn’t say anything. He just slowly turned around and walked out the door.

In the world, history repeats itself, and so does life for Tora-san. Every time he comes home, the same thing happens. It often starts at the dinner table. The conversation begins quietly. Then it gets louder. Strong words fly. A fight starts. And then Tora-san decides to leave.

This time he will go out, far away from Tokyo. He will sell small gifts and souvenirs so he can eat. He will make friends and drink with them. He will tell them funny stories. And then he will meet another woman. He will fall in love with her. But in the end, he will lose her to somebody else.

And then — he will come home again, and the pattern will repeat itself.

Tora-san is a sad and funny character. He appears in 48 movies and is played by the actor Atsumi Kiyoshi. Tora-san tells funny stories similar to the style of Japanese comedy called "rakugo." A rakugo character is often foolish and always in a hurry. But rakugo storytelling is also fun and energetic.

People came to love Tora-san and his stories through film. But in real rakugo, the storyteller sits on a cushion on a stage. The stage is simple. The storyteller has a Japanese fan and a small cloth. And he or she performs conversations between people. In the art of rakugo, these conversations come alive with characters and humor.

In the west, comedians stand on stage and talk. We call this "stand-up" comedy. But rakugo artists sit on the stage on their knees. Kimie Oshima, from Bunkyo Gakuin University, says rakugo is "sit-down" comedy. According to Oshima, rakugo is unique to Japan. And it has a history of more than 300 years.

A key part of rakugo is the point, or punch-line. There are two Japanese words for punch-line. "OCHI" means "fall," and "SAGE," means "lowering." A good rakugo artist delivers a punch-line with timing and skill. And this ends the joke with a surprise. There are about 300 classic rakugo stories that follow a pattern. New stories follow this pattern, too. In this way, old and new stories stay within the rakugo tradition. (Read more at ReadOasis.com.)