

Kimono

John Paris

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KIMONO

by

JOHN PARIS

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Utsutsu wo mo
Utsutsu to sara ni
Omowaneba,
Yume wo mo yume to
Nani ka omowamu?

Since I am convinced

That Reality is in no way
Real,
How am I to admit
That dreams are dreams?_

The verses and translation above are taken from A. Waley's "JAPANESE POETRY: THE UTA" (Clarendon Press), as are many of the classical poems placed at the head of the chapters.

CHAPTER I

AN ANGLO-JAPANESE MARRIAGE

_Shibukaro ka
Shiranedo kaki no
Hatsu-chigiri_.

Whether the fruit be bitter
Or whether it be sweet,
The first bite tells.

The marriage of Captain the Honourable Geoffrey Barrington and Miss Asako Fujinami was an outstanding event in the season of 1913. It was bizarre, it was picturesque, it was charming, it was socially and politically important, it was everything that could appeal to the taste of London society, which, as the season advances, is apt to become jaded by the monotonous process of Hymen in High Life and by the continued demand for costly wedding presents.

Once again Society paid for its seat at St. George's and for its glass of champagne and crumb of cake with gifts of gold and silver and precious stones enough to smother the tiny bride; but for once in a way it paid with a good heart, not merely in obedience to convention, but for the sake of participating in a unique and delightful scene, a touching ceremony, the plighting of East and West.

Would the Japanese heiress be married in a kimono with flowers and fans fixed in an elaborate _coiffure_? Thus the ladies were wondering as they craned their necks to catch a glimpse of the bride's procession up the aisle; but, though some even stood on hassocks and pew seats, few were able to distinguish for certain. She was so very tiny. At any rate, her six tall bridesmaids were arrayed in Japanese dress, lovely white creations embroidered with birds and foliage.

It is hard to distinguish anything in the perennial twilight of St. George's; a twilight symbolic of the new lives which emerge from its Corinthian portico into that married world about which so much has been guessed and so little is known.

One thing, however, was visible to all as the pair moved together up to the altar rails, and that was the size of the bridegroom as contrasted with the smallness of his bride. He looked like a great rough bear and she like a silver fairy. There was something intensely pathetic in the curve of his broad shoulders as he bent over the

little hand to place in its proud position the diminutive golden circlet which was to unite their two lives.

As they left the church, the organ was playing _Kimi-ga-ya_, the Japanese national hymn. Nobody recognized it, except the few Japanese who were present; but Lady Everington, with that exaggeration of the suitable which is so typical of her, had insisted on its choice as a voluntary. Those who had heard the tune before and half remembered it decided that it must come from the "Mikado"; and one stern dowager went so far as to protest to the rector for permitting such a tune to desecrate the sacred edifice.

Outside the church stood the bridegroom's brother officers. Through the gleaming passage of sword-blades, smiling and happy, the strangely assorted couple entered upon the way of wedlock, as Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Barrington--the shoot of the Fujinami grafted on to one of the oldest of our noble families.

"Are her parents here?" one lady was asking her neighbour.

"Oh, no; they are both dead, I believe."

"What kind of people are they, do you know? Do Japs have an aristocracy and society and all that kind of thing?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I shouldn't think so. They don't look real enough."

"She is very rich, anyhow," a third lady intervened, "I've heard they are big landowners in Tokyo, and cousins of Admiral Togo's."

* * * * *

The opportunity for closer inspection of this curiosity was afforded by the reception given at Lady Everington's mansion in Carlton House Terrace. Of course, everybody was there. The great ballroom was draped with hangings of red and white, the national colours of Japan. Favours of the same bright hues were distributed among the guests. Trophies of Union Jacks and Rising Suns were grouped in corners and festooned above windows and doorways.

Lady Everington was bent upon giving an international importance to her protegee's marriage. Her original plan had been to invite the whole Japanese community in London, and so to promote the popularity of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance by making the most of this opportunity for social fraternising. But where was the Japanese community in London? Nobody knew. Perhaps there was none. There was the Embassy, of course, which arrived smiling, fluent, and almost too well-mannered. But Lady Everington had been unable to push very far her programme for international amenities. There were strange little yellow men from the City, who had charge of ships and banking interests; there were strange little yellow men from beyond the West End, who studied the Fine Arts, and lived, it appeared, on nothing. But the hostess could find no ladies at all, except Countess Saito and the Embassy dames.

Monsieur and Madame Murata from Paris, the bride's guardians, were also present. But the Orient was submerged beneath the flood of our rank and fashion, which, as one lady put it, had to take care how it stepped for fear of crushing the little creatures.

"Why _did_ you let him do it?" said Mrs. Markham to her sister.

"It was a mistake, my dear," whispered Lady Everington, "I meant her for somebody quite different."

"And you're sorry now?"

"No, I have no time to be sorry--ever," replied that eternally graceful and youthful Egeria, who is one of London's most powerful social influences. "It will be interesting to see what becomes of them."

Lady Everington has been criticised for stony-heartedness, for opportunism, and for selfish abuse of her husband's vast wealth. She has been likened to an experimental chemist, who mixes discordant elements together in order to watch the results, chilling them in ice or heating them over the fire, until the lives burst in fragments or the colour slowly fades out of them. She has been called an artist in _mesalliances_, a mismatch-maker of dangerous cunning, a dangler of picturesque beggar-maids before romantic-eyed Cophetuas, a daring promoter of ambitious American girls and a champion of musical comedy peeresses. Her house has been named the Junior Bachelors Club. The charming young men who seem to be bound to its hospitable board by invisible chains are the material for her dashing improvisations and the _dramatis personae_ of the scores of little domestic comedies which she likes to keep floating around her in different stages of development.

Geoffrey Barrington had been the secretary of this club, and a favourite with the divinity who presided over it. We had all supposed that he would remain a bachelor; and the advent of Asako Fujinami into London society gave us at first no reason to change our opinion. But she was certainly attractive.

* * * * *

She ought to have been married in a kimono. There was no doubt about it now, when there was more liberty to inspect her, as she stood there shaking hands with hundreds of guests and murmuring her "Thank you very much" to the reiterated congratulations.

The white gown was perfectly cut and of a shade to give its full value to her complexion, a waxen complexion like old ivory or like a magnolia petal, in which the Mongolian yellow was ever so faintly discernible. It was a sweet little face, oval and smooth; but it might have been called expressionless if it had not been for a dimple which peeped and vanished around a corner of the small compressed mouth, and for the great deep brown eyes, like the eyes of deer or like pools of forest water, eyes full of warmth and affection. This was the feature which struck most of us as we took the opportunity to watch her in European dress with the glamour of her kimono stripped from her. They were the eyes of the Oriental girl, a creature closer to the animals than we are, lit by instinct more often than by reason, and hiding a soul in its infancy, a repressed, timorous, uncertain thing, spasmodically violent and habitually secretive and aloof.

Sir Ralph Cairns, the famous diplomat, was talking on this subject to Professor Ironside.

"The Japanese are extraordinarily quick," he was saying, "the most adaptable people since the ancient Greeks, whom they resemble in some ways. But they are more superficial. The intellect races on ahead, but the heart lingers in the Dark Ages."

"Perhaps intermarriage is the solution of the great racial problem," suggested the Professor.

"Never," said the old administrator. "Keep the breed pure, be it white, black, or yellow. Bastard races cannot flourish. They are waste of Nature."

The Professor glanced towards the bridal pair.

"And these also?" he asked.

"Perhaps," said Sir Ralph, "but in her case her education has been so entirely European."

Hereupon, Lady Everington approaching, Sir Ralph turned to her and said,--

"Dear lady, let me congratulate you: this is your masterpiece."

"Sir Ralph," said the hostess, already looking to see which of her guests she would next pounce upon, "You know the East so well. Give me one little piece of advice to hand over to the children before they start on their honeymoon."

Sir Ralph smiled benignly.

"Where are they going?" he asked.

"Everywhere," replied Lady Everington, "they are going to travel."

"Then let them travel all over the world," he answered, "only not to Japan. That is their Bluebeard's cupboard; and into that they must not look."

There was more discussion of bridegroom and bride than is usual at society weddings, which are apt to become mere reunions of fashionable people, only vaguely conscious of the identity of those in whose honour they have been gathered together.

"Geoffrey Barrington is such a healthy barbarian," said a pale young man with a monocle; "if it had been a high-browed child of culture like you, Reggie, with a taste for exotic sensations, I should hardly have been surprised."

"And if it had been you, Arthur," replied Reggie Forsyth of the Foreign Office, who was Barrington's best man, "I should have known at once that it was the twenty thousand a year which was the supreme attraction."

There was a certain amount of Anglo-Indian sentiment afloat among the company, which condemned the marriage entirely as an outrage on decency.

"What was Brandan dreaming of," snorted General Haslam, "to allow his son to marry a yellow native?"

"Dreaming of the mortgage on the Brandan property, I expect, General," answered Lady Rushworth.

"It's scandalous," foamed the General, "a fine young fellow, a fine officer, too! His career ruined for an undersized _geisha_!"

"But think of the millions of _yens_ or _sens_ or whatever they are, with which she is going to re-gild the Brandan coronet!"

"That wouldn't console me for a yellow baby with slit eyes," continued the General, his voice rising in debate as his custom was at the Senior.

"Hush, General!" said his interlocutor, "we don't discuss such possibilities."

"But everybody here must be thinking of them, except that unfortunate young man."

"We never say what we are thinking, General; it would be too upsetting."

"And we are to have a Japanese Lord Brandan, sitting in the House of Lords?" the General went on.

"Yes, among the Jews, Turks, and Armenians, who are there already," Lady Rushworth answered, "an extra Oriental will never be noticed. It will only be another instance of the course of Empire taking its way Eastward."

* * * * *

In the Everington dining-room the wedding presents were displayed. It looked more like the interior of a Bond Street shop where every kind of _article de luxe_, useful and useless, was heaped in plenty.

Perhaps the only gift which had cost less than twenty pounds was Lady Everington's own offering, a photograph of herself in a plain silver frame, her customary present when one of her proteges was married under her immediate auspices.

"My dear," she would say, "I have enriched you by several thousands of pounds. I have introduced you to the right people for present-giving at precisely the right moment previous to your wedding, when they know you neither too little nor too much. By long experience I have learnt to fix it to a day. But I am not going to compete with this undistinguished lavishness. I give you my picture to stand in your drawing-room as an artist puts his signature to a completed masterpiece, so that when you look around upon the furniture, the silver, the cut glass, the clocks, the engagement tablets, and the tantalus stands, the offerings of the rich whose names you have long ago forgotten, then you will confess to yourself in a burst of thankfulness to your fairy godmother that all this would never have been yours if it had not been for her!"

In a corner of the room and apart from the more ostentatious homage,

stood on a small table a large market-basket, in which was lying a huge red fish, a roguish, rollicking mullet with a roving eye, all made out of a soft crinkly silk. In the basket beneath it were rolls and rolls of plain silk, red and white. This was an offering from the Japanese community in London, the conventional wedding present of every Japanese home from the richest to the poorest, varying only in size and splendour. On another small table lay a bundle of brown objects like prehistoric axe heads, bound round with red and white string, and vaguely odorous of bloater-paste. These were dried flesh of the fish called katsuobushi by the Japanese, whose absence also would have brought misfortune to the newly married. Behind them, on a little tray, stood a miniature landscape representing an aged pine-tree by the sea-shore and a little cottage with a couple of old, old people standing at its door, two exquisite little dolls dressed in rough, poor kimonos, brown and white. The old man holds a rake, and the old woman holds a broom. They have very kindly faces and white silken hair. Any Japanese would recognise them at once as the Old People of Takasago, the personification of the Perfect Marriage. They are staring with wonder and alarm at the Brandan sapphires, a monumental parure designed for the massive state of some Early-Victorian Lady Brandan.

Asako Fujinami had spent days rejoicing over the arrival of her presents, little interested in the identity of the givers but fascinated by the things themselves. She had taken hours to arrange them in harmonious groups. Then a new gift would arrive which would upset the balance, and she would have to begin all over again.

Besides this treasury in the dining-room, there were all her clothes, packed now for the honeymoon, a whole wardrobe of fairy-like disguises, wonderful gowns of all colours and shapes and materials. These, it is true, she had bought herself. She had always been surrounded by money; but it was only since she had lived with Lady Everington that she had begun to learn something about the thousand different ways of spending it, and all the lovely things for which it can be exchanged. So all her new things, whatever their source, seemed to her like presents, like unexpected enrichments. She had basked among her new acquisitions, silent as was her wont when she was happy, sunning herself in the warmth of her prosperity. Best of all, she never need wear kimonos again in public. Her fiance had acceded to this, her most immediate wish. She could dress now like the girls around her. She would no longer be stared at like a curio in a shop window. Inquisitive fingers would no longer clutch at the long sleeves of, crinkled silk, or try to probe the secret of the huge butterfly bow on her back. She could step out fearlessly now like English women. She could give up the mincing walk and the timid manner which she felt was somehow inseparable from her native dress.

When she told her protectress that Geoffrey had consented to its abandonment, Lady Everington had heaved a sigh.

"Poor Kimono!" she said, "it has served you well. But I suppose a soldier is glad to put his uniform away when the fighting is over. Only, never forget the mysterious power of the uniform over the other sex."

Another day when her Ladyship had been in a bad mood, she had snapped,--

"Put those things away, child, and keep to your kimono. It is your natural plumage. In those borrowed plumes you look undistinguished and underfed."

* * * * *

The Japanese Ambassador to the Court of St. James proposed the health of the bride and bridegroom. Count Saito was a small, wise man, whom long sojourn in European countries had to some extent de-orientalised. His hair was grizzled, his face was seamed, and he had a peering way of gazing through his gold-rimmed spectacles with head thrust forward like a man half blind, which he certainly was not.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "it is a great pleasure for me to be present on this occasion, for I think this wedding is a personal compliment to myself and to my work in this splendid country. Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Barrington are the living symbols of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance; and I hope they will always remember the responsibility resting on their shoulders. The bride and bridegroom of to-day must feel that the relations of Great Britain and Japan depend upon the perfect harmony of their married life. Ladies and gentlemen, let us drink long life and happiness to Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Barrington, to the Union Jack and to the Rising Sun!"

The toast, was drunk and three cheers were given, with an extra cheer for Mrs. Geoffrey. The husband, who was no hand at speechmaking, replied--and his good-natured voice was quite thick with emotion--that it was awfully good of them all to give his wife and himself such a ripping send-off, and awfully good of Sir George and Lady Everington especially, and awfully good of Count Saito; and that he was the happiest man in the world and the luckiest, and that his wife had told him to tell them all that she was the happiest woman, though he really did not see why she should be. Anyhow, he would do his best to give her a jolly good time. He thanked his friends for their good wishes and for their beautiful presents. They had had jolly good times together, and, in return for all their kindness, he and his wife wanted to wish them all a jolly good time.

So spoke Geoffrey Barrington; and at that moment many people present must have felt a pang of regret that this fine specimen of England's young manhood should marry an oriental. He was over six feet high. His broad shoulders seemed to stoop a little with the lazy strength of a good-tempered carnivore, of Una's lion, and his face, which was almost round, was set off by a mane of the real lion colour. He wore his moustache rather longer than was the fashion. It was a face which seemed ready to laugh at any moment--or else to yawn. For there was about the man's character and appearance something indolent and half-awakened and much of the schoolboy. Yet he was over thirty. But there is always a tendency for Army life to be merely a continuation of public-school existence. Eton merges into Sandhurst, and Sandhurst merges into the regiment. One's companions are all the time men of the same class and of the same ideas. The discipline is the same, the conventionality and the presiding fetish of Good and Bad Form. So many, generals are perennial school boys. They lose their freshness, that is all.

But Geoffrey Barrington had not lost his freshness. This was his great charm, for he certainly was not quick or witty. Lady Everington said that she kept him as a disinfectant to purify the atmosphere.

"This house," she declared, "sometimes gets over-scented with tuberoses. Then I open the window and let Geoffrey Barrington in!"

He was the only son of Lord Brandan and heir to that ancient but impoverished title. He had been brought up to the idea that he must marry a rich wife. He neither jibbed foolishly at the proposal, nor did he surrender lightly to any of the willing heiresses who threw themselves at his head. He accepted his destiny with the fatalism which every soldier must carry in his knapsack, and took up his post as Mars in attendance in Lady Everington's drawing-room, recognising that there lay the strategic point for achieving his purpose. He was not without hope, too, that besides obtaining the moneybags he might be so fortunate as to fall in love with the possessor of them.

Asako Fujinami, whom he had first met at dinner, at Lady Everington's, had crossed his mind just like an exquisite bar of melody. He made no comments at the time, but he could not forget her. The haunting tune came back to him again and again. By the time that she had floated in his arms through three or four dances, the spell had worked. *La belle dame sans merci*, the enchantress who lurks in every woman, had him in thrall. Her simplest observations seemed to him to be pearls of wisdom, her every movement a triumph of grace.

"Reggie," he said to his friend Forsyth, "what do you think of that little Japanese girl?"

Reggie, who was a diplomat by profession and a musician by the grace of God, and whose intuition was almost feminine especially where Geoffrey was concerned, answered,--

"Why, Geoffrey, are you thinking of marrying her?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed his friend, starting at the thought as at a discovery; "but I, don't think she'd have me. I'm not her sort."

"You never can tell," suggested Reggie mischievously; "She is quite unspoilt, and she has twenty thousand a year. She is unique. You could not possibly get her confused with somebody else's wife, as so many people seem to do when they get married. Why not try?"

Reggie thought that such a mating was impossible, but it amused him to play with the idea. As for Lady Everington, who knew every one so well, and who thought that she knew them perfectly, she never guessed.

"I think, Geoffrey, that you like to be seen with Asako," she said, "just to point the contrast."

Her confession to her sister, Mrs. Markham, was the truth. She had made a mistake; she had destined Asako for somebody quite different. It was the girl herself who had been the first to enlighten her. She came to her hostess's boudoir one evening before the labours of the night began.

"Lady Georgie," she had said--Lady Everington is Lady Georgie to all who know her even a little. "*Il faut que je vous dise quelque chose*." The girl's face glanced downward and sideways, as her habit was when embarrassed.

When Asako spoke in French it meant that something grave was afoot. She was afraid that her unsteady English might muddle what she intended to say. Lady Everington knew that it must be another proposal; she had already dealt with three.

"_Eh bien, cette fois qui est-il?_" she asked.

"_Le capitaine Geoffroi_" answered Asako. Then her friend knew that it was serious.

"What did you say to him?" she demanded.

"I tell him he must ask you."

"But why drag me into it? It's your own affair."

"In France and in Japan," said Asako, "a girl do not say Yes and No herself. It is her father and her mother who decide. I have no father or mother; so I think he must ask you."

"And what do you want me to say?"

For answer Asako gently squeezed the elder woman's hand, but Lady Georgie was in no mood to return the pressure. The girl at once felt the absence of the response, and said,--

"What, you do not like the _capitaine Geoffroi_?"

But her fairy godmother answered bitterly,--

"On the contrary, I have a considerable affection for Geoffrey."

"Then," cried Asako, starting up, "you think I am not good enough for him. It's because I'm--not English."

She began to cry. In spite of her superficial hardness, Lady Everington has a very tender heart. She took the girl in her arms.

"Dearest child," she said, raising the little, moist face to hers, "don't cry. In England we answer this great question ourselves. Our fathers and mothers and fairy godmothers have to concur. If Geoffrey Barrington has asked you to marry him, it is because he loves you. He does not scatter proposals like calling-cards, as some young men do. In fact, I have never heard of him proposing to anyone before. He does not want you to say 'No', of course. But are you quite ready to say 'Yes'? Very well, wait a fortnight, and don't see more of him than you can help in the meantime. Now, let them send for my _mousseuse_. There is nothing so exhausting to the aged as the emotions of young people."

That evening, when Lady Everington met Geoffrey at the theatre, she took him severely to task for treachery, secrecy and decadence. He, was very humble and admitted all his faults except the last, pleading as his excuse that he could not get Asako out of his head.

"Yes, that is a symptom," said her Ladyship; "you are clearly stricken. So I fear I am too late to effect a rescue. All I can do is to congratulate you both. But, remember, a wife is not nearly so fugitive as a melody, unless she is the wrong kind of wife."

It was a wrench for the little lady to part with the oldest of her friendships, and to give up her Geoffrey to the care of this decorative stranger whose qualities were unknown, and undeveloped. But she knew what the answer would be at the end of the fortnight. So she steeled her nerves to laugh at her friends' commiserations and to make the marriage of her godchildren one of the season's successes. It would certainly be an interesting addition to her museum of domestic dramas.

* * * * *

There was one person whom Lady Everington was determined to pump for information on that wedding-day, and had drawn into the net of her invitations for this very purpose. It was Count Saito, the Japanese Ambassador.

She cornered him as he was admiring the presents, and whisked him away to the silence and twilight of her husband's study.

"I am so glad you were able to come, Count Saito," she began. "I suppose you know the Fujinamis, Asako's relatives in Tokyo?"

"No, I do not know them." His Excellency answered, but his tone conveyed to the lady's instinct that he personally would not wish to know them.

"But you know the name, do you not?"

"Yes, I have heard the name; there are many families called Fujinami in Japan."

"Are they very rich?"

"Yes, I believe there are some who are very rich," said the little diplomat, who clearly was ill at ease.

"Where does their money come from?" his inquisitor went on remorselessly, "You are keeping something from me, Count Saito. Please be frank, if there is any mystery."

"Oh no, Lady Everington, there is no mystery, I am sure. There is one family of Fujinami who have many houses and lands in Tokyo and other towns. I will be quite open with you. They are rather what you in England call *_nouveaux riches_*."

"Really!" Her Ladyship was taken aback for a moment. "But you would never notice it with Asako, would you? I mean, she does not drop her Japanese aitches, and that sort of thing, does she?"

"Oh no," Count Saito reassured her, "I do not think Mademoiselle Asako talks Japanese language, so she cannot drop her aitches."

"I never thought of that," his hostess continued, "I thought that if a Japanese had money, he must be a *_daimyo_*, or something."

The Ambassador smiled.

"English people," he said, "do not know very well the true condition of Japan. Of course we have our rich new families and our poor old

families just as you have in England. In some aspects our society is just the same as yours. In others, it is so, different, that you would lose your way at once in a maze of ideas which would seem to you quite upside down."

Lady Everington interrupted his reflections in a desperate attempt to get something out of him by a surprise attack.

"How interesting," she said, "it will be for Geoffrey Harrington and his wife to visit Japan and find out all about it."

The Ambassador's manner changed.

"No, I do not think," he said, "I do not think that is a good thing at all. They must not do that. You must not let them."

"But why not?"

"I say to all Japanese men and women who live a long time in foreign countries or who marry foreign people, 'Do not go back to Japan,' Japan is like a little pot and the foreign world is like a big garden. If you plant a tree from the pot into the garden and let it grow, you cannot put it back into the pot again."

"But, in this case, that is not the only reason," objected Lady Everington.

"No, there are many other reasons too," the Ambassador admitted; and he rose from his sofa, indicating that the interview was at an end.

* * * * *

The bridal pair left in a motor-car for Folkestone under a hailstorm of rice, and with the propitious white slipper dangling from the number-plate behind.

When all her guests were gone, Lady Everington fled to her boudoir and collapsed in a little heap of sobbing finery on the broad divan. She was overtired, no doubt; but the sense of her mistake lay heavy upon her, and the feeling that she had sacrificed to it her best friend, the most humanly valuable of all the people who resorted to her house. An evil cloud of mystery hung over the young marriage, one of those sinister unfamiliar forces which travellers bring home from the East, the curse of a god or a secret poison or a hideous disease.

It would be so natural for those two to want to visit Japan and to know their second home. Yet both Sir Ralph Cairns and Count Saito, the only two men that day who knew anything about the real conditions, had insisted that such a visit would be fatal. And who were these Fujinamis whom Count Saito knew, but did not know? Why had she, who was so socially careful, taken so much for granted just because Asako was a Japanese?

CHAPTER II

HONEYMOON

_Asa no kami
Ware wa kezuraji
Utsukushiki
Kimi ga ta-makura
Fureteshi mono wo._

(My) morning sleep hair
I will not comb;
For it has been in contact with
The pillowing hand of
My beautiful Lord!

The Barringtons left England for a prolonged honeymoon, for Geoffrey was now free to realise his favourite project of travelling abroad. So they became numbered among that shoal of English people out of England, who move restless leisure between Paris and the Nile.

Geoffrey had resigned his commission in the army. His friends thought that this was a mistake. For the loss of a man's career, even when it is uncongenial to him, is a serious amputation, and entails a lesion of spiritual blood. He had refused his father's suggestion of settling down in a house on the Brandan estate, for Lord Brandan was an unpleasing old gentleman, a frequenter of country bars and country barmaids. His son wished to keep his young bride as far away as possible from a spectacle of which he was heartily ashamed.

First of all they went to Paris, which Asako adored; for was it not her home? But this time she made the acquaintance of a Paris unknown to her, save by rumour, in the convent days or within the discreet precincts of Monsieur Murata's villa. She was enchanted by the theatres, the shops, the restaurants, the music, and the life which danced around her. She wanted to rent an appartement, and to live there for the rest of her existence.

"But the season is almost over," said her husband; "everybody will be leaving."

Unaccustomed as yet to his freedom, he still felt constrained to do the same as Everybody.

Before leaving Paris, they paid a visit to the Auteuil villa, which had been Asako's home for so many years.

Murata was the manager of a big Japanese firm in Paris. He had spent almost all his life abroad and the last twenty years of it in the French capital, so that even in appearance, except for his short stature and his tilted eyes, he had come to look like a Frenchman with his beard a l'imperiale, and his quick bird-like gestures. His wife was a Japanese, but she too had lost almost all traces of her native mannerisms.

Asako Fujinami had been brought to Paris by her father, who had died there while still a young man. He had entrusted his only child to the care of the Muratas with instructions that she should be educated in European ways and ideas, that she should hold no communication with her relatives in Japan, and that eventually a white husband should be provided for her. He had left his whole fortune in trust for her, and

the interest was forwarded regularly to M. Murata by a Tokyo lawyer, to be used for her benefit as her guardian might deem best. This money was to be the only tie between Asako and her native land.

To cut off a child from its family, of which by virtue of vested interests it must still be an important member, was a proceeding so revolutionary to all respectable Japanese ideas that even the enlightened Murata demurred. In Japan the individual counts for so little, the family for so much. But Fujinami had insisted, and disobedience to a man's dying wish brings the curse of a "rough ghost" upon the recalcitrant, and all kinds of evil consequences.

So the Muratas took Asako and cherished her as much as their hearts, withered by exile and by unnatural living, were capable of cherishing anything. She became a daughter of the well-to-do French bourgeoisie, strictly but affectionately disciplined with the proper restraints on the natural growth of her brain and individuality.

Geoffrey Barrington was not very favourably impressed by the Murata household. He wondered how so bright a little flower as Asako could have been reared in such gloomy surroundings. The spirits dominant in the villa were respectable economy and slavish imitation of the tastes and habits of Parisian friends. The living-rooms were as impersonal as the rooms of a boarding-house. Neutral tints abounded, ugly browns and nightmare vegetable patterns on carpets, furniture and wallpapers. There was a marked tendency towards covers, covers for the chairs and sofas, tablecloths and covers for the tablecloths, covers for cushion-covers, antimacassars, lamp-stands, vase-stands and every kind of decorative duster. Everywhere the thick smell of concealed grime told of insufficient servants and ineffective sweeping. There was not one ornament or picture which recalled Japan, or gave a clue to the personal tastes of the owners.

Geoffrey had expected to be the nervous witness of an affecting scene between his wife and her adopted parents. But no, the greetings were polite and formal. Asako's frock and jewellery were admired, but without that note of angry envy which often brightens the duller talk between ladies in England. Then, they sat down to an atrocious lunch eaten in complete silence.

When the meal was over, Murata drew Geoffrey aside into his shingly garden.

"I think that you will be content with our Asa San," he said; "the character is still plastic. In England it is different; but in France and in Japan we say it is the husband who must make the character of his wife. She is the plain white paper; let him take his brush and write on it what he will. Asa San is a very sweet girl. She is very easy to manage. She has a beautiful disposition. She does not tell lies without reason. She does not wish to make strange friends. I do not think you will have trouble with her."

"He talks about her rather as if she were a horse," thought Geoffrey. Murata went on,--

"The Japanese woman is the ivy which clings to the tree. She does not wish to disobey."

"You think Asako is still very Japanese, then?" asked Geoffrey.

"Not her manners, or her looks, or even her thoughts," replied Murata, "but nothing can change the heart."

"Then do you think she is homesick sometimes for Japan?" said her husband.

"Oh no," smiled Murata. The little wizened man was full of smiles. "She left Japan when she was not two years old. She remembers nothing at all."

"I think one day we shall go to Japan," said Geoffrey, "when we get tired of Europe, you know. It is a wonderful country, I am told; and it does not seem right that Asako should know nothing about it. Besides, I should like to look into her affairs and find out about her investments."

Murata was staring at his yellow boots with an embarrassed air. It suddenly struck the Englishman that he, Geoffrey Harrington, was related to people who looked like that, and who now had the right to call him cousin. He shivered.

"You can trust her lawyers," said the Japanese, "Mr. Ito is an old friend of mine. You may be quite certain that Asako's money is safe."

"Oh yes, of course," assented Geoffrey, "but what exactly are her investments? I think I ought to know."

Murata began to laugh nervously, as all Japanese do when embarrassed.

"_Mon Dieu_!" he exclaimed, "but I do not know myself. The money has been paid regularly for nearly twenty years; and I know the Fujinami are very rich. Indeed, Captain Barrington, I do not think Asako would like Japan. It was her father's last wish that she should never return there."

"But why?" asked Geoffrey. He felt that Murata was keeping something from him. The little man answered,--

"He thought that for a woman the life is more happy in Europe; he wished Asako to forget altogether that she was Japanese."

"Yes, but now she is married and her future is fixed. She is not going back permanently to Japan, but just to see the country. I think we would both of us like to. People say it is a magnificent country."

"You are very kind," said Murata, "to speak so of my country. But the foreign people who marry Japanese are happy if they stay in their own country, and Japanese who marry foreigners are happy if they go away from Japan. But if they stay in Japan they are not happy. The national atmosphere in Japan is too strong for those people who are not Japanese or are only half Japanese. They fade. Besides life in Japan is very poor and rough. I do not like it myself."

Somehow Geoffrey could not accept these as being the real reasons. He had never had a long talk with a Japanese man before; but he felt that if they were all like that, so formal, so unnatural, so secretive, then he had better keep out of the range of Asako's relatives.

He wondered what his wife really thought of the Muratas, and during the return to their hotel, he asked,--

"Well, little girl, do you want to go back again and live at Auteuil?"

She shook her head.

"But it is nice to think you have always got an extra home in Paris, isn't it?" he went on, fishing for an avowal that home was in his arms only, a kind of conversation which was the wine of life to him at that period.

"No," she answered with a little shudder, "I don't call that home."

Geoffrey's conventionality was a little bit shocked at this lack of affection; he was also disappointed at not getting exactly the expected answer.

"Why, what was wrong with it?" he asked.

"Oh, it was not pretty or comfortable," she said, "they were so afraid to spend money. When I wash my hands, they say, 'Do not use too much soap; it is waste.'"

* * * * *

Asako was like a little prisoner released into the sunlight. She dreaded the idea of being thrust back into darkness again.

In this new life of hers anything would have made her happy, that is to say, anything new, anything given to her, anything good to eat or drink, anything soft and shimmery to wear, anything--so long as her big husband was with her. He was the most fascinating of all her novelties. He was much nicer than Lady Everington; for he was not always saying, "Don't," or making clever remarks, which she could not understand. He gave her absolutely her own way, and everything that she admired. He reminded her of an old Newfoundland dog who had been her slave when she was a little girl.

He used to play with her as he would have played with a child, watching her as she tried on her finery, hiding things for her to find, holding them over her head and making her jump for them like a puppy, arranging her ornaments for her in those continual private exhibitions which took up so much of her time. Then she would ring the bell and summon all the chambermaids within call to come and admire; and Geoffrey would stand among all these womenfolk, listening to the chorus of "_Mon Dieu!_" and "_Ah, que c'est beau!_" and "_Ah, qu'elle est gentille!_" like some Hector who had strayed into the _gynaecium_ of Priam's palace. He felt a little foolish, perhaps, but very happy, happy in his wife's naive happiness and affection, which did not require any mental effort to understand, nor that panting pursuit on which he had embarked more than once in order to keep up with the witty flirtatiousness of some of the beauties of Lady Everington's _salon_.

Happiness shone out of Asako like light. But would she always be happy? There were the possibilities of the future to be reckoned with, sickness, childbirth, and the rearing of children, the hidden development of the character which so often grows away from what

it once cherished, the baleful currents of outside influences, the attraction and repulsion of so-called friends and enemies all of which complicate the primitive simplicity of married life and forfeit the honeymoon Eden. Adam and Eve in the garden of the Creation can hear the voice of God whispering in the evening breeze; they can live without jars and ambitions, without suspicion and without reproaches. They have no parents, no parents-in-law, no brothers, sisters, aunts, or guardians, no friends to lay the train of scandal or to be continually pulling them from each other's arms. But the first influence which crosses the walls of their paradise, the first being to whom they speak, which possesses the semblance of a human voice, is most certainly Satan and that Old Serpent, who was a liar and a slanderer from the beginning, and whose counsels will lead inevitably to the withdrawal of God's presence and to the doom of a life of pain and labor.

There was one cloud in the heaven of their happiness. Geoffrey was inclined to tease Asako about her native country. His ideas about Japan were gleaned chiefly from musical comedies. He would call his wife Yum Yum and Pitti Sing. He would fix the end of one of her black veils under his hat, and would ask her whether she liked him better with a pigtail.

"Captain Geoffrey," she would complain, "it is the Chinese who wear the pigtail; they are a very savage people."

Then he would call her his little geisha, and this she resented; for she knew from the Muratas that geisha were bad women who took husbands away from their wives, and that was no joking matter.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Geoffrey, taken aback by this sudden reproof: "they are dear little things like you, darling, and they bring you tea and wave fans behind your head, and I would like to have twenty of them--to wait upon you!"

He would tease her about a supposed fondness for rice, for chop-sticks, for paper umbrellas and jiujitsu. She liked him to tease her, just as a child likes to be teased, while all the time on the verge of tears. With Asako, tears and laughter were never far apart.

"Why do you tease me because I am Japanese?" she would sob; "besides, I'm not really. I can't help it. I can't help it!"

"But, sweetheart," her Captain Geoffrey would say, suddenly ashamed of his elephantine humour, "there's nothing to cry about. I would be proud to be a Japanese. They are jolly brave people. They gave the Russians a jolly good hiding."

It made her feel well to hear him praise her people, but she would say:

"No, no, they're not. I don't want to be a Jap. I don't like them. They're ugly and spiteful. Why can't we choose what we are? I would be an English girl--or perhaps French," she added, thinking of the Rue de la Paix.

* * * * *

They left Paris and went to Deauville; and here it was that the serpent first crawled into Eden, whispering of forbidden fruit. These serpents were charming people, amusing men and smart women, all anxious to make the acquaintance of the latest sensation, the Japanese millionairess and her good-looking husband.

Asako lunched with them and dined with them and sat with them near the sea in wonderful bathing costumes which it would be a shame to wet. Conscious of the shortcomings of her figure as compared with those of the lissom mermaids who surrounded her, Asako returned to kimonos, much to her husband's surprise; and the mermaids had to confess themselves beaten.

She listened to their talk and learned a hundred things, but another hundred at least remained hidden from her.

Geoffrey left his wife to amuse herself in the cosmopolitan society of the French watering-place. He wanted this. All the wives whom he had ever known seemed to enjoy themselves best when away from their husbands' company. He did not quite trust the spirit of mutual adoration, which the gods had given to him and his bride. Perhaps it was an unhealthy symptom. Worse still, it might be Bad Form. He wanted Asako to be natural and to enjoy herself, and not to make their love into a prison house.

But he felt a bit lonely when he was away from her. Occupation did not seem to come easily to him as it did when she was there to suggest it. Sometimes he would loaf up and down on the esplanade; and sometimes he would take strenuous swims in the sea. He became the prey of the bores who haunt every seaside place at home and abroad, lurking for lonely and polite people upon whom they may unload their conversation.

All these people seemed either to have been in Japan themselves or to have friends and relations who knew the country thoroughly.

A wonderful land, they assured him. The nation of the future, the Garden of the East, but of course Captain Barrington knew Japan well. No, he had never been there? Ah, but Mrs. Barrington must have described it all to him. Impossible! Really? Not since she was a baby? How very extraordinary! A charming country, so quaint, so original, so picturesque, such a place to relax in; and then the Japanese girls, the little *_mousmes_*, in their bright kimonos, who came fluttering round like little butterflies, who were so gentle and soft and grateful; but there! Captain Barrington was a married man, that was no affair of his. Ha! Ha!

The elderly *_roues_*, who buzzed like February flies in the sunshine of Deauville, seemed to have particularly fruity memories of tea-house sprees and oriental philanderings under the cherry-blossoms of Yokohama. Evidently, Japan was just like the musical comedies.

Geoffrey began to be ashamed of his ignorance concerning his wife's native country. Somebody had asked him, what exactly *_bushido_* was. He had answered at random that it was made of rice and curry powder. By the hilarious reception given to this explanation he knew that he must have made a *_gaffe_*. So he asked one of the more erudite bores to give him the names of the best books about Japan. He would "mug it up," and get some answers off pat to the leading questions. The erudite one promptly lent him some volumes by Lafcadio Hearn and Pierre Loti's

Madame Chrysantheme. He read the novel first of all. Rather spicy, wasn't it?

Asako found the book. It was an illustrated edition; and the little drawings of Japanese scenes pleased her immensely, so that she began to read the letter press.

"It is the story of a bad man and a bad woman," she said; "Geoffrey, why do you read bad things? They bring bad conditions."

Geoffrey smiled. He was wondering whether the company of the fictitious _Chrysantheme_ was more demoralizing than that of the actual Mme. Laroche Meyerbeer, with whom his wife had been that day for a picnic lunch.

"Besides, it isn't fair," his wife continued. "People read that book and then they think that all Japanese girls are bad like that."

"Why, darling, I didn't think you had read it," Geoffrey expostulated, "who has been telling you about it?"

"The Vicomte de Brie," Asako answered. "He called me _Chrysantheme_ and I asked him why."

"Oh, did he?" said Geoffrey. Really it was time to put an end to lunch picnics and mermaidism. But Asako was so happy and so shingly innocent.

She returned to her circle of admirers, and Geoffrey to his studies of the Far East. He read the Lafcadio Hearn books, and did not perceive that he was taking opium. The wonderful sentences of that master of prose poetry rise before the eyes in whorls of narcotic smoke. They lull the brain as in a dream, and form themselves gradually into visions of a land more beautiful than any land that has ever existed anywhere, a country of vivid rice plains and sudden hills, of gracious forests and red temple gateways, of wise priests and folk-lore imagery, of a simple-hearted smiling people with children bright as flowers laughing and playing in unfailing sunlight, a country where everything is kind, gentle, small, neat, artistic, and spotlessly clean, where men become gods not by sudden apotheosis but by the easy processes of nature, a country, in short, which is the reverse of our own poor vexed continent where the monstrous and the hideous multiply daily.

One afternoon Geoffrey was lounging on the terrace of the hotel reading _Kokoro_, when his attention was attracted by the arrival of Mme. Laroche Meyerbeer's motor-car with Asako, her hostess and another woman embedded in its depths. Asako was the first to leap out. She went up to her apartment without looking to right or left, and before her husband had time to reach her. Mme. Meyerbeer watched this arrow flight and shrugged her shoulders before lazily alighting.

"Is all well?" asked Geoffrey.

"No serious damage," smiled the lady, who is known in Deauville as _Madame Cythere_, "but you had better go and console her. I think she has seen the devil for the first time."

He opened the door of their sunny bedroom, and found Asako packing

feverishly, and sobbing in spasms.

"My poor little darling," he said, lifting her in his arms, "whatever is the matter?"

He laid her on the sofa, took off her hat, and loosened her dress, until gradually she became coherent.

"He tried to kiss me," she sobbed.

"Who did?" her husband asked.

"The Vicomte de Brie."

"Damned little monkey," cried Geoffrey, "I'll break every miserable bone in his pretence of a body."

"Oh, no, no," protested Asako, "let us go away from here at once. Let us go to Switzerland, anywhere."

The serpent had got into the garden, but he had not been a very adroit reptile. He had shown his fangs; and the woman had promptly bruised his head and had given him an eye like an Impressionist sunset, which for several days he had to hide from the ridicule of his friends.

But Asako too had been grievously injured in the innocence of her heart; and it took all the snow winds of the Engadine to blow away from her face the hot defilement of the man's breath. She clung closely to her husband's protection. She, who had hitherto abandoned herself to excessive amiability, barbed the walls of their violated paradise with the broken glass of bare civility. Every man became suspect, the German professors culling Alpine plants, the mountain maniacs with their eyes fixed on peaks to conquer. She had no word for any of them. Even the manlike womenfolk, who golfed and rowed and clambered, were to her indignant eyes dangerous panders to the lusts of men, disguised allies of _Madame Cythere_.

"Are they all bad?" she asked Geoffrey.

"No, little girl, I don't suppose so. They look too dismal to be bad."

Geoffrey was grateful for the turn of events which had delivered up his wife again into his sole company. He had missed her society more than he dared confess; for uxoriousness is a pitiful attitude. In fact, it is Bad Form.

At this period he wanted her as a kind of mirror for his own mind and for his own person. She saw to it that his clothes were spotless and that his tie was straight. Of course, he always dressed for dinner even when they dined in their room. She too would dress herself up in her new finery for his eyes alone. She would listen to him laying down the law on subjects which he would not dare broach were he talking to any one else. She flattered him in that silent way which is so soothing to a man of his character. Her mind seemed to absorb his thoughts with the readiness of blotting paper; and he did not pause to observe whether the impression had come out backwards or forwards. He who had been so mute among Lady Everington's geniuses fell all of a sudden into a loquaciousness which was merely the reaction of his love for his wife, the instinct which makes the male bird sing. He just

went on talking; and every day he became in his own estimation and in that of Asako, a more intelligent, a more original and a more eloquent man.

CHAPTER III

EASTWARDS

_Nagaki yo no
To no nemuri no
Miname-zame,
Nami nori fune no
Oto no yoki kana_.

From the deep sleep
Of a long night
Waking,
Sweet is the sound
Of the ship as it rides the waves.

When August snow fell upon St. Moritz, the Barringtons descended to Milan, Florence, Venice and Rome. Towards Christmas they found their way to the Riviera, where they met Lady Everington at Monte Carlo, very indignant, or pretending to be so, at the neglect with which she had been treated.

"Fairy godmothers are important people," she said, "and very easily offended. Then, they turn you into wild animals, or send you to sleep for a hundred years. Why didn't you write to me, child?"

They were sitting on the terrace with the Casino behind them, overlooking the blue Mediterranean. A few yards farther on, a tall, young Englishman was chatting and laughing with a couple of girls too elaborately beautiful and too dazzlingly gowned for any world but the half-world. Suddenly he turned, and noticed Lady Everington. With a courteous farewell to his companions, he advanced to greet her.

"Aubrey Laking," she exclaimed, "you never answered the letter I wrote to you at Tokyo."

"Dear Lady Georgie, I left Tokyo ages ago. It followed me back to England; and I am now second secretary at Christiania. That is why I am in Monte Carlo!"

"Then let me introduce you to Asako Fujinami, who is now Mrs. Barrington. You must tell her all about Tokyo. It is her native city; but she has not seen it since she was in long clothes, if Japanese babies wear such things."

Aubrey Laking and Barrington had been at Eton together. They were old friends, and were delighted to meet once more. Barrington, especially, was pleased to have this opportunity to hear about Japan from one who had but lately left the country, and who was moreover a fluent and agreeable talker. Laking had not resided in Japan long enough to get tired of orientalism. He described the quaint, the picturesque, the

amusing side of life in the East. He was full of enthusiasm for the land of soft voices and smiling faces, where countless little shops spread their wares under the light of the evening lanterns, where the twang of the _samisen_ and the _geisha's_ song are heard coming from the lighted tea-house, and the shadow of her helmet-like _coiffure_ is seen appearing and disappearing in silhouette against the paper _shoji_.

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The East was drawing the Barringtons towards its perilous coasts. Laking's position at the Tokyo Embassy had been taken by Reggie Forsyth, one of Geoffrey's oldest friends, his best man at his wedding and a light of Lady Everington's circle. Already, Geoffrey had sent him a post-card, saying, "Warm up the _sake_ bottle," (Geoffrey was becoming quite learned in things Japanese), "and expect friends shortly."

However, when the Barringtons did at last tear themselves from the Riviera, they announced rather disingenuously that they were going to Egypt.

"They are too happy," Lady Everington said to Laking a few days later, "and they know nothing. I am afraid there will be trouble."

"Oh, Lady Georgie," he replied, "I have never known you to be a prophetess of gloom. I would have thought the auspices were most fortunate."

"They ought to quarrel more than they do," Lady Everington complained. "She ought to contradict him more than she does. There must be a volcanic element in marriage. It is a sign of trouble coming when the fires are quiet."

"But they have got plenty of money," expostulated Aubrey, whose troubles were invariably connected with his banking account, "and they are very fond of each other. Where is the trouble to come from?"

"Trouble is on the lookout for all of us, Aubrey," said his companion, "it is no good flying from it, even. The only thing to do is to look it in the face and laugh at it; then it gets annoyed sometimes, and goes away. But those two poor dears are sailing into the middle of it, and they don't even know how to laugh yet."

"You think that Egypt is hopelessly demoralising. Thousands of people go there and come safely home, almost all, in fact, except Robert Hichens's heroines."

"Oh no, not in Egypt," said Lady Everington; "Egypt is only a stepping-stone. They are going to Japan."

"Well, certainly Japan is harmless enough. There is nobody there worth flirting with except us at the Embassies, and we generally have our hands full. As for the visitors, they are always under the influence of Cook's tickets and Japanese guides."

"Aubrey dear, you think that trouble can only come from flirting or money."

"I know that those two preoccupations are an abundant source of trouble."

"What do you think of Mrs. Barrington?" asked her Ladyship, appearing to change the subject.

"Oh, a very sweet little thing."

"Like your lady friends in Tokyo, the Japanese ones, I mean?"

"Not in the least. Japanese ladies look very picturesque, but they are as dull as dolls. They sidle along in the wake of their husbands, and don't expect to be spoken to."

"And have you no more intimate experience?" asked Lady Everington. "Really, Aubrey, you have not been living up to your reputation."

"Well, Lady Georgie," the young man proceeded, gazing at his polished boots with a well-assumed air of embarrassment, "since I know that you are one of the enlightened ones, I will confess to you that I did keep a little establishment _a la_ Pierre Loti. My Japanese teacher thought it would be a good way of improving my knowledge of the local idiom; and this knowledge meant an extra hundred pounds to me for interpreter's allowance, as it is called. I thought, too, that it would be a relief after diplomatic dinner parties to be able to swear for an hour or so, big round oaths in the company of a dear beloved one who would not understand me. So my teacher undertook to provide me with a suitable female companion. He did. In fact, he introduced me to his sister; and the suitability was based on the fact that she held the same position under my predecessor, a man whom I dislike exceedingly. But this I only found out later on. She was dull, deadly dull. I couldn't even make her jealous. She was as dull as my Japanese grammar; and when I had passed my examination and burnt my books, I dismissed her."

"Aubrey, what a very wicked story!"

"No, Lady Georgie, it was not even wicked. She was not real enough to sin with. The affair had not even the excitement of badness to keep it going."

"Do you know the Japanese well?" Lady Everington returned to the highroad of her inquiry.

"No, nobody does; they are a most secretive people."

"Do you think that, if the Barringtons go to Japan, there is any danger of Asako being drawn back into the bosom of her family?"

"No, I shouldn't think so," Laking replied, "Japanese life is so very uncomfortable, you know, even to the Japs themselves, when once they have got used to living in Europe or America. They sleep on the floor, their clothes are inconvenient, and their food is nasty, even in the houses of the rich ones."

"Yes, it must be a peculiar country. What do you think is the greatest shock for the average traveller who goes there?"

"Lady Georgie, you are asking me very searching questions to-day. I

don't think I will answer any more."

"Just this one," she pleaded.

He considered his boots again for a moment, and then, raising his face to hers with that humorous challenging look which he assumes when on the verge of some indiscretion, he replied,--

"The _Yoshiwara_."

"Yes," said her Ladyship, "I have heard of such a place. It is a kind of Vanity Fair, isn't it, for all the _cocottes_ Of Tokyo?"

"It's more than that," Laking answered; "it is a market of human flesh, with nothing to disguise the crude fact except the picturesqueness of the place. It is a square enclosure as large as a small town. In this enclosure are shops, and in the shop windows women are displayed just like goods, or like animals in cages; for the windows have wooden bars. Some of the girls sit there stolidly like stuffed images, some of them come to the bars and try to catch hold of the passers-by, just like monkeys, and joke with them and shout after them. But I could not understand what they said--fortunately, perhaps. The girls,--there must be several thousands--are all dressed up in bright kimonos. It really is a very pretty sight, until one begins to think. They have their price tickets hung up in the shop windows, one shilling up to one pound. That is the greatest shock which Japan has in store for the ordinary tourist."

Lady Everington was silent for a moment; her flippant companion had become quite serious.

"After all," she said, "is it any worse than Piccadilly Circus at night?"

"It is not a question of better or worse," argued Laking. "Such a purely mercenary system is a terrible offence to our most cherished belief. We may be hypocrites, but our hypocrisy itself is an admission of guilt and an act of worship. To us, even to the readiest sinners among us, woman is always something divine. The lowest assignation of the streets has at least a disguise of romance. It symbolises the words and the ways of Love, even if it parodies them. But to the Japanese, woman must be merely animal. You buy a girl as you buy a cow."

Lady Everington shivered, but she tried to live up to her reputation of being shocked by nothing.

"Well, that is true, after all, whether in Piccadilly or in the Yoshiwara. All prostitution is just a commercial transaction."

"Perhaps," said the young diplomat, "but what about the Ideal at the back of our minds? Passion is often a grotesque incarnation of the Ideal, like a savage's rude image of his god. A glimpse of the ideal is possible in Piccadilly, and impossible in the Yoshiwara. The divine something was visible in Marguerite Gautier; little Hugh saw it even in Nana. For one thing, here in London, in the dirtiest of sordid dramas, it is still the woman who gives, but in Japan it is always the man who takes."

"Aubrey," said his friend, "I had no idea that you were a poet, or in other words that you ever talked nonsense without laughing. You think such a shock is strong enough to upset the Barrington _menage_?"

"It will give furiously to think," he answered, "to poor old Geoffrey, who is a very straight, clean and honest fellow, not overused to furious thinking. I suppose if one married a monkey, one might persuade oneself of her humanity, until one saw her kindred in cages."

"Poor little Asako, my latest god-daughter!" cried Lady Everington. "Really, Aubrey, you are very rude!"

"I did not mean to be," said Laking penitently. "She is a most ingratiating little creature, like a lazy kitten; but I think it is unwise for him to take her to Japan. All kinds of latent orientalisms may develop."

* * * * *

The spring was at hand, the season of impulse, when we obey most readily the sudden stirrings of our hearts. Even in the torrid climate of Egypt, squalls of rain passed over like stray birds of passage. Asako Barrington felt the fresh influence and the desire to do new things in new places. Hitherto she had evinced very little inclination to revisit the home of her ancestors. But on their return from the temples of Luxor, she said quite unexpectedly to Geoffrey,--

"If we go to Japan now, we shall be in time to see the cherry-blossoms."

"Why, little Yum Yum," cried her husband, delighted, "are you tired of Pharaohs?"

"Egypt is very interesting," said Asako, correctly; "it is wonderful to think of these great places standing here for thousands and thousands of years. But it makes one sad, don't you think? Everybody here seems to have died long, long ago. It would be nice to see green fields again, wouldn't it, Geoffrey dearest?"

The voice of the Spring was speaking clearly.

"And you really want to go to Japan, sweetheart? It's the first time I've heard you say you want to go."

"Uncle and Aunt Murata in Paris used always to say about now, 'If we go back to Japan we shall be in time to see the cherry-blossoms.'"

"Why," asked Geoffrey, "do the Japanese make such a fuss about their cherry-blossoms?"

"They must be very pretty," answered his wife, "like great clouds of snow. Besides, the cherry-flowers are supposed to be like the Japanese spirit."

"So you are my little cherry-blossom--is that right?"

"Oh no, not the women," she replied, "the men are the cherry-blossoms."

Geoffrey laughed. It seemed absurd to him to compare a man to the frail and transient beauty of a flower.

"Then what about the Japanese ladies," he asked, "if the men are blossoms?"

Asako did not think they had any special flower to symbolise their charms. She suggested,--

"The bamboo, they say, because the wives have to bend under the storms when their husbands are angry. But, Geoffrey, you are never angry. You do not give me a chance to be like the bamboo."

Next day, he boldly booked their tickets for Tokyo.

The long sea voyage was a pleasant experience, broken by fleeting visits to startled friends in Ceylon and at Singapore, and enlivened by the close ephemeral intimacies of life on board ship.

There was a motley company on board _S.S. Sumatra_; a company whose most obvious elements, the noisy and bibulous pests in the smoking-room and the ladies of mysterious destination with whom they dallied, were dismissed by Geoffrey at once as being terrible bounders. Beneath this scum more congenial spirits came to light, officers and Government officials returning to their posts, and a few globe-trotters of leisure. Everybody seemed anxious to pay attention to the charming Japanese lady; and from such incessant attention it is difficult to escape within the narrow bounds of ship life. The only way to keep off the impossibles was to form a bodyguard of the possibles. The seclusion of the honeymoon paradise had to be opened up for once in a way.

Of course, there was much talk about the East; but it was a different point of view, from that of the enthusiasts of Deauville and the Riviera. These men and women had many of them lived in India, the Malay States, Japan, or the open ports of China, lived there to earn their bread and butter, not to dream about the Magic of the Orient. For such as these the romance had faded. The pages of their busy lives were written within a mourning border of discontent, of longing for that home land, to which on the occasion of their rare holidays they returned so readily, and which seemed to have no particular place or use for them when they did return. They were members of the British Dispersion; but their Zion was of more comfort to them as a sweet memory than as an actual home.

"Yes," they would say about the land of their exile, "it is very picturesque."

But their faces, lined or pale, their bitterness and their reticence, told of years of strain, laboriously money-earning, in lands where relaxations are few and forced, where climatic conditions are adverse, where fevers lurk, and where the white minority are posted like soldiers in a lonely fort, ever suspicious, ever on the watch.

* * * * *

The most faithful of Asako's bodyguard was a countryman of her own, Viscount Kamimura, the son of a celebrated Japanese statesman and diplomat, who, after completing his course at Cambridge, was returning

to his own country for the first time after many years.

He was a shy gentle youth, very quiet and refined, a little effeminate, even, in his exaggerated gracefulness and in his meticulous care for his clothes and his person. He avoided all company except that of the Barringtons, probably because a similarity in circumstances formed a bond between him and his country-woman.

He had a high, intellectual forehead, the beautiful deep brown eyes of Asako, curling, sarcastic lips, a nose almost aquiline but starting a fraction of an inch too low between his eyes. He had read everything, he remembered everything, and he had played lawn tennis for his university.

He was returning to Japan to be married. When Geoffrey asked him who his fiancée was, he replied that he did not know yet, but that his relatives would tell him as soon as ever he arrived in Japan.

"Haven't you got any say in the matter?" asked the Englishman.

"Oh yes," he answered, "If I actually dislike her, I need not marry her; but, of course, the choice is limited, so I must try not to be too hard to please."

Geoffrey thought that it must be because of his extreme aristocracy that so few maidens in Japan were worthy of his hand. But Asako asked the question,--

"Why is the choice so small?"

"You see," he said, "there are not many girls in Japan who can speak both English and French, and as I am going into the Diplomatic Service and shall leave Japan again shortly, that is an absolute necessity; besides, she must have a very good degree from her school."

Geoffrey could hardly restrain himself from laughing. This idea of choosing a wife like a governess for her linguistic accomplishments seemed to him exceedingly comic.

"You don't mind trusting other people," he said, "to arrange your marriage for you?"

"Certainly not," said the young Japanese, "they are my own relatives, and they will do their best for me. They are all older than I am, and they have had the experience of their own marriages."

"But," said Geoffrey, "when you saw your friends in England choosing for themselves, and falling in love and marrying for love's sake--?"

"Some of them chose for themselves and married barmaids and divorced persons, just for the reason that they were in love and uncontrolled. So they brought shame on their families, and are probably now very unhappy. I think they would have done better if they had let their relatives choose for them."

"Yes; but the others who marry girls of their own set?"

"I think their choice is not really free at all. I do not think it is so much the girl who attracts them. It is the plans and intentions of

those around them which urge them on. It is a kind of mesmerism. The parents of the young man and the parents of the young girl make the marriage by force of will. That also is a good way. It is not so very different from our system in Japan."

"Don't you think that people in England marry because they love each other?" asked Asako.

"Perhaps so," replied Kamimura, "but in our Japanese language we have no word which is quite the same as your word Love. So they say we do not know what this Love is. It may be so, perhaps. Anyhow Mr. Barrington will not wish to learn Japanese, I think."

Geoffrey liked the young man. He was a good athlete, he was unassuming and well-bred, he clearly knew the difference between Good and Bad Form. Geoffrey's chief misgiving with regard to Japan had been a doubt as to the wisdom of making the acquaintance of his wife's kindred. How dreadful if they turned out to be a collection of oriental curios with whom he would not have one idea in common!

The company of this young aristocrat, in no way distinguishable from an Englishman except for a certain grace and maturity, reassured him. No doubt his wife would have cousins like this; clean, manly fellows who would take him shooting and with whom he could enjoy a game of golf. He thought that Kamimura must be typical of the young Japanese of the upper classes. He did not realize that he was an official product, chosen by his Government and carefully moulded and polished, not to be a Japanese at home, but to be a Japanese abroad, the qualified representative of a First Class Power.

Kamimura left the boat with them at Colombo and joined them in their visit to some tea-planting relatives. He was ready to do the same at Singapore, but he received an urgent cable from Japan recalling him at once.

"I must not be too late for my own wedding," he said, during their last lunch together at Raffles's Hotel. "It would be a terrible sin against the laws of Filial Piety."

"Whatever is that?" asked Asako.

"Dear Mrs. Barrington, are you a daughter of Japan, and have never heard of the Twenty-four Children?"

"No; who are they?"

"They are model children, the paragons of goodness, celebrated because of their love for their fathers and mothers. One of them walked miles and miles every day to get water from a certain spring for his sick mother; another, when a tiger was going to eat his father, rushed to the animal and cried, 'No, eat me instead!' Little boys and girls in Japan are always being told to be like the Twenty-four Children."

"Oh, how I'd hate them!" cried Asako.

"That is because you are a rebellious, individualistic Englishwoman. You have lost that sense of family union, which makes good Japanese, brothers and cousins and uncles and aunts, all love each other publicly, however much they may hate each other in private."

"That is very hypocritical!"

"It is the social law," replied Kamimura. "In Japan the family is the important thing. You and I are nothing. If you want to get on in the world you must always be subject to your family. Then you are sure to get on however stupid you may be. In England you seem to use your families chiefly to quarrel with."

"I think our relatives ought to be just our best friends," said Asako.

"They are that too in a way," the young man answered. "In Japan it would be better to be born without hands and feet than to be born without relatives."

CHAPTER IV

NAGASAKI

_Hono-bono to
Akashi no ura no
Asa-giri ni
Shima-kakure-yuku
Fune wo shi zo omou._

My thoughts are with a boat
Which travels island-hid
In the morning-mist
Of the shore of Akashi
Dim, dim!

After Hongkong, they let the zone of eternal summer behind them. The crossing from Shanghai to Japan was rough, and the wind bitter. But on the first morning in Japanese waters Geoffrey was on deck betimes to enjoy to the full the excitement of arrival. They were approaching Nagasaki. It was a misty dawn. The sky was like mother-of-pearl, and the sea like mica. Abrupt grey islands appeared and disappeared, phantasmal, like guardian spirits of Japan, representatives of those myriads of Shinto deities who have the Empire in their keeping.

Then, suddenly from behind the cliff of one of the islands a fishing boat came gliding with the silent stateliness of a swan. The body of the boat was low and slender, built of some white, shining wood; from the middle rose the high sail like a silver tower. It looked like the soul of that sleeping island setting out upon a dream journey.

The mist was dissolving, slowly revealing more islands and more boats. Some of them passed quite close to the steamer; and Geoffrey could see the fishermen, dwarfish figures straining at the oar or squatting at the bottom of the boat, looking like Nibelungen on the quest for the Rhinegold. He could hear their strange cries to each other and to the steamer, harsh like the voice of sea-gulls.

Asako came on deck to join her husband. The thrill of returning to Japan had scattered her partiality for late sleeping. She was dressed

in a tailor-made coat and skirt of navy-blue serge. Her shoulders were wrapped in a broad stole of sable. Her head was bare. Perhaps it was the inherited instinct of generations of Japanese women, who never cover their heads, which made her dislike hats and avoid wearing them if possible.

The sun was still covered, but the view was clear as far as the high mountains on the horizon towards which the ship was ploughing her way.

"Look, Asako, Japan!"

She was not looking at the distance. Her eyes were fixed on an emerald islet half a mile or less from the steamer's course, a jewel of the seas. It rose to the height of two hundred feet or so, a conical knoll, densely wooded. On the summit appeared a scar of rock like a ruined castle, and, rising from the rock's crest, a single pine-tree. Its trunk was twisted by all the winds of Heaven. Its long, lean branches groped the air like the arms of a blinded demon. It seemed to have an almost human personality an expression of fruitless striving, pathetic yet somehow sinister--a Prometheus among trees. Geoffrey followed his wife's gaze to the base of the island where a shoal of brown rocks trailed out to seawards. In a miniature bay he saw a tiny beach of golden sand, and, planted in the sand, a red gateway, two uprights and two lintels, the lower one held between the posts, the upper one laid across them and protruding on either side. It is the simplest of architectural designs, but strangely suggestive. It transformed that wooded island into a dwelling-place. It cast an enchantment over it, and seemed to explain the meaning of the pine-tree. The place was holy, an abode of spirits.

Geoffrey had read enough by now to recognize the gateway as a "_torii_"; a religious symbol in Japan which always announces the neighbourhood of a shrine. It is a common feature of the country-side, as familiar as the crucifix in Catholic lands.

But Asako, seeing the beauty of her country for the first time, and unaware of the dimming cloud of archaeological explanations, clapped her hands together three times in sheer delight; or was it in unconscious obedience to the custom of her race which in this way calls upon its gods? Then with a movement entirely occidental she threw her arms round her husband's neck, kissing him with all the devotion of her being.

"Dear old Geoffrey, I love you so," she murmured. Her brown eyes were full of tears.

* * * * *

The steamer passed into a narrow channel, a kind of fiord, with wooded hills on both sides. The forests were green with spring foliage. Never had Geoffrey seen such a variety or such density of verdure. Every tree seemed to be different from its neighbour; and the hillsides were packed with trees like a crowded audience. Here and there a spray of mountain cherry-blossom rose among the green like a jet of snow.

At the foot of the woods, by the edge of the calm water, the villages nestled. Only roofs could be seen, high, brown, thatched roofs with a line of sword-leaved irises growing along the roof-ridge like a crown. These native cottages looked like timid animals, cowering in their

forms under the protecting trees. One felt that at any time an indiscreet hoot of the steamer might send them scuttering back to the forest depths. There were no signs of life in these submerged villages, where the fight between the forester's axe and primal vegetation seemed still undecided. Life was there; but it was hidden under the luxuriance of the overgrowth, hidden to casual passers-by like the life of insects. Only by the seaside, where the houses were clustered together above a seawall of cyclopean stones, and on the beach, where the long narrow boats, sharp-prowed and piratical, were drawn up to the shore, the same gnome-like little men, with a generous display of naked brown limbs, were sawing and hammering and mending their nets.

The steamer glided up the fiord towards a cloud of black smoke ahead. Unknown to Geoffrey, it passed the grey Italianate Catholic cathedral, the shrine of the old Christian faith of Japan planted there by Saint Francis Xavier four hundred years ago. Anchor was cast off the island of Deshima, now moored to the mainland, where during the locked centuries the Dutch merchants had been permitted to remain in profitable servitude. Deshima has now been swallowed up by the Japanese town, and its significance has shifted across the bay to where the smoke and din of the Mitsubishi Dockyard prepare romantic visitors for the modern industrial life of the new Japan. Night and day, the furnace fires are roaring; and ten thousand workmen are busy building ships of war and ships of peace for the Britain of the Pacific.

The quarantine officers came on board, little, brown men in uniform, absurdly self-important. Then the ship was besieged by a swarm of those narrow, primitive boats called *_sampan_*, which Loti has described as a kind of barbaric gondola, all jostling each other to bring merchants of local wares, damascene, tortoise-shell, pottery and picture post cards aboard the vessel, and to take visitors ashore.

Geoffrey and Asako were among the first to land. The moment of arrival on Japanese soil brought a pang of disappointment. The sea-front at Nagasaki seemed very like a street in any starveling European town. It presented a line of offices and consulates built in Western style, without distinction and without charm. Customs' officers and policemen squinted suspiciously at the strangers. A few women, in charge of children or market-baskets, stared blankly.

"Why, they are wearing kimonos!" exclaimed Asako, "but how dirty and dusty they are. They look as though they had been sleeping in them!"

The Japanese women, indeed, cling to their national dress. But to the Barringtons, landing at Nagasaki, they seemed ugly, shapeless and dingy. Their hair was greasy and unkempt. Their faces were stupid and staring. Their figures were hidden in the muffle of their dirty garments. Geoffrey had been told they have baths at least once a day, but he was inclined to doubt it. Or else, it was because they all bathed in the same bath and their ablutions were merely an exchange of grime. But where were those butterfly girls, who dance with fan and battledore on our cups and saucers?

The rickshaws were a pleasant experience, the one-man perambulators; and the costume of the rickshaw-runners was delightful, and their gnarled, indefatigable legs. With their tight trunk-hose of a coarse dark-blue material and short coat to match like an Eton jacket and

with their large, round mushroom hats, they were like figures from the crowd of a Flemish Crucifixion.

Behind the Barrington's *_sampan_*, a large lighter came alongside the wharf. It was black with coal-dust, and in one corner was heaped a pile of shallow baskets, such as are used in coaling vessels at Japanese ports, being slipped from hand to hand in unbroken chain up the ship's side and down again to the coal barge. The work was finished. The lighter was empty except for a crowd of coal-stained coolies which it was bringing back to Nagasaki. These were dressed like the rickshaw-men. They wore tight trousers, short jackets and straw sandals. They were sitting, wearied, on the sides of the barge, wiping black faces with black towels. Their hair was long, lank and matted. Their hands were bruised and shapeless with the rough toil.

"Poor men," sighed Asako, "they've had hard work!"

The crowd of them passed, peering at the English people and chattering in high voices. Geoffrey had never seen such queer-looking fellows, with their long hair, clean-shaven faces, and stumpy bow-legs. One more disheveled than the others was standing near him with tunic half-open. It exposed a woman's breast, black, loose and hard like leather.

"They are women!" he exclaimed, "what an extraordinary thing!"

But the children of Nagasaki--surely there could be no such disillusionment. They are laughing, happy, many-coloured and ubiquitous. They roll under the rickshaw wheels. They peep from behind the goods piled on the floors of the shops, a perpetual menace to shopkeepers, especially in the china stores, where their bird-like presence is more dangerous than that of the dreaded bull. They are blown up and down the temple-steps like fallen petals. They gather like humming-birds round the itinerant venders of the streets, the old men who balance on their bare shoulders their whole stock in trade of sweetmeats, syrups, toys or singing grasshoppers. They are the dolls of our own childhood, endowed with disconcerting life. Around their little bodies flames the love of colour of an oriental people, whose adult taste has been disciplined to sombre browns and greys. Wonderful motley kimonos they make for their children with flower patterns, butterfly patterns, toy and fairy-story patterns, printed on flannelette--or on silk for the little plutocrats--in all colors, among which reds, oranges, yellows, mauves, blues and greens predominate.

They invaded the depressing atmosphere of the European-style hotel, where Geoffrey and Asako were trying to enjoy a tasteless lunch--their grubby, bare feet pattering on the worn lino.

It pleased him to watch them, playing their game of *_Jonkenpan_* with much show of pudgy fingers, and with restrained and fitful scamperings. He even made a tentative bid for popularity by throwing copper coins. There was no scramble for this largesse. Gravely and in turn each child pocketed his penny; but they all regarded Geoffrey with a wary and suspicious eye. He, too, on closer inspection found them less angelic than at first sight. The slimy horror of unwiped noses distressed him, and the significant prevalence of scabby scalps.

* * * * *

After their dull lunch in this drab hotel, Geoffrey and his wife started once more on their voyage of discovery. Nagasaki is a hidden city; it flows through its narrow valleys like water, and follows their serpentine meanderings far inland.

They soon left behind the foreign settlement and its nondescript ugliness to plunge into the labyrinth of little native streets, wayward and wandering like sheep-tracks, with sudden abrupt hills and flights of steps which checked the rickshaws' progress. Here, the houses of the rich people were closely fenced and cunningly hidden; but the life of poverty and the shopkeepers' domesticity were flowing over into the street out of the too narrow confines of the boxes which they called their homes.

With an extra man to push behind, the rickshaws had brought them up a zigzag hill to a cautious wooden gateway half open in a close fence of bamboo.

"Tea-house!" said the rickshaw man, stopping and grinning. It was clearly expected of the foreigners that they should descend and enter.

"Shall we get out and explore, sweetheart?" suggested Geoffrey. They passed under the low gate, up a pebbled pathway through the sweetest fairy garden to the entrance of the tea-house, a stage of brown boards highly polished and never defiled by the contamination of muddy boots. On the steps of approach a collection of geta (native wooden clogs) and abominable side-spring shoes told that guests had already arrived.

Within the dark corridors of the house there was an immediate fluttering as of pigeons. Four or five little women prostrated themselves before the visitors with a hissing murmur of "Irasshai! (Condescend to come!)."

The Barringtons removed their boots and followed one of these ladies down a gleaming corridor with another miniature garden in an enclosed courtyard on one side, and paper shoji and peeping faces on the other, out across a further garden by a kind of oriental Bridge of Sighs to a small separate pavilion, which floated on a lake of green shrubs and pure air, as though moored by the wooden gangway to the main block of the building.

This summer-house contained a single small room like a very clean box with wooden frame, opaque paper walls, and pale golden matting. The only wall which seemed at all substantial presented the appearance of an alcove. In this niche there hung a long picture of cherry-blossoms on a mountain side, below which, on a stand of dark sandalwood, squatted a bronze monkey holding a crystal ball. This was the only ornament in the room.

Geoffrey and his wife sat down or sprawled on square silk cushions called zabuton. Then the shoji were thrown open; and they looked down upon Nagasaki.

It was a scene of sheer enchantment. The tea-house was perched on a cliff which overhung the city. The light pavilion seemed like the

car of some pullman aeroplane hovering over the bay. It was the brief half-hour of evening, the time of day when the magic of Japan is at

its most powerful. All that was cheap and sordid was shut out by the bamboo fence and wrapped away in the twilight mists. It was a half-hour of luminous greyness. The skies were grey and the waters of the bay and the roofs of the houses. A grey vapour rose from the town; and a black-grey trail of smoke drifted from the dockyards and from the steamers in the harbour. The cries and activities of the city below rose clear and distinct but infinitely remote, as sound of the world might reach the Gods in Heaven. It was a half-hour of fairyland when anything might happen.

Two little maids brought tea and sugary cakes, green tea like bitter hot water, insipid and unsatisfying. It was a shock to see the girls' faces as they raised the tiny china teacups. Under the glaze of their powder they were old and wise.

They observed Asako's nationality, and began to speak to her in Japanese.

"Their politeness is put on to order," thought Geoffrey, "they seem forward and inquisitive minxes."

But Asako only knew a few set phrases of her native tongue. This baffled the ladies, one of whom after a whispered consultation and some giggling behind sleeves, went off to find a friend who would solve the mystery.

"_Nesan, Nesan_ (elder sister)" she called across the garden.

Strange little dishes were produced on trays of red lacquer, fish and vegetables of different kinds artistically arranged, but most unpalatable.

A third _nesan_ appeared. She could speak some English.

"Is _Okusama_ (lady) Japanese?" she began, after she had placed the tiny square table before Geoffrey, and had performed a prostration.

Geoffrey assented.

Renewed prostration before _okusama_, and murmured greetings in Japanese.

"But I can't speak Japanese," said Asako laughing. This perplexed the girl, but her curiosity prompted her.

"_Danna San_ (master) Ingris'?" she asked, looking at Geoffrey.

"Yes," said Asako. "Do many Englishmen have Japanese wives?"

"Yes, very many," was the unexpected answer. "O Fuji San," she continued, indicating one of the other maids, "have Ingris' _danna San_ very many years ago; very kind _danna san_; give O Fuji plenty nice kimono; he say, O Fuji very good girl, go to Ingris' wit him; O Fuji say, No, cannot go, mother very sick; so _danna san_ go away. Give O Fuji San very nice finger ring."

She lapsed into vernacular. The other girl showed with feigned embarrassment a little ring set with glassy sapphires.

"Oh!" said Asako, dimly comprehending.

"All Ingiris' _danna san_ come Nagasaki," the talkative maid went on, "want Japanese girl. Ingiris' _danna san_ kind man, but too plenty drink. Japanese _danna san_ not kind, not good. Ingiris' _danna san_ plenty money, plenty. Nagasaki girl very many foreign _danna san. Rashamen wa Nagasaki meibutsu_ (foreigners' mistresses famous product of Nagasaki). Ingiris' _danna san_ go away all the time. One year, two year--then go away to Ingiris' country."

"Then what does the Japanese girl do?" asked Asako.

"Other _danna san_ come," was the laconic reply. "Ingiris' _danna san_ live in Japan, Japanese girl very nice. Ingiris' _danna san_ go away, no want Japanese girl. Japanese girl no want go away Japan. Japanese girl go to other country, she feel very sick; heart very lonely, very sad!"

A weird, unpleasant feeling had stolen into the little room, the presence of unfamiliar thoughts and of foreign moralities, birds of unhealth.

The two other girls who could not speak English were posing for Geoffrey's benefit; one of them reclining against the framework of the open window with her long kimono sleeves crossed in front of her like wings, her painted oval face fixed on him in spite of the semblance of downcast eyes; the other squatting on her heels in a corner of the room with the same demure expression and with her hands folded in her lap. Despite the quietness of the poses they were as challenging in their way as the swinging hips of Piccadilly. It is as true to-day as it was in Kaempffer's time, the old Dutch traveler of two hundred and fifty years ago, that every hotel in Japan is a brothel, and every tea-house and restaurant a house of assignation.

From a wing of the building near by came the twanging of a string, like a banjo string being tuned in fantastic quarter tones. A few sharp notes were struck, at random it seemed, followed by a few bars of a quavering song and then a burst of clownish laughter. Young bloods of Nagasaki had called in _geisha_ to amuse them at their meal.

"Japanese _geisha_," said the tea-house girl, "if _danna san_ wish to see _geisha_ dance--?"

"No thank you," said Geoffrey, hurriedly, "Asako darling, it is time we went home: we want our dinners."

CHAPTER V

CHONKINA

_Modashi-ite
Sakashira suru wa
Sake nomite
Yei-naki suru ni
Nao shikazu keri._

To sit silent
And look wise
Is not to be compared with
Drinking _sake_
And making a riotous shouting.

As soon as the meal was over, Asako went to bed. She was tired out by an orgy of sight-seeing and new impressions. Geoffrey said that he would have a short walk and a smoke before turning in. He took the road which led towards the harbour of Nagasaki.

_Chonkina, Chonkina, Chon, Chon, Kina, Kina,
Yokohama, Nagasaki, Hakodate--Hoi!_

The refrain of an old song was awakened in his mind by the melodious name of the place.

He descended the hill from the hotel, and crossed a bridge over a narrow river. The town was full of beauty. The warm light in the little wooden houses, the creamy light of the paper walls, illuminated from within, with the black silhouettes of the home groups traced upon them, the lanterns dancing on the boats in the harbour, the lights on the larger vessels in stiff patterns like propositions of Euclid, the lanterns on carts and rickshaws, lanterns like fruit, red, golden and glowing, and round bubble lamps over each house entrance with Chinese characters written upon them giving the name of the occupant.

Chonkina! Chonkina!

As though in answer to his incantation, Geoffrey suddenly came upon Wigram. Wigram had been a fellow-passenger on board the steamer. He was an old Etonian; and this was really the only bond between the two men. For Wigram was short, fat and flabby, dull-eyed and pasty-faced. He spoke with a drawl; he had literary pretensions and he was travelling for pleasure.

"Hello, Barrington," he said, "you all alone?"

"Yes," answered Geoffrey, "my wife is a bit overtired; she has turned in."

"So you are making the most of your opportunity, studying night-life, eh, naughty boy?"

"Not much about, is there?" said Geoffrey, who considered that a "pi fellow" was Bad Form, and would not be regarded as such even by a creature whose point of view was as contemptible as that of Wigram.

"Doesn't walk the streets, old man; but it's there all the same. The men at the club here tell me that Nagasaki is one of the hottest spots on the face of the globe."

"Seems sleepy enough," answered Geoffrey.

"Oh, here! these are just English warehouses and consulates. They're always asleep. But you come with me and see them dance the _Chonkina_."

Geoffrey started at this echo of his own thoughts, but he said,--

"I must be getting back; my wife will be anxious."

"Not yet, not yet. It will be all over in half an hour, and it's worth seeing. I am just going to the club to find a fellow who said he'd show me the ropes."

Geoffrey allowed himself to be persuaded. After all he was not expected home so immediately. It was many years since he had visited low and disreputable places. They were Bad Form, and had no appeal for him. But the strangeness of the place attracted him, and a longing for the first glimpse behind the scenes in this inexplicable new country.

Chonkina! Chonkina!

Why shouldn't he go?

He was introduced to Wigram's friend, Mr. Patterson, a Scotch merchant of Nagasaki, who lurched out of the club in his habitual Saturday evening state of mellow inebriation.

They called for three rickshaws, whose runners seemed to know without instructions whither they had to go.

"Is it far from here?" asked Geoffrey.

"It is not so far," said the Scotchman; "it is most conveniently situated."

Noiselessly they sped down narrow twisting streets with the same unfamiliar lights and shadows, the glowing paper walls, and the luminous globes of the gate lamps.

From the distance came the beat of a drum.

Geoffrey had heard a drum sounded like that before in the Somali village at Aden, a savage primitive sound with a kind of marching rhythm, suggestive of the swing of hundreds of black bodies moving to some obscene festival.

But here, in Japan, such music sounded remote from the civilisation of the country, from the old as from the new.

"_Chonkina, Chonkina_" it seemed to be beating.

The rickshaws turned into a broader street with houses taller and more commanding than any seen hitherto. They were built of brown wood like big Swiss chalets, and were hung with red paper lanterns like huge ripe cherries.

Another stage-like entrance, more fluttering of women and low prostrations, a procession along shining corridors and up steep stairways like companion-ladders, everywhere a heavy smell of cheap scent and powder, the reek of the brothel.

The three guests were installed, squatting or lounging around a low table with beer and cakes. There was a chorus of tittering and squeaking voices in the corridor. The partition slid open, and six

little women came running into the room.

"Patasan San! Patasan San!" they cried, clapping their hands.

Here at last were the butterfly women of the traveller's imagination. They wore bright kimonos, red and blue, embroidered with gold thread. Their faces were pale like porcelain with the enamelling effect of the liquid powder which they use. Their black shiny hair, like liquorice, was arranged in fantastic volutes, which were adorned with silver bell-like ornaments and paper flowers. Choking down Geoffrey's admiration, a cloud of heavy perfume hung around them.

"Good day to you," they squeaked in comical English, "How do you do? I love you. Please kiss me. Dam! dam!"

Patterson introduced them by name as O Hana San (Miss Flower), O Yuki San (Miss Snow), O En San (Miss Affinity), O Toshi San (Miss Year), O Taka San (Miss Tall) and O Koma San (Miss Pony).

One of them, Miss Pony, put her arm around Geoffrey's neck--the little fingers felt like the touch of insects--and said,--

"My darling, you love me?"

The big Englishman disengaged himself gently. It is Bad Form to be rough to women, even to Japanese courtesans. He began to be sorry that he had come.

"I have brought two very dear friends of mine," said Patterson to all the world, "for pleasure artistic rather than carnal; though perhaps I can safely prophesy that the pleasure of the senses is the end of all true art. We have come to see the national dance of Japan, the Nagasaki reel, the famous Chonkina. I myself am familiar with the dance. On two or three occasions I have performed with credit in these very halls. But these two gentlemen have come all the way from England on purpose to see the dance. I therefore request that you will dance it to-night with care and attention, with force of imagination, with a sense of pleasurable anticipation, and with humble respect to the naked truth."

He spoke with the precise eloquence of intoxication, and as he flopped to the ground again Wigram clapped him on the shoulder with a "Bravo, old man!"

Geoffrey felt very silent and rather sick.

Chonkina! Chonkina!

The little women made a show of modesty, hiding their faces behind their long kimono sleeves.

A servant girl pushed open the walls which communicated with the next room, an exact replica of the one in which they were sitting. An elderly woman in a sea-grey kimono was squatting there silent, rigid and dignified. For a moment Geoffrey thought that a mistake had been made, that this was another guest disturbed in quiet reflection and about to be justly indignant.

But no, this Roman matron held in her lap the white disc of a

samisen, the native banjo, upon which she strummed with a flat white bone. She was the evening's orchestra, an old _geisha_.

The six little butterflies lined up in front of her and began to dance, not our Western dance of free limbs, but an Oriental dance from the hips with posturings of hands and feet. They sang a harsh faltering song without any apparent relation to the accompaniment played by that austere dame.

Chonkina! Chonkina!

The six little figures swayed to and fro.

Chonkina! Chonkina! Hoi!

With a sharp cry the song and dance stopped abruptly. The six dancers stood rigid with hands held out in different attitudes. One of them had lost the first round and must pay forfeit. Off came the broad embroidered sash. It was thrown aside, and the raucous singing began afresh.

Chonkina! Chonkina! Hoi!

The same girl lost again; and amid shrill titterings the gorgeous scarlet kimono fell to the ground. She was left standing in a pretty blue under-kimono of light silk with a pale pink design of cherry-blossoms starred all over it.

Chonkina! Chonkina!

Round after round the game was played; and first one girl lost and then another. Two of them were standing now with the upper part of their bodies bare. One of them was wearing a kind of white lace petticoat, stained and sour-looking, wrapped about her hips; the other wore short flannel drawers, like a man's bathing-pants, coloured in a Union Jack pattern, some sailor's offering to his _inamorata_. They were both of them young girls. Their breasts were flat and shapeless. The yellow skin ended abruptly at the throat and neck with the powder line. For the neck and face were a glaze of white. The effect of this break was to make the body look as if it had lost its real head under the guillotine, and had received an ill-matched substitute from the surgeon's hands.

Chonkina! Chonkina!

Patterson had drawn nearer to the performers. His red face and his grim smile were tokens of what he would have described as pleasurable anticipation. Wigram, too, his flabby visage paler than ever, his large eyes bulging, and his mouth hanging open, gazed as in a trance. He had whispered to Geoffrey,--

"I've seen the _danse du ventre_ at Algiers, but this beats anything."

Geoffrey from behind the fumes of the pipe-smoke watched the unreal phantasmagoria as he might have watched a dream.

Chonkina! Chonkina!

The dance was more expressive now, not of art but of mere animalism.

The bodies shook and squirmed. The faces were screwed up to express an ecstasy of sensual delight. The little fingers twitched into immodest gestures.

Chonkina! Chonkina! Hoi!

Geoffrey had never gazed on a naked woman except idealised in marble or on canvas. The secret of Venus had been for him, as for many men, an inviolate Mecca towards which he worshipped. Glimpses he had seen, visions of soft curves, mica glistenings of creamy skin, but never the crude anatomical fact.

An overgrown embryo she seemed, a gawkish ill-moulded thing.

Woman, thought Geoffrey, should be supple and pliant, with a suggestion of swiftness galvanising the delicacy of the lines. Atalanta was his ideal woman.

But this creature had apparently no bones or sinews. She looked like a sawdust dummy. She seemed to have been poured into a bag of brown tissue. There was no waist line. The chest appeared to fit down upon the thighs like a lid. The legs hung from the hips like trouser-legs, and seemed to fit into the feet like poles into their sockets. The turned-in toes were ridiculous and exasperating. There was no shaping of breasts, stomach, knees and ankles. There was nothing in this image of clay to show the loving caress of the Creator's hand. It had been modelled by a wretched bungler in a moment of inattention.

Yet it stood there, erect and challenging, this miserable human tadpole, usurping the throne of Lais and crowned with the worship of such devotees as Patterson and Wigram.

Are all women ugly? The query flashed through Geoffrey's brain. Is the vision of Aphrodite Anadyomene an artist's lie? Then he thought of Asako. Stripped of her gauzy nightdresses, was she like this? A shame on such imagining!

Patterson was hugging a girl on his knee. Wigram had caught hold of another. Geoffrey said--but nobody heard him,--

"It's getting too hot for me here. I'm going."

So he went.

His little wife was awake, and disposed to be tearful.

"Where have you been?" she asked, "You said you would only be half an hour."

"I met Wigram," said Geoffrey, "and I went with him to see some _geisha_ dancing."

"You might have taken me. Was it very pretty?"

"No, it was very ugly; you would not have cared for it at all."

He had a hot bath, before he lay down by her side.

CHAPTER VI

ACROSS JAPAN

_Momo-shiki no
Ōmiya-bito wa
Okaredo
Kokoro ni norite
Omoyuru imo!_

Though the people of the
Great City
With its hundred towers
Be many,
Riding on my heart--
(Only) my beloved Sister!

The traveller in Japan is restricted to a hard-worn road, dictated to him by Messrs. Thos. Cook and Son, and by the Tourists' Information Bureau. This *_via sacra_* is marked by European-style hotels of varying quality, by insidious curio-shops, and by native guides, serious and profane, who classify foreigners under the two headings of Temples and Tea-houses. The lonely men-travellers are naturally supposed to have a *_penchant_* for the spurious *_geisha_*, who haunt the native restaurants; the married couples are taken to the temples, and to those merchants of antiquities, who offer the highest commission to the guides. There is always an air of petty conspiracy in the wake of every foreigner who visits the country. If he is a Japan enthusiast, he is amused by the naive ways, and accepts the conventional smile as the reflection of the heart of "the happy, little Japs." If he hates the country, he takes it for granted that extortion and villainy will accompany his steps.

Geoffrey and Asako enjoyed immensely their introduction to Japan. The unpleasant experiences of Nagasaki were soon forgotten after their arrival at Kyoto, the ancient capital of the Mikado, where the charm of old Japan still lingers. They were happy, innocent people, devoted to each other, easily pleased, and having heaps of money to spend. They were amused with everything, with the people, with the houses, with the shops, with being stared at, with being cheated, with being dragged to the ends of the vast city only to see flowerless gardens and temples in decay.

Asako especially was entranced. The feel of the Japanese silk and the sight of bright colours and pretty patterns awoke in her a kind of ancestral memory, the craving of generations of Japanese women. She bought kimonos by the dozen, and spent hours trying them on amid a chorus of admiring chambermaids and waitresses, a chorus specially trained by the hotel management in the difficult art of admiring foreigners' purchases.

Then to the curio-shops! The antique shops of Kyoto give to the simple foreigner the impression that he is being received in a private home by a Japanese gentleman of leisure whose hobby is collecting. The unsuspecting prey is welcomed with cigarettes and specially honourable tea, the thick green kind like pea-soup. An autograph book is produced

in which are written the names of rich and distinguished people who have visited the collection. You are asked to add your own insignificant signature. A few glazed earthenware pots appear, Tibetan temple pottery of the Han Period. They are on their way to the Winckler collection in New York, a trifle of a hundred thousand dollars.

Having pulverised the will-power of his guest, the merchant of antiquities hands him over to his myrmidons who conduct him round the shop--for it is only a shop after all. Taking accurate measurement of his purse and tastes, they force him to buy what pleases them, just as a conjurer can force a card upon his audience.

The Barringtons' rooms at the Miyako Hotel soon became like an annex to the show-rooms in Messrs. Yamanaka's store. Brocades and kimonos were draped over chairs and bedsteads. Tables were crowded with porcelain, cloisonne and statues of gods. Lanterns hung from the roof; and in a corner of the room stood an enormous bowl-shaped bell as big as a bath, resting on a tripod of red lacquer. When struck with a thick leather baton like a drum-stick it uttered a deep sob, a wonderful, round, perfect sound, full of the melancholy of the wind and the pine-forests, of the austere dignity of a vanishing civilisation, and the loneliness of the Buddhist Law.

There was a temple on the hill behind the hotel whence such a note reached the visitors at dawn and again at sunset. The spirit of everything lovely in the country sang in its tones; and Asako and Geoffrey had agreed, that, whatever else they might buy or not buy, they must take an echo of that imprisoned music home with them to England.

So they bought the cyclopean voice, engraved with cabalistic writing, which might be, as it professed to be, a temple bell of Yamato over five hundred years old, or else the last year's product of an Osaka foundry for antique brass ware. Geoffrey called it "Big Ben."

"What are you going to do with all these things?" he asked his wife.

"Oh, for our home in London," she answered, clapping her hands and gazing with ecstatic pride at all her treasures. "It will be wonderful. Oh, Geoffrey, Geoffrey, you are so good to give all this to me!"

"But it is your own money, little sweetheart!"

* * * * *

Never did Asako seem further from her parents' race than during the first weeks of her sojourn in her native country. She was so unconscious of her relationship that she liked to play at imitating native life, as something utterly peculiar and absurd. Meals in Japanese eating-houses amused her immensely. The squatting on bare floors, the exaggerated obeisance of the waiting-girls, the queer food, the clumsy use of chop-sticks, the numbness of her feet after being sat upon for half an hour, all would set her off in peals of unchecked laughter, so as to astonish her compatriots who naturally enough mistook her for one of themselves.

Once, with the aid of the girls of the hotel, she arrayed herself in

the garments of a Japanese lady of position with her hair dressed in the shiny black helmet-shape, and her waist encased in the broad, tight obi or sash, which after all was no more uncomfortable than a corset. Thus attired she came down to dinner one evening, trotting behind her husband as a well-trained Japanese wife should do. In foreign dress she appeared petite and exotic, but one would have hesitated to name the land of her birth. It was a shock to Geoffrey to see her again in her native costume. In Europe, it had been a distinction, but here, in Japan, it was like a sudden fading into the landscape. He had never realised quite how entirely his wife was one of these people. The short stature and the shuffling gait, the tiny delicate hands, the grooved slit of the eyelids, and the oval of the face were pure Japanese. The only incongruous elements were the white ivory skin which, however, is a beauty not unknown among home-reared Japanese women also, and, above all, the expression which looked out of the dancing eyes and the red mouth ripe for kisses, an expression of freedom, happiness, and natural high spirits, which is not to be seen in a land where the women are hardly free, never natural, and seldom happy. The Japanese woman's face develops a compressed look which leaves the features a mere mask, and acquires very often a furtive glance, as of a sharp-fanged animal half-tamed by fear, something weasel-like or vixenish.

Flaunting her native costume, Asako came down to dinner at the Miyako Hotel, laughing, chattering, and imitating the mincing steps of her country-women and their exaggerated politeness. Geoffrey tried to play his part in the little comedy; but his good spirits were forced and gradually silence fell between them, the silence which falls on masqueraders in fancy dress, who have tried to play up to the spirit of their costume, but whose imagination flags. Had Geoffrey been able to think a little more deeply he would have realized that this play-acting was a very visible sign of the gulf which yawned between his wife and the yellow women of Japan. She was acting as a white woman might have done, certain of the impossibility of confusion. But Geoffrey for the first time felt his wife's exoticism, not from the romantic and charming side, but from the ugly, sinister, and--horrible word--inferior side of it. Had he married a coloured woman? Was he a squaw's man? A sickening vision of chonkina at Nagasaki rose before his imagination.

When dinner was over, and after Asako had received the congratulations of the other guests, she retired upstairs to put on her neglige. Geoffrey lit a cigar after dinner, but Asako objected to the heavy aroma hanging about her bedroom. They therefore parted generally for this brief half hour; and afterwards they would read and talk together in their sitting-room. Like other people, they soon got into the habit of going to bed early in a country where there were no theatres playing in a comprehensible tongue, and no supper restaurants to turn night into day.

Geoffrey lit his cigar and made his way to the smoking-room. Two elderly men, merchants from Kobe, were already sitting there over whiskies and sodas, discussing a mutual acquaintance.

"No, I don't see much of him," one of them, an American, was saying, "nobody does nowadays. But take my word, when he came out here as a young man he was one of the smartest young fellows in the East."

"Yes, I can quite believe you," said the other, a stolid Englishman

with a briar pipe, "he struck me as an exceptionally well-educated man."

"He was more than that, I tell you. He was a financial genius. He was a man with a great future."

"Poor fellow!" said the other. "Well, he has only got himself to thank."

Geoffrey was not an eavesdropper by nature, but he found himself getting interested in the fate of this anonymous failure, and wondered if he was going to hear the cause of the man's downfall.

"When these Japanese women get hold of a man," the American went on, "they seem to drain the brightness out of him. Why, you have only got to stroll around to the Kobe Club and look at the faces. You can tell the ones that have Japanese wives or housekeepers right away. Something seems to have gone right out of their expression."

"It's worry," said the Englishman. "A fellow marries a Japanese girl, and he finds he has to keep all her lazy relatives as well; and then a crowd of half-caste brats come along, and he doesn't know whether they are his own or not."

"It is more than that," was the emphatic answer. "Men with white wives have worry enough; and a man can go gay in the tea-houses, and none the worse. But when once they marry them it is like signing a bond with the devil. That man's damned."

Geoffrey rose and left the room. He thought on the whole it was better to withdraw than to hit that harsh-voiced Yankee hard in the eye. He felt that his wife had been insulted. But the speaker could not have known by whom he had been overheard. He had merely expressed an opinion which, as a sudden instinct told Geoffrey, must be generally prevalent among the white people living in this yellow country. Now that he came to think of it, he remembered curious glances cast at him and Asako by foreigners and also, strange to say, by Japanese, glances half contemptuous. Had he acquired it already, that expression which marked the faces of the unfortunates at the Kobe Club? He remembered also tactless remarks on board ship, such as, "Mrs. Barrington has lived all her life in England; of course, that makes all the difference."

Geoffrey looked at his reflection in the long mirror in the hall. There were no signs as yet of premature damnation on the honest, healthy British face. There were signs, perhaps, of ripened thought and experience, of less superficial appreciation. The eyes seemed to have withdrawn deeper into their sockets, like the figurines in toy barometers when they feel wet weather coming.

He was beginning to appreciate the force of the advice which had urged him to beware of Japan. Here, in the hotbed of race prejudice, evil spirits were abroad. It was so different in broad-hearted tolerant London. Asako was charming and rich. She was received everywhere. To marry her was no more strange than to marry a French girl or a Russian. They could have lived peaceably in Europe; and her distant fatherland would have added a pathetic charm to her personality. But here in Japan, where between the handful of whites and the myriads of yellow men stretches a No Man's Land, serrated and desolate, marked

with bloody fights, with suspicions and treacheries, Asako's position as the wife of a white man and Geoffrey's position as the husband of a yellow wife were entirely different. The stranger's phrases had summed up the situation. They were no good, these white men who had pawned their lives to yellow girls. They were the failures, the _rates_. Geoffrey had heard of promising young officers in India who had married native women and who had had to leave the service. He had done the same. Better go gay in the tea-houses with Wigram. He was the husband of a coloured woman.

And then the crowd of half-caste brats? In England one hardly ever thinks of the progeny of mixed races. That bitter word "half-caste" is a distant echo of sensational novels. Geoffrey had not as yet noticed the pale handsome children of Eurasia, Nature's latest and most half-hearted experiment, whose seed, they say, is lost in the third generation. But he had heard the tone of scorn which flung out the term; and it suddenly occurred to him that his own children would be half-castes.

He was walking on the garden terrace overlooking the starry city. He was thinking with an intensity unfamiliar to him and terrifying, like a machine which is developing its fullest power, and is shaking a framework unused to such a strain. He wanted a friend's presence, a desultory chat with an old pal about people and things which they shared in common. Thank God, Reggie Forsyth was in Tokyo. He would leave to-morrow. He must see Reggie, laugh at his queer clever talk again, relax himself, and feel sane.

He was nervous of meeting his wife, lest her instinct might guess his thoughts. Yet he must not leave her any longer or his absence would make her anxious. Not that his love for Asako had been damaged; but he felt that they were traveling along a narrow path over a bottomless gulf in an unexplored country.

He returned to the rooms and found her lying disconsolate on a sofa, wrapped in a flimsy champagne-coloured dressing-gown, one of the spoils of Paris. Her hair had been rapidly combed out of its formal native arrangement. It looked draggled and hard as though she had been bathing. Titine, the French maid, was removing the rejected debris of kimono and sash.

"Sweetheart, you've been crying," said Geoffrey, kissing her.

"You didn't like me as a Jap, and you've been thinking terrible things about me. Look at me, and tell me what you have been thinking."

"Little Yum Yum talks great nonsense sometimes. As a matter of fact, I was thinking of going on to Tokyo to-morrow. I think we've seen about all there is to be seen here, don't you?"

"Geoffrey, you want to see Reggie Forsyth. You're getting bored and homesick already."

"No, I'm not. I think it is a ripping country; in fact, I want to see more of it. What I am wondering is whether we should take Tanaka."

* * * * *

This made Asako laugh. Any mention of Tanaka's name acted as a

talisman of mirth. Tanaka was the Japanese guide who had fixed himself on to their company remora-like, with a fine flair for docile and profitable travelers.

He was a very small man, small even for a Japanese, but plump withal. His back view looked like that of a little boy, an illusion accentuated by the shortness of his coat and his small straw boater with its colored ribbon. Even when he turned the illusion was not quite dispelled; for his was a round, ruddy, chubby face with dimples, a face with big cheeks ripe for smacking, and little sunken pig-like eyes.

He had stalked the Barringtons during their first excursion on foot through the ancient city, knowing that sooner or later they would lose their way. When the opportunity offered itself and he saw them gazing vaguely round at cross-roads, he bore down upon them, raising his hat and saying:

"Can I assist you, sir?"

"Yes; would you kindly tell me the way to the Miyako Hotel?" asked Geoffrey.

"I am myself *_en route_*," answered Tanaka. "Indeed we meet very *_a propos_*."

On the way he had discoursed about all there was to be seen in Kyoto. Only, visitors must know their way about, or must have the service of an experienced guide who was *_au fait_* and who knew the "open sesames." He pronounced this phrase "open sessums," and it was not until late that night that its meaning dawned upon Geoffrey.

Tanaka had a rich collection of foreign and idiomatic phrases, which he must have learned by heart from a book and with which he adorned his conversation.

On his own initiative he had appeared next morning to conduct the two visitors to the Emperor's palace, which he gave them to understand was open for that day only, and as a special privilege due to Tanaka's influence. While expatiating on the wonders to be seen, he brushed Geoffrey's clothes and arranged them with the care of a trained valet. In the evening, when they returned to the hotel and Asako complained of pains in her shoulder, Tanaka showed himself to be an adept at massage.

Next morning he was again at his post; and Geoffrey realized that another member had been added to his household. He acted as their *_cicerone_* or "siseroan," as he pronounced it, to temple treasuries and old palace gardens, to curio-shops and to little native eating-houses. The Barringtons submitted, not because they liked Tanaka, but because they were good-natured, and rather lost in this new country. Besides, Tanaka clung like a leech and was useful in many ways.

Only on Sunday morning it was the hotel boy who brought their early morning tea. Tanaka was absent. When he made his appearance he wore a grave expression which hardly suited his round face; and he carried a large black prayer-book. He explained that he had been to church. He was a Christian, Greek Orthodox. At least so he said, but afterwards

Geoffrey was inclined to think that this was only one of his mystifications to gain the sympathy of his victims and to create a bond between him and them.

His method was one of observation, imitation and concealed interrogation. The long visits to the Barringtons' rooms, the time spent in clothes-brushing and in massage, were so much opportunity gained for inspecting the room and its inhabitants, for gauging their habits and their income, and for scheming out how to derive the greatest possible advantage for himself.

The first results of this process were almost unconscious. The wide collar, in which his face had wobbled Micawber-like, disappeared; and a small double collar, like the kind Geoffrey wore, took its place. The garish neck-tie and hatband were replaced by discreet black. He acquired the attitudes and gestures of his employer in a few days.

As for the cross-examination, it took place in the evening, when Geoffrey was tired, and Tanaka was taking off his boots.

"Previous to the _fiancee_," Tanaka began, "did Lady Barrington live long time in Japan?"

He was lavish with titles, considering that money and nobility in such people must be inseparable; besides, experience had taught him that the use of such honorifics never came amiss.

"No; she left when she was quite a little baby."

"Ladyship has Japanese name?"

"Asako Fujinami. Do you know the name, Tanaka?"

The Japanese set his head on one side to indicate an attitude of reflection.

"Tokyo?" he suggested.

"Yes, from Tokyo."

"Does Lordship pay his _devoir_ to relatives of Ladyship?"

"Yes, I suppose so, when we go to Tokyo."

"Ladyship's relatives have noble residence?" asked Tanaka; it was his way of inquiring if they were rich.

"I really don't know at all," answered Geoffrey.

"Then I will detect for Lordship. It will be better. A man can do great foolishness if he does not detect."

After this Geoffrey discouraged Tanaka. But Asako thought him a huge joke. He made himself very useful and agreeable, fetching and carrying for her, and amusing her with his wonderful English. He almost succeeded in dislodging Titine from her cares for her mistress's person. Geoffrey had once objected, on being expelled from his wife's bedroom during a change of raiment:

"But Tanaka was there. You don't mind him seeing you apparently."

Asako had burst out laughing.

"Oh, he isn't a man. He isn't real at all. He says that I am like a flower, and that I am very beautiful in '_deshabeel_'."

"That sounds real enough," grunted Geoffrey, "and very like a man."

Perhaps, innocent as she was, Asako enjoyed playing off Tanaka against her husband, just as it certainly amused her to watch the jealousy between Titine and the Japanese. It gave her a pleasant sense of power to see her big husband look so indignant.

"How old do you think Tanaka is?" he asked her one day.

"Oh, about eighteen or nineteen," she answered. She was not yet used to the deceptiveness of Japanese appearances.

"He does not look more sometimes," said her husband; "but he has the ways and the experience of a very old hand. I wouldn't mind betting you that he is thirty."

"All right," said Asako, "give me the jade Buddha if you are wrong."

"And what will you give me if I am right?" said Geoffrey.

"Kisses," replied his wife.

Geoffrey went out to look for Tanaka. In a quarter of an hour he came back, triumphant.

"My kisses, sweetheart," he demanded.

"Wait," said Asako; "how old is he?"

"I went out of the front door and there was Master Tanaka, telling the rickshaw-men the latest gossip about us. I said to him, 'Tanaka, are you married?' 'Yes, Lordship,' he answered, 'I am widower.' 'Any children?' I asked again. 'I have two progenies,' he said; 'they are soldiers of His Majesty the Emperor.' 'Why, how old are you?' I asked. 'Forty-three years,' he answered. 'You are very well preserved for a man of your age,' I said, and I have come back for my kisses."

After this monstrous deception Geoffrey had declared that he would dismiss Tanaka.

"A man who goes about like that," he said, "is a living lie."

* * * * *

Two days later, early in the morning, they left Kyoto by the great metal high road of Japan, which has replaced the famous way known as the _Tokaido_, sacred in history, legend and art. Every stone has its message for Japanese eyes, every tree its association with poetry or romance. Even among Western connoisseurs of Japanese wood engraving, its fifty-two resting places are as familiar as the Stations of the Cross. Such is the _Tokaido_, the road between the two capitals of Kyoto and Tokyo, still haunted by the ghosts of the Emperor's ox-drawn

wagons, the _Shoguns'_ lacquered palanquins, by feudal warriors in their death-like armour, and by the swinging strides of the _samurai_.

"Look, look, Fujiyama!"

There was a movement in the observation-car, where Geoffrey and his wife were watching the unfolding of their new country. The sea was away to the right beyond the tea-fields and the pine-woods. To the left was the base of a mountain. Its summit was wrapped in cloud. From the fragment visible, it was possible to appreciate the architecture of the whole--_ex pede Herculem_. It took the train quite one hour to travel over that arc of the circuit of Fuji, which it must pass on its way to Tokyo. During this time, the curtained presence of the great mountain dominated the landscape. Everything seemed to lead up to that mantle of cloud. The terraced rice fields rose towards it, the trees slanted towards it, the moorland seemed to be pulled upwards, and the skin of the earth was stretched taut over some giant limb which had pushed itself up from below, the calm sea was waiting for its reflection, and even the microscopic train seemed to swing in its orbit round the mountain like an unwilling satellite.

"It's a pity we can't see it," said Geoffrey.

"Yes; it's the only big thing in the whole darned country," said a saturnine American, sitting opposite; "and then, when you get on to it, it's just a heap of cinders."

Asako was not worrying about the landscape. Her thoughts were directed to a family of well-to-do Japanese, first-class passengers, who had settled in the observation car for half an hour or so, and had then withdrawn. There was a father, his wife and two daughters, wax-like figures who did not utter a word but glided shadow-like in and out of the compartment. Were they relations of hers?

Then, when she and her husband passed down the corridor train to lunch, and through the swarming second-class carriages, she wondered once more, as she saw male Japan sprawling its length over the seats in the ugliest attitudes of repose, and female Japan squatting monkey-like and cleaning ears and nostrils with scraps of paper or wiping stolid babies. The carriages swarmed with children, with luggage and litter. The floors were a mess of spilled tea, broken earthenware cups and splintered wooden boxes. Cheap baggage was piled up everywhere, with wicker baskets, paper parcels, bundles of drab-coloured wraps, and cases of imitation leather. Among this debris children were playing unchecked, smearing their faces with rice cakes, and squashing the flies on the window pane.

Were any of these her relatives? Asako shuddered. How much did she actually know about these far-away cousins? She could just remember her father. She could recall great brown shining eyes, and a thin face wasted by the consumption which killed him, and a tenderness of voice and manner quite apart from anything which she had ever experienced since. This soon came to an end. After that she had known only the conscientiously chilly care of the Muratas. They had told her that her mother had died when she was born, and that her father was so unhappy that he had left Japan forever. Her father was a very clever man. He had read all the English and French and German books. He had left special word when he was dying that Asako was not to go back to Japan, that Japanese men were bad to women, that she was to be brought up

among French girls and was to marry a European or an American. But the Muratas could not tell her any intimate details about her father, whom they had not known very well. Again, although they were aware that she had rich cousins living in Tokyo, they did not know them personally and could tell her nothing.

Her father had left no papers, only his photograph, the picture of a delicate, good-looking, sad-faced man in black cloak and kimono, and a little French book called *Pensees de Pascal*, at the end of which was written the address of Mr. Ito, the lawyer in Tokyo through whom the dividends were paid, and that of "my cousin Fujinami Gentaro."

CHAPTER VII

THE EMBASSY

*Tsuyu no yo no
Tsuyu no yo nagara
Sari nagara!*

While this dewdrop world
Is but a dewdrop world,
Yet--all the same!--

The fabric of our lives is like a piece of knitting, terribly botched and bungled in most cases. There are stitches which are dropped, sometimes to be swallowed up and forgotten in the superstructure, sometimes to be picked up again after a lapse of years. These stitches are old friendships.

The first stitch from Geoffrey's bachelor days to be worked back into the scheme of his married life was his friendship for Reggie Forsyth, who had been best man at his wedding and who had since then been appointed Secretary to the Embassy at Tokyo.

Reggie had received a telegram saying that Geoffrey was coming. He was very pleased. He had reached that stage in the progress of exile where one is inordinately happy to see any old friend. In fact, he was beginning to be "fed up" with Japan, with its very limited distractions, and with the monotony of his diplomatic colleagues.

Instead of going to the tennis court, which was his usual afternoon occupation, he had spent the time in arranging his rooms, shifting the furniture, rehangng the pictures, paying especial care to the disposition of his Oriental curios, his recent purchases, his last enthusiasms in this land of languor. Reggie collected Buddhas, Chinese snuff-bottles and lacquered medicine cases--called *inro* in Japanese.

"Caviare to the general!" murmured Reggie, as he gloated over a chaste design of fishes in mother-of-pearl, a pseudo-Korin. "Poor old Geoffrey! He's only a barbarian; but perhaps she will be interested. Here, T[=o]!" he called out to an impassive Japanese man-servant, "have the flowers come yet, and the little trees?"

T[=o] produced from the back regions of the house a quantity of dwarf

trees, planted as miniature landscapes in shallow porcelain dishes, and big fronds of budding cherry blossom.

Reggie arranged the blossom in a triumphal arch over the corner table, where stood the silent company of the Buddhas. From among the trees he chose his favourite, a kind of dwarf cedar, to place between the window, opening on to a sunny veranda, and an old gold screen, across whose tender glory wound the variegated comicality of an Emperor's traveling procession, painted by a Kano artist of three centuries ago.

He removed the books which were lying about the room--grim Japanese grammars, and forbidding works on International Law; and in their place he left volumes of poetry and memoirs, and English picture-papers strewn about in artistic disorder. Then he gave the silver frames of his photographs to To to be polished, the photographs of fair women signed with Christian names, of diplomats in grand uniforms, and of handsome foreigners.

Having reduced the serious atmosphere of his study so as to give an impression of amiable indolence, Reggie Forsyth lit a cigarette and strolled out into the garden, amused at his own impatience. In London he would never have bestirred himself for old Geoffrey Barrington, who was only a Philistine, after all, with no sense of the inwardness of things.

Reggie was a slim and graceful young man, with thin fair hair brushed flat back from his forehead. A certain projection of bones under the face gave him an almost haggard look; and his dancing blue eyes seemed to be never still. He wore a suit of navy serge fitting close to his figure, black tie, and grey spats. In fact, he was as immaculate as a young diplomat should always be.

Outside his broad veranda was a gravel path, and beyond that a Japanese garden, the hobby of one of his predecessors, a miniature domain of hillocks and shrubs, with the inevitable pebbly water course, in which a bronze crane was perpetually fishing. Over the red-brick wall which encircles the Embassy compound the reddish buds of a cherry avenue were bursting in white stars.

The compound of the Embassy is a fragment of British soil. The British flag floats over it; and the Japanese authorities have no power within its walls. Its large population of Japanese servants, about one hundred and fifty in all, are free from the burden of Japanese taxes; and, since the police may not enter, gambling, forbidden throughout the Empire, flourishes there; and the rambling servants' quarters behind the Ambassador's house are the Monte Carlo of the Tokyo _betto_ (coachman) and _kurumaya_ (rickshaw runner). However, since the alarming discovery that a professional burglar had, Diogenes-like, been occupying an old tub in a corner of the wide grounds, a policeman has been allowed to patrol the garden; but he has to drop that omnipotent swagger which marks his presence outside the walls.

Except for Reggie Forsyth's exotic shrubbery, there is nothing Japanese within the solid red walls. The Embassy itself is the house of a prosperous city gentleman and might be transplanted to Bromley or Wimbledon. The smaller houses of the secretaries and the interpreters also wear a smug, suburban appearance, with their red brick and their black-and-white gabling. Only the broad verandas betray the intrusion of a warmer sun than ours.

The lawns were laid out as a miniature golf-links, the thick masses of Japanese shrubs forming deadly bunkers, and Reggie was trying some mashie shots when one of the rare Tokyo taxi-cabs, carrying Geoffrey Barrington inside it, came slowly round a corner of the drive, as though it were feeling its way for its destination among such a cluster of houses.

Geoffrey was alone.

"Hello, old chap!" cried Reggie, running up and shaking his friend's big paw in his small nervous grip, "I'm so awfully glad to see you; but where's Mrs. Barrington?"

Geoffrey had not brought his wife. He explained that they had been to pay their first call on Japanese relations, and that they had been honourably out; but even so the strain had been a severe one, and Asako had retired to rest at the hotel.

"But why not come and stay here with me?" suggested Reggie. "I have got plenty of spare rooms; and there is such a gulf fixed between people who inhabit hotels and people with houses of their own. They see life from an entirely different point of view; their spirits hardly ever meet."

"Have you room for eight large boxes of dresses and kimonos, several cases of curios, a French maid, a Japanese guide, two Japanese dogs and a monkey from Singapore?"

Reggie whistled.

"No really, is it as bad as all that? I was thinking that marriage meant just one extra person. It would have been fun having you both here, and this is the only place in Tokyo fit to live in."

"It looks a comfortable little place," agreed Geoffrey. They had reached the secretary's house, and the newcomer was admiring its artistic arrangement.

"Just like your rooms in London!"

Reggie prided himself on the exclusively oriental character of his habitation, and its distinction from any other dwelling place which he had ever possessed. But then Geoffrey was only a Philistine, after all.

"I suppose it's the photographs which look like old times," Geoffrey went on. "How's little Veronique?"

"Veronica married an Argentine beef magnate, a German Jew, the nastiest person I have ever avoided meeting."

"Poor old Reggie! Was that why you came to Japan?"

"Partly; and partly because I had a chief in the Foreign Office who dared to say that I was lacking in practical experience of diplomacy. He sent me to this comic country to find it."

"And you have found it right enough," said Geoffrey, inspecting a

photograph of a Japanese girl in her dark silk kimono with a dainty flower pattern round the skirts and at the fall of the long sleeves. She was not unlike Asako; only there was a fraction of an inch more of bridge to her nose, and in that fraction lay the secret of her birth.

"That is my latest inspiration," said Reggie. "Listen!"

He sat down at the piano and played a plaintive little air, small and sweet and shivering.

"_Japonaiserie d'hiver_," he explained.

Then he changed the burden of his song into a melody rapid and winding, with curious tricklings among the bass notes.

"Lamia," said Reggie, "or Liliith."

"There's no tune in that last one; you can't whistle it," said Geoffrey, who exaggerated his Philistinism to throw Reggie's artistic nature into stronger relief. "But what has that got to do with the lady?"

"Her name is Smith," said Reggie. "I know it is almost impossible and terribly sad; but her other name is Yae. Rather wild and savage--isn't it? Like the cry of a bird in the night-time, or of a cannibal tribe on the warpath."

"And is this your oriental version of Veronique?" asked his friend.

"No," said Reggie, "it is a different chapter of experience altogether. Perhaps old Hardwick was right. I still have much to learn, thank God. Veronique was personal; Yae is symbolic. She is my model, just like a painter's model, only more platonic. She is the East to me; for I cannot understand the East pure and undiluted. She is a country-woman of mine on her father's side, and therefore easier to understand. Impersonality and fatalism, the Eastern Proteus, in the grip of self-insistence and idealism, the British Hercules. A butterfly body with this cosmic war shaking it incessantly. Poor child! no wonder she seems always tired."

"She is a half-caste?" asked Geoffrey.

"Bad word, bad word. She isn't half-anything; and caste suggests India and suttees. She is a Eurasian, a denizen of a dream country which has a melodious name and no geographical existence. Have you ever heard anybody ask where Eurasia was? I have. A traveling Member of Parliament's wife at the Embassy here only a few months ago. I said that it was a large undiscovered country lying between the Equator and Tierra del Fuego. She seemed quite satisfied, and wondered whether it was very hot there; she remembered having heard a missionary once complain that the Eurasians wore so very few clothes! But to return to Yae, you must meet her. This evening? No? To-morrow then. You will like her because, she looks something like Asako; and she will adore you because you are utterly unlike me. She comes here to inspire me once or twice a week. She says she likes me because everything in my house smells so sweet. That is the beginning of love, I sometimes think. Love enters the soul through the nostrils. If you doubt me, observe the animals. But foreign houses in Japan are haunted by a smell of dust and mildew. You cannot love in them. She likes to lie

on my sofa, and smoke cigarettes, and do nothing, and listen to my playing tunes about her."

"You are very impressionable," said his friend. "If it were anybody else I should say you were in love with this girl."

"I am still the same, Geoffrey; always in love--and never."

"But what about the other people here?" Barrington asked.

"There are none, none who count. I am not impressionable. I am just short-sighted. I have to focus my weak vision on one person and neglect the rest."

* * * * *

A rickshaw was waiting to take Geoffrey back to the hotel. Under the saffron light of an uncanny sunset, which barred the western heavens with three broad streaks of orange and inky-blue like a gypsy girl's kerchief, the odd little vehicle rolled down the hill of Miyakezaka which overhangs the moat of the Imperial Palace.

The latent soul of Tokyo, the mystery of Japan, lies within the confines of that moat, which is the only great majestic thing in an untidy rambling village of more than two million living beings.

The Palace of the Mikado--a title by the way which is never used among Japanese--is hidden from sight. That is the first remarkable thing about it. The gesture of Versailles, the challenge of "_l'etat c'est moi_," the majestic vulgarity which the millionaire of the moment can mimic with a vulgarity less majestic, are here entirely absent; and one cannot mimic the invisible.

Hardly, on bare winter days, when the sheltering groves are stripped, and the saddened heart is in need of reassurance, appears a green lustre of copper roofs.

The _Goshoe_ at Tokyo is not a sovereign's palace; it is the abode of a God.

The surrounding woods and gardens occupy a space larger than Hyde Park in the very centre of the city. One well-groomed road crosses an extreme corner of this estate. Elsewhere only privileged feet may tread. This is a vast encumbrance in a modern commercial metropolis, but a striking tribute to the unseen.

The most noticeable feature of the Palace is its moats. These lie in three or four concentric circles, the defences of ancient Yedo, whose outer lines have now been filled up by modern progress and an electric railway. They are broad sheets of water as wide as the Thames at Oxford, where ducks are floating and fishing. Beyond is a _glacis_ of vivid grass, a hundred feet high at some points, topped by vast iron-grey walls of cyclopean boulder-work, with the sudden angles of a Vauban fortress. Above these walls the weird pine-trees of Japan extend their lean tormented boughs. Within is the Emperor's domain.

Geoffrey was hurrying homeward along the banks of the moat. The stagnant, viscous water was yellow under the sunset, and a yellow light hung over the green slopes, the grey walls and the dark tree

tops. An echelon of geese passed high overhead in the region of the pale moon. Within the mysterious _enclave_ of the "Son of Heaven" the crows were uttering their harsh sarcastic croak.

Witchery is abroad in Tokyo during this brief sunset hour. The mongrel nature of the city is less evident. The pretentious Government buildings of the New Japan assume dignity with the deep shadows and the heightening effect of the darkness. The untidy network of tangled wires fades into the coming obscurity. The rickety trams, packed to overflowing with the city crowds returning homeward, become creeping caterpillars of light. Lights spring up along the banks of the moat. More lights are reflected from its depth. Dark shadows gather like a frown round the Gate of the Cherry Field, where Ii Kamon no Kami's blood stained the winter snow-drifts some sixty years ago, because he dared to open the Country of the Gods to the contemptible foreigners; and in the cry of the _tofu_-seller echoes the voice of old Japan, a long-drawn wail, drowned at last by the grinding of the tram wheels and the lash and crackle of the connecting-rods against the overhead lines.

Geoffrey, sitting back in his rickshaw, turned up his coat-collar, and watched the gathering pall of cloud extinguishing the sunset.

"Looks like snow," he said to himself; "but it is impossible!"

At the entrance to the Imperial Hotel--a Government institution, as almost everything in Japan ultimately turns out to be--Tanaka was standing in his characteristic attitude of a dog who waits for his master's return. Characteristically also, he was talking to a man, a Japanese, a showy person with spectacles and oily buffalo-horn moustaches, dressed in a vivid pea-green suit. However, at Geoffrey's approach, this individual raised his bowler-hat, bobbed and vanished; and Tanaka assisted his patron to descend from his rickshaw.

As he approached the door of his suite, a little cloud of hotel _boys_ scattered like sparrows. This phenomenon did not as yet mean anything to Geoffrey. The native servants were not very real to him. But he was soon to realize that the _boy san_--Mister Boy, as his dignity now insists on being called--is more than an amusing contribution to the local atmosphere. When his smiles, his bows, and his peculiar English begin to pall, he reveals himself in his true light as a constant annoyance and a possible danger. Hell knows no fury like the untipped "_boy san_" He refuses to answer the bell. He suddenly understands no English at all. He bangs all the doors. He spends his spare moments in devising all kinds of petty annoyances, damp and dirty sheets, accidental damage to property, surreptitious draughts. And to vex one _boy san_ is to antagonize the whole caste; it is a boycott. At last the tip is given. Sudden sunshine, obsequious manners, attention of all kinds--for ever dwindling periods, until at last the _boy san_ attains his end, a fat retaining fee, extorted at regular intervals.

But even more exasperating, since no largesse can cure it, is his national bent towards espionage. What does he do with his spare time, of which he has so much? He spends it in watching and listening to the hotel guests. He has heard legends of large sums paid for silence or for speech. There may be money in it, therefore, and there is always amusement. So the only housework which the _boy san_ does really willingly, is to dust the door, polish the handle, wipe the threshold;--anything in fact which brings him into the propinquity of

the keyhole. What he observes or overhears, he exchanges with another _boy san_; and the hall porter or the head waiter generally serves as Chief Intelligence Bureau, and is always in touch with the Police.

The arrival of guests so remarkable as the Barringtons became, therefore, at once a focus for the curiosity the ambition of the _boy sans_. And a rickshaw-man had told the lodgekeeper, whose wife told the wife of one of the cooks, who told the head waiter, that there was some connection between these visitors and the rich Fujinami. All the _boy sans_ knew what the Fujinami meant; so here was a cornucopia of unwholesome secrets. It was the most likely game which had arrived at the Imperial Hotel for years, ever since the American millionaire's wife who ran away with a San Francisco Chinaman.

But to Geoffrey, when he broke up the gathering, the _boy sans_ were just a lot of queer little Japs.

Asako was lying on her sofa, reading. Titine was brushing her hair. Asako, when she read, which was not often, preferred literature of the sentimental school, books like _The Rosary_, with stained glass in them, and tragedy overcome by nobleness of character.

"I've been lonely without you and nervous," she said, "and I've had a visitor already."

She pointed to a card lying on a small round table, a flimsy card printed--not engraved--on cream-coloured pasteboard. Geoffrey picked it up with a smile.

"Curio dealers?" he asked.

Japanese letters were printed on one side and English on the other.

[Illustration: _S. ITO_ _Attorney of Law_]

"Ito, that's the lawyer fellow, who pays the dividends. Did you see him."

"Oh, no, I was much too weary. But he has only just gone. You probably passed him on the stairs."

Geoffrey could only think of the vivid gentleman, who had been talking with Tanaka. The guide was sent for and questioned, but he knew nothing. The gentleman in green had merely stopped to ask him the time.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HALF-CASTE GIRL

_Tomarite mo
Tsubasa wa ugoku
Kocho kana!_

Little butterfly!

Even when it settles
Its wings are moving.

Next morning it was snowing and bitterly cold. Snow in Japan, snow in April, snow upon the cherry trees, what hospitality was this?

The snow fell all day, muffling the silent city. Silence is at all times one of Tokyo's characteristics. For so large and important a metropolis it is strangely silent always. The only continuous street noise is the grating and crackling of the trams. The lumbering of horse vehicles and the pulsation of motor traffic are absent; for as beasts of burden horses are more costly than men, and in 1914 motor cars were still a novelty. Since the war boom, of course, every _narikin (nouveau riche)_ has rushed to buy his car; but even so, the state of the roads, which alternate between boulders and slush, do not encourage the motorist, and are impassable for heavy lorries. So incredible weights and bundles are moved on hand-barrows; and bales of goods and stacks of produce are punted down the dark waterways which give to parts of Tokyo a Venetian picturesqueness. Passengers, too proud to walk, flit past noiselessly in rubber-tyred rickshaws--which are not, as many believe, an ancient and typical Oriental conveyance, but the modern invention of an English missionary called Robinson. The hum of the city is dominated by the screech of the tramcars in the principal streets and by the patter of the wooden clogs, an incessant, irritating sound like rain. But these were now hushed by the snow.

Neither the snow nor the other of Nature's discouragements can keep the Japanese for long indoors. Perhaps it is because their own houses are so draughty and uncomfortable.

This day they were out in their thousands, men and women, drifting aimlessly along the pavements, as is their wont, wrapped in grey ulsters, their necks protected by ragged furs, pathetic spoils of domestic tabbies, and their heads sheltered under those wide oil-paper umbrellas, which have become a symbol of Japan in foreign eyes, the gigantic sunflowers of rainy weather, huge blooms of dark blue or black or orange, inscribed with the name and address of the owner in cursive Japanese script.

Most of these people are wearing _ashida_, high wooden clogs perilous to the balance, which raise them as on stilts above the street level and add to the fantastical appearance of these silent shuffling multitudes.

The snow falls, covering the city's meannesses, its vulgar apings of Americanisms, its crude advertisements. On the other hand, the true native architecture asserts itself, and becomes more than ever attractive. The white purity seems to gather all this miniature perfection, these irregular roofs, these chalet balconies, these broad walls and studies in rock and tree under a close-fitting cape, its natural winter garment.

* * * * *

The first chill of the rough weather kept Geoffrey and Asako by their fireside. But the indoor amenities of Japanese hotel life are few. There is a staleness in the public rooms and an angular discord in the private sitting-rooms, which condemn the idea of a comfortable day

of reading, or of writing to friends at home about the Spirit of the East. So at the end of the first half of a desolate afternoon, a visit to the Embassy suggested itself.

They left the hotel, ushered on their way by bowing _boy sans_; and in a few minutes an unsteady motor-car, careless of obstacles and side-slips, had whirled them through the slushy streets into the British compound, which only wanted a robin to look like the conventional Christmas card.

It was a pleasant shock, after long traveling through countries modernized in a hurry, to be received by an English butler against a background of thick Turkey carpet, mahogany hall table and Buhl clock. It was like a bar of music long-forgotten to see the fall of snowy white cards accumulating in their silver bowl.

Lady Cynthia Cairns's drawing-room was not an artistic apartment; it was too comfortable for that. There were too many chairs and sofas; and they were designed on broad lines for the stolid, permanent sitting of stout, comfortable bodies. There were too many photographs on view of persons distinguished for their solidity rather than for their good looks, the portraits of the guests whom one would expect to find installed in those chairs. A grand piano was there; but the absence of any music in its neighbourhood indicated that its purpose was chiefly to symbolize harmony in the home life, and to provide a spacious crush-room for the knick-knacks overflowing from many tables. These were dominated by a large signed photograph of Queen Victoria. In front of an open fireplace, where bright logs were crackling, slept an enormous black cat on a leopard's skin hearthrug.

Out of this sea of easy circumstances rose Lady Cynthia. A daughter of the famous Earl of Cheviot, hers was a short but not unmajestic figure, encased in black silks which rustled and showed flashes of beads and jet in the dancing light of the fire. She had the firm pose of a man, and a face entirely masculine with strong lips and chin and humourous grey eyes, the face of a judge.

Miss Gwendolen Cairns, who had apparently been reading to her mother when the visitors arrived, was a tall girl with fair _cendre_ hair. The simplicity of the cut of her dress and its pale green color showed artistic sympathies of the old aesthetic kind. The maintained amiability of her expression and manner indicated her life's task of smoothing down feelings ruffled by her mother's asperities, and of oiling the track of her father's career.

"How are you, my dears?" Lady Cynthia was saying. "I'm so glad you've come in spite of the tempest. Gwendolen was just reading me to sleep. Do you ever read to your husband, Mrs. Barrington? It is a good idea, if only your voice is sufficiently monotonous."

"I hope we haven't interrupted you," murmured Asako, who was rather alarmed at the great lady's manner.

"It was a shock when I heard the bell ring. I cried out in my sleep--didn't I, Gwendolen?--and said, 'It's the Beebees!'"

"I'm glad it wasn't as bad as all that," said Geoffrey, coming to his wife's rescue; "would that have been the worst that could possibly happen?"

"The very worst," Lady Cynthia answered. "Professor Beebee teaches something or other to the Japanese, and he and Mrs. Beebee have lived in Japan for the last forty years. They remind me of that old tortoise at the Zoo, who has lived at the bottom of the sea for so many centuries that he is quite covered with seaweed and barnacles. But they are very sorry for me, because I only came here yesterday. They arrive almost every day to instruct me in the path in which I should go, and to eat my cakes by the dozen. They don't have any dinner the days they come here for tea. Mrs. Beebee is the Queen of the Goonies."

"Who are the Goonies?" asked Geoffrey.

"The rest of the old tortoises. They are missionaries and professors and their wives and daughters. The sons, of course, run away and go to the bad. There are quite a lot of the Goonies, and I see much more of them than I do of the geishas and the samurais and the harakiris and all the Eastern things, which Gwendolen will talk about when she gets home. She is going to write a book, poor girl. There's nothing else to do in this country except to write about what is not here. It's very easy, you know. You copy it all out of some one else's book, only you illustrate it with your own snapshots. The publishers say that there is a small but steady demand, chiefly for circulating libraries in America. You see, I have been approached already on the subject, and I have not been here many months. So you've seen Reggie Forsyth already, he tells me. What do you think of him?"

"Much the same as usual; he seemed rather bored."

Lady Cynthia had led her guest away from the fireside, where Gwendolen Cairns was burbling to Asako.

Geoffrey could feel the searchlight of her judicial eye upon him, and a sensation like the pause when a great man enters a room. Something essential was going to invade the commonplace talk.

"Captain Barrington, your coming here just now is most providential. Reggie Forsyth is not bored at all, far from it."

"I thought he would like the country," said Geoffrey guardedly.

"He doesn't like the country. Why should he? But he likes somebody in the country. Now do you understand?"

"Yes," agreed Geoffrey, "he showed me the photograph of a half Japanese girl. He said that she was his inspiration for local colour."

"Exactly, and she's turning his brain yellow," snapped Lady Cynthia, forgetting, as everybody else did, including Geoffrey himself, that the same criticism might apply to Asako. However, Geoffrey was becoming more sensitive of late. He blushed a little and fidgeted, but he answered,--

"Reggie has always been easily inflammable."

"Oh, in England, perhaps, it's good for a boy's education; but out here, Captain Barrington, it is different. I have lived for a long time East of Suez; and I know the danger of these love episodes in countries where there is nothing else to do, nothing else to talk

about. I am a gossip myself; so I know the harm gossip can do."

"But is it so serious, Lady Cynthia? Reggie rather laughed about it to me. He said, 'I am in love always--and never!'"

"She is a dangerous young lady," said the Ambassador. "Two years ago a young business man out here was engaged to be married to her. In the autumn his body was washed ashore near Yokohama. He had been bathing imprudently, and yet he was a good swimmer. Last year two officers attached to the Embassy fought a duel, and one was badly wounded. It was turned into an accident of course; but they were both admirers of hers. This year it is Reggie's turn. And Reggie is a man with a great future. It would be a shame to lose him."

"Lady Cynthia, aren't you being rather pessimistic? Besides, what can I do?"

"Anything, everything! Eat with him, drink with him, play cards with him, go to the dogs with him--no, what a pity you are married! But, even so, it's better than nothing. Play tennis with him; take him to the top of Fujiyama. I can do nothing with him. He flouts me publicly. The old man can give him an official scolding; and Reginald will just mimic him for the benefit of the Chancery. I can hear them laughing all the way from here when Reggie is doing what he calls one of his 'stunts'. But you--why, he can see in your face the whole of London, the London which he respects and appreciates in spite of his cosmopolitan airs. He can see himself introducing Miss Yae Smith in Lady Everington's drawing-room as Mrs. Forsyth."

"Is there a great objection?" asked Geoffrey.

"It is impossible," said Lady Cynthia.

A sudden weariness came over Geoffrey. Did that ruthless "Impossible" apply to his case also? Would Lady Everington's door be closed to him on his return? Was he guilty of that worst offence against Good Form, a mesalliance? Or was Asako saved--by her money? Something unfair was impending. He looked at the two girls seated by the fireside, sipping their tea and laughing together. He must have shown signs of his embarrassment, for Lady Cynthia said,--

"Don't be absurd, Captain Barrington. The case is entirely different. A lady is always a lady, whether she is born in England or Japan. Miss Smith is not a lady; still worse, she is a half-caste, the daughter of an adventurer journalist and a tea-house woman. What can one expect? It is bad blood."

* * * * *

After taking leave of the Cairns, Geoffrey and Asako crossed the garden compound, white and Christmas-like under its covering of snow. They found their way down the by-path which led to the discreet seclusion of Reggie Forsyth's domain. The leaping of fire shadows against the lowered blinds gave a warm and welcoming impression of shelter and comfort; and still more welcoming were the sounds of the piano. It was a pleasure for the travellers to hear, for they had long been unaccustomed to the sound of music. Music should be the voice of the soul of the house; in the discord of hotels it is lost and scattered, but the home which is without music is dumb and imperfect.

Reggie must have heard them coming, for he changed the dreamy melody which he was playing into the chorus of a popular song which had been rife in London a year ago. Geoffrey laughed. "Father's home again! Father's home again!" he hummed, fitting the words to the tune, as he waited for the door to open.

They were greeted in the passage by Reggie. He was dressed in all respects like a Japanese gentleman, in black silk haori (cloak), brown wadded kimono and fluted hakama (skirt). He wore white tabi (socks) and straw zori (slippers). It is a becoming and sensible dress for any man.

"I thought it must be you," he laughed, "so I played the watchword. Fancy you're being so homesick already. Please come in, Mrs. Harrington. I have often longed to see you in Japan, but I never thought you would come; and let me take your coat off. You will find it quite warm indoors."

It was warm indeed. There was the heat of a green-house in Reggie's artistically ordered room. It was larger too than on the occasion of Geoffrey's visit; for the folding doors which led into a further apartment were thrown open. Two big fires were blazing; and old gold screens, glittering like Midas's treasury, warded off the draught from the windows. The air was heavy with fumes of incense still rising from a huge brass brazier, full of glowing charcoal and grey sand, placed in the middle of the floor. In one corner stood the Buddha table twinkling in the firelight. The miniature trees were disposed along the inner wall. There was no other furniture except an enormous black cushion lying between the brazier and the fireplace; and in the middle of the cushion--a little Japanese girl.

She was squatting on her white-gloved toes in native fashion. Her kimono was sapphire blue, and it was fastened by a huge silver sash with a blue and green peacock embroidered on the fold of the bow, which looked like great wings and was almost as big as the rest of the little person put together. Her back was turned to the guests; and she was gazing into the flames in an attitude of reverie. She seemed unconscious of everything, as though still listening to the echo of the silent music. Reggie in his haste to greet his visitors had not noticed the hurried solicitude to arrange the set of the kimono to a nicety in order to indicate exactly the right pose.

She looked like a jeweled butterfly on a great black leaf.

"Yae--Miss Smith," said Reggie, "these are my old friends whom I was telling you about."

The small creature rose slowly with a dreamy grace, and stepped off her cushion as a fairy might alight from her walnut-shell carriage.

"I am very pleased to meet you," she purred.

It was the stock American phrase which has crossed the Pacific westwards; but the citizen's brusqueness was replaced by the condescension of a queen.

Her face was a delicate oval of the same creamy smoothness as Asako's. But the chin, which in Asako's case receded a trifle in obedience

to Japanese canons of beauty, was thrust vigorously forward; and the curved lips in their Cupid's bow seemed moulded for kissing by generations of European passions, whereas about Japanese mouths there is always something sullen and pinched and colourless. The bridge of her nose and her eyes of deep olive green, the eyes of a wildcat, gave the lie to her mother's race.

Reggie's artistry could not help watching the two women together with appreciative satisfaction. Yae was even smaller and finer-fingered than the pure-bred Japanese. Ever since he had first met Yae Smith he had compared and contrasted her in his mind with Asako Barrington. He had used both as models for his dainty music. His harmonies, he was wont to explain, came to him in woman's shape. To express Japan he must see a Japanese woman. Not that he had any interest in Japanese women, physically. They are too different from our women, he used to think; and the difference repelled and fascinated him. It is so wide that it can only be crossed by frank sensuality or by blind imagination. But the artist needs his flesh-and-blood interpreter if he is to get even as far as a misunderstanding. So in figuring to himself the East, Reggie had at first made use of his memory of Asako, with her European education built up over the inheritance of Japan. Later he met Yae Smith, through the paper walls of whose Japanese existence the instincts of her Scottish forefathers kept forcing their unruly way.

Geoffrey could not define his thoughts so precisely; but something unruly stirred in his consciousness, when he saw the ghost of his days of courtship rise before him in the deep blue kimono. His wife had certainly made a great abdication when she abandoned her native dress for plain blue serges. Of course he could not have Asako looking like a doll; but still--had he fallen in love with a few yards of silk?

Yae Smith seemed most anxious to please in spite of the affectation of her poses, which perhaps were necessary to her, lest, looking so much like a plaything, she might be greeted as such. She always wanted to be liked by people. This was her leading characteristic. It was at the root of her frailties--a soil overfertilized from which weeds spring apace.

She was voluble in a gentle cat-like way, praising the rings on Asako's fingers, and the cut and material of her dress. But her eyes were forever glancing towards Geoffrey. He was so very tall and broad, standing in the framework of the folding doors beside the slim figure of Reggie, more girlish than ever in the skirts of his kimono.

Captain Barrington, the son of a lord! How fine he must look in uniform, in that cavalry uniform, with the silver cuirass and the plumed helmet like the English soldiers in her father's books at home!

"Your husband is very big," she said to Asako.

"Yes, he is," said Asako; "much too big for Japan."

"Oh, I should like that," said the little Eurasian, "it must be nice."

There was a warmth, a sincerity in the tone which made Asako stare at her companion. But the childish face was innocent and smiling. The languid curve of the smile and the opalescence of the green eyes betrayed none of their secrets to Asako's inexperience.

Reggie sat down at the piano, and, still watching the two women, he began to play.

"This is the Yae Sonata," he explained to Geoffrey.

It began with some bars from an old Scottish song:

"Had we never loved so sadly,
Had we never loved so madly,
Never loved and never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

Insensibly the pathetic melody faded away into the staccato beat of a geisha's song, with more rhythm than tune, which doubled and redoubled its pace, stumbling and leaping up again over strange syncopations.

All of a sudden the musician stopped.

"I can't describe your wife, now that I see her," he said. "I don't know any dignified old Japanese music, something like the gavottes of Couperin only in a setting of Kyoto and gold screens; and then there must be a dash of something very English which she has acquired from you--'Home, Sweet Home' or 'Sally in our Alley.'"

"Never mind, old chap!" said Geoffrey; "play 'Father's home again!'"

Reggie shook himself; and then struck up the rolling chorus; but, as he interpreted it, his mood turned pensive again. The tone was hushed, the time slower. The vulgar tune expressed itself suddenly in deep melancholy, it brought back to the two young men more forcibly than the most inspired concerto, the memory of England, the sparkle of the theatres, the street din of London, and the warmth of good company--all that had seemed sweet to them in a time which was distant now.

Reggie ceased playing. The two girls were sitting together now on the big black cushion in front of the fire. They were looking at a portfolio of Japanese prints, Reggie's embryo collection.

The young diplomat said to his friend:

"Geoffrey, you've not been in the East long enough to be exasperated by it. I have. So our ideas will not be in sympathy."

"It's not what I thought it was going to be, I must admit. Everything is so much of a muchness. If you've seen one temple you've seen the lot, and the same with everything here."

"That is the first stage, Disappointment. We have heard so much of the East and its splendours, the gorgeous East and the rest of it. The reality is small and sordid, and like so much that is ugly in our own country."

"Yes, they wear shocking bad clothes, don't they, directly they get out of kimonos; and even the kimonos look dingy and dirty."

"They are." said Reggie. "Yours would be, if you had to keep a wife

and eight children on thirty shillings a month."

Then he added:

"The second stage in the observer's progress is Discovery. Have you read Lafcadio Hearn's books about Japan?"

"Yes. some of them," answered Geoffrey. "It strikes me that he was a thorough-paced liar."

"No, he was a poet, a poet; and he jumped over the first stage to dwell for some time in the second, probably because he was by nature short-sighted. That is a great advantage for discoverers."

"But what do you mean by the second stage?"

"The stage of Discovery! Have you ever walked about a Japanese city in the twilight when the evening bell sounds from a hidden temple? Have you turned into the by-streets and watched the men returning to their wise little houses and the family groups assembled to meet them and help them change into their kimonos? Have you heard the splashing and the chatter of the bath-houses which are the evening clubs of the common people and the great clearing-houses of gossip? Have you heard the broken _samisen_ music tracking you down a street of _geisha_ houses? Have you seen the _geisha_ herself in her blue cloak sitting rigid and expressionless in the rickshaw which is carrying her off to meet her lover? Have you heard the drums of Priapus beating from the gay quarters? Have you watched the crowds which gather round a temple festival, buying queer little plants for their homes and farthing toys for their children, crowding to the fortune-teller's booth for news of good luck and bad luck, throwing their penny to the god and clapping their hands to attract his attention? Have you seen anything of this without a feeling of deep pleasure and a wonder as to how these people live and think, what we have got in common with them, and what we have got to learn from them?"

"I think I know what you mean," said Geoffrey. "It's all very picturesque, but they always seem to be hiding something."

"Exactly," said his friend, "and every man of intelligence who has to live in this country thinks that he need only learn their language and use their customs, and then he will find out what is hidden. That is what Lafcadio Hearn did; and that is why I wear a kimono. But what did he find out? A lot of pretty stories, echoes of old civilization and folk-lore; but of the mind and heart of the Japanese people--the only coloured people, after all, who have held their heads up against the white races--little or nothing until he reached the third stage, Disillusionment. Then he wrote _Japan, an Interpretation_, which is his best book."

"I haven't read it."

"You ought to. His other things are mere melodies, the kind of stuff I can play to you by the hour. This is a serious book of history and political science."

"Sounds a bit dry for me." laughed Geoffrey.

"It is a disillusioned man's explanation of the country into which he

had tried to sink, but which had rejected him. He explains the present by the past. That is reasonable. The dead are the real rulers of Japan, he says. Underneath the surface changing, the nation is deeply conservative, suspicious of all interference and unconventionally, sullenly self-satisfied; and above all, still as much locked in its primitive family system as it was a thousand years ago. You cannot be friends with a Japanese unless you are friends with his family; and you cannot be friends with his family unless you belong to it. This is the deadlock; and this is why we never get any forwarder."

"Then I've got a chance since I've got a Japanese family."

"I don't know of course," said Reggie; "but I shouldn't think they would have much use for you. They will receive you most politely; but they will look upon you as an interloper and they will try to steer you out of the country."

"But my wife?" said Geoffrey, "she is their own flesh and blood, after all."

"Well, of course, I don't know. But if they are extremely friendly I should look out, if I were you. The Japanese are conventionally hospitable, but they are not cordial to strangers unless they have a very strong motive."

Geoffrey Barrington looked in the direction where his wife was seated on a corner of the big cushion, turning over one by one a portfolio full of parti-colored woodprints on their broad white mounts. The firelight flickered round her like a crowd of importunate thoughts. She felt that he was looking at her, and glanced across at him.

"Can you see in there, Mrs. Barrington, or shall I turn the lights on?" asked her host.

"Oh, no," answered the little lady, "that would spoil it. The pictures look quite alive in the firelight. What a lovely collection you've got!"

"There's nothing very valuable there," said Reggie, "but they are very effective, I think, even the cheap ones."

Asako was holding up a pied engraving of a sinuous Japanese woman, an Utamaro from an old block recut, in dazzling raiment, with her sash tied in front of her and her head bristling with amber pins like a porcupine.

"Geoffrey, will you please take me to see the Yoshiwara?" she asked.

The request dismayed Geoffrey. He knew well enough what was to be seen at the Yoshiwara. He would have been interested to visit the licensed quarter of the demi-monde himself in the company of--say Reggie Forsyth. But this was a branch of inquiry which to his mind should be reserved for men alone. Nice women never think of such things. That his own wife should wish to see the place and, worse still, should express that wish in public was a blatant offence against Good Form, which could only be excused by her innocent ignorance.

But Reggie, who was used to the curiosity of every tourist, male and female, about the night-life of Tokyo, answered readily:

"Yes, Mrs. Barrington. It's well worth seeing. We must arrange to go down there."

"Miss Smith tells me," said Asako, "that all these lovely gay creatures are Yoshiwara girls; and that you can see them there now."

"Not that identical lady of course," said Reggie, who had joined the group by the fireside, "she died a hundred years ago; but her professional great-granddaughters are still there."

"And I can see them!" Asako clapped her hands. "Ladies are allowed to go and look? It does not matter? It is not improper?"

"Oh, no," said Yae Smith, "my brothers have taken me. Would you like to go?"

"Yes, I would," said Asako, glancing at her husband, who, however, showed no signs of approval.

CHAPTER IX

ITO SAN

__Ama no hara
Fumi-todorokashi
Naru-kami mo
Omou-naka wo ba
Sakuru mono ka wa?__

Can even the God of Thunder
Whose footfall resounds
In the plains of the sky
Put asunder
Those whom love joins?

Geoffrey's conscience was disturbed. His face was lined and worried with thought, such as had left him untroubled since the effervescences of his early youth. Like many young men of his caste, he had soon submitted all the baffling riddles of conduct to the thumb rule of Good Form. This Yoshiwara question was to him something more than a moral conundrum. It was a subtle attack by the wife of his bosom, aided and abetted by his old friend Reggie Forsyth and by the mysterious forces of this unfamiliar land as typified by Yae Smith, against the citadel of Good Form, against the stronghold of his principles.

Geoffrey himself wished to see the Yoshiwara. His project had been that one evening, when Asako had been invited to dinner by friends, he and Reggie would go and look at the place. This much was sanctioned by Good Form.

For him to take his wife there, and for people to know that he had done so, would be the worst of Bad Form, the conduct of a rank outsider. Unfortunately, it was also Bad Form for him to discuss the matter with Asako.

A terrible dilemma.

Was it possible that the laws of Good and Bad Form were only locally binding, and that here in Japan they were no longer valid?

Reggie was different. He was so awfully clever. He could extemporize on Good Form as he could extemporize on the piano. Besides, he was a victim to the artistic temperament, which cannot control itself. But Reggie had not been improved by his sojourn in this queer country, or he would never have so far forgotten himself as to speak in such a way in the presence of ladies.

Geoffrey would give him a good beating at tennis; and then, having reduced him to a fit state of humility, he would have it out with him. For Barrington was not a man to nurse displeasure against his friends.

The tennis courts at Tokyo--which stand in a magnificent central position one day to be occupied by the Japanese Houses of Parliament--are every afternoon the meeting place for youth in exile with a sprinkling of Japanese, some of whom have acquired great skill at the game. Towards tea-time the ladies arrive to watch the evening efforts of their husbands and admirers, and to escort them home when the light begins to fail. So the tennis courts have become a little social oasis in the vast desert of oriental life. Brilliant it is not. Sparkle there is none. But there is a certain chirpiness, the forced gaiety of caged birds.

The day was warm and bright. The snow had vanished as though by supernatural command. Geoffrey enjoyed his game thoroughly, although he was beaten, being out of practice and unused to gravel courts. But the exercise made him, in his own language, "sweat like a pig," and he felt better. He thought he would shelve the unpleasant subject for the time being; but it was Reggie himself who revived it.

"About the Yoshiwara," he said, seating himself on one of the benches placed round the courts. "They are having a special show down there to-morrow. It will probably be worth seeing."

"Look here," said Geoffrey, "is it the thing for ladies--English ladies--to go to a place like that?"

"Of course," answered his friend, "it is one of the sights of Tokyo. Why, I went with Lady Cynthia not so long ago. She was quite fascinated."

"By Jove!" Geoffrey ejaculated. "But for a young girl--? Did Miss Cairns go too?"

"Not on that occasion; but I have no doubt she has been."

"But isn't it much the same as taking a lady to a public brothel?"

"Not in the least," was Reggie's answer, "it is like along Piccadilly after nightfall, looking in at the Empire, and returning via Regent Street; and in Paris, like a visit to the Rat Mort and the Bal Tabarin. It is the local version of an old theme."

"But is that a nice sight for a lady?"

"It is what every lady wants to see."

"Reggie, what rot! Any clean-minded girl--"

"Geoffrey, old man, would you like to see the place?"

"Yes, but for a man it's different."

"Why do you want to see it? You're not going there for business, I presume?"

"Why? for curiosity, I suppose. One hears such a lot of people talk about the Yoshiwara--"

"For curiosity, that's right: and do you really think that women, even clean-minded women, have less curiosity than men?"

Geoffrey Barrington started to laugh at his own discomfiture.

"Reggie, you were always a devil for arguing!" he said. "At home one would never talk about things like that."

"There must be a slight difference then between Home and Abroad. Certain bonds are relaxed. Abroad, one is a sight-seer. One is out to watch the appearance and habits of the natives in a semi-scientific mood, just as one looks at animals in the Zoo. Besides, nobody knows or cares who one is. One has no awkward responsibilities towards one's neighbours; and there is little or no danger of finding an intimate acquaintance in an embarrassing position. In London one lives in constant dread of finding people out."

"But my wife," Geoffrey continued, troubled once more, "I can't imagine--"

"Mrs. Barrington may be an exception; but take my word for it, every woman, however good and holy, is intensely interested in the lives of her fallen sisters. They know less about them than we do. They are therefore more mysterious and interesting to them. And yet they are much nearer to them by the whole difference of sex. There is always a personal query arising, 'I, too, might have chosen that life--what would it have brought me?' There is a certain compassion, too; and above all there is the intense interest of rivalry. Who is not interested in his arch-enemy? and what woman does not want to know by what unholy magic her unfair competitor holds her power over men?"

The tennis courts were filling with youths released from offices. In the court facing them, two young fellows had begun a single. One of them was a Japanese; the other, though his hair and eyes were of the native breed, was too fair of skin and too tall of stature. He was a Eurasian. They both played exceedingly well. The rallies were long sustained, the drives beautifully timed and taken. The few unemployed about the courts soon made this game the object of their special attention.

"Who are they?" asked Geoffrey, glad to change the conversation.

"That's Aubrey Smith, Yae's brother, one of the best players here, and Viscount Kamimura, who ought to be quite the best; but he has just

married, and his wife will not let him play often enough."

"Oh," exclaimed Geoffrey, "he was on the ship with us coming out."

He had not recognised the good-looking young Japanese. He had not expected to meet him somehow in such a European _milieu_. Kamimura had noticed his fellow-traveller, however; and when the set was over and the players had changed sides, he came up and greeted him most cordially.

"I hear you are already married," said Geoffrey. "Our best congratulations!"

"Thank you," replied Kamimura, blushing. Japanese blush readily in spite of their complexion.

"We Japanese must not boast about our wives. It is what you call Bad Form. But I would like her to meet Mrs. Barrington. She speaks English not so badly."

"Yes," said Geoffrey, "I hope you will come and dine with us one evening at the Imperial."

"Thank you very much," answered the young Viscount. "How long are you staying in Japan?"

"Oh, for some months."

"Then we shall meet often, I hope," he said, and returned to his game.

"A very decent fellow; quite human," Reggie commented.

"Yes, isn't he?" said Geoffrey; and then he asked suddenly,--

"Do you think he would take his wife to see the Yoshiwara?"

"Probably not; but then they are Japanese people living in Japan. That alters everything."

"I don't think so," said Geoffrey; and he was conscious of having scored off his friend for once.

Miss Yae Smith had arrived on her daily visit to the courts. She was already surrounded by a little retinue of young men, who, however, scattered at Reggie's approach.

Miss Yae smiled graciously on the two new-comers and inquired after Mrs. Barrington.

"It was so nice to talk with her the other day; it was like being in England again."

Yes, Miss Yae had been in England and in America too. She preferred those countries very much to Japan. It was so much more amusing. There was so little to do here. Besides, in Japan it was such a small world; and everybody was so disagreeable; especially the women, always saying untrue, unkind things.

She looked so immaterial and sprite-like in her blue kimono, her

strange eyes downcast as her habit was when talking about herself and her own doings, that Geoffrey could think no evil of her, nor could he wonder at Reggie's gaze of intense admiration which beat upon her like sunlight on a picture.

However, Asako must be waiting for him. He took his leave, and returned to his hotel.

* * * * *

Asako had been entertaining a visitor. She had gone out shopping for an hour, not altogether pleased to find herself alone. On her return, a Japanese gentleman in a vivid green suit had risen from a seat in the lounge of the hotel, and had introduced himself.

"I am Ito, your attorney-of-law."

He was a small, podgy person with a round oily face and heavy voluted moustaches. The expression of his eyes was hidden behind gold-rimmed spectacles. It would have been impossible for a European to guess his age, anything between twenty-five and fifty. His thick, plum-coloured hair was brushed up on his forehead in a butcher-boy's curl. His teeth glittered with dentist's gold. He wore a tweed suit of bright pea-soup colour, a rainbow tie and yellow boots. Over the bulge of an egg-shaped stomach hung a massive gold watch-chain blossoming into a semi-heraldic charm, which might be a masonic emblem or a cycling club badge. His breastpocket appeared to hold a quiverful of fountain-pens.

"How do you do, Mrs. Harrington? I am pleased to meet you."

The voice was high and squeaky, like a boy's voice when it is breaking. The extended hand was soft and greasy in spite of its attempt at a firm grip. With elaborate politeness he ushered Mrs. Harrington into her chair. He took his place close beside her, crossed his fat legs, and stuck his thumbs into his arm-holes.

"I am your friend Ito," he began, "your father's friend, and I am sure to be your friend, too."

But for the reference to her father she would have snubbed him. She decided to give him tea in the lounge, and not to invite him to her private rooms. A growing distrust of her countrymen, arising largely from observation of the ways of Tanaka, was making little Asako less confiding than of yore. She was still ready to be amused by them, but she was becoming less credulous of the Japanese pose of simplicity and the conventional smile. However, she was soon melted by Mr. Ito's kindness of manner. He patted her hand, and called her "little girl."

"I am your old lawyer," he kept on saying, "your father's friend, and your best friend too. Anything you want, just ring me and you have it. There's my number. Don't forget now. Shiba 1326. What do you think of Japan, now? Beautiful country, I think. And you have not yet seen Miyanoshita, or Kamakura, or Nikko temples. You have not yet got automobile, I think. Indeed, I am sorry for you. That is a very wrong thing! I shall at once order for you a very splendid automobile, and we must make a grand trip. Every rich and noble person possesses splendid automobile."

"Oh, that would be nice!" Asako clapped her hands. "Japan is so pretty. I do want to see more of it. But I must ask my husband about buying the motor."

Ito laughed a fat, oily laugh.

"Indeed, that is Japanese style, little girl. Japanese wife say, 'I ask my husband.' American style wife very different. She say, 'My husband do this, do that'--like coolie. I have travelled much abroad. I know American custom very well."

"My husband gives me all I want, and a great deal more," said Asako.

"He is very kind man," grinned the lawyer, "because the money is all yours--not his at all. Ha, ha!"

Then, seeing that his officiousness was overstepping the mark, he added,--

"I know American ladies very well. They don't give money to their husbands. They tell their husbands, 'You give money to me.' They just do everything themselves, writing cheques all the time!"

"Really?" said Asako; "but my husband is the kindest and best man in the world!"

"Quite right, quite right. Love your husband like a good little girl. But don't forget your old lawyer, Ito. I was your father's friend. We were at school together here in Tokyo."

This interested Asako immensely. She tried to make the lawyer talk further, but he said that it was a very long story, and he must tell her some other time. Then she asked him about her cousin, Mr. Fujinami Gentaro.

"He is away from town just now. When he returns, I think he will invite you to splendid feast."

With that he took his leave.

"What do you think of him?" Asako asked Tanaka, who had been watching the interview with an attendant chorus of _boy sans_.

"He is _haikara_ gentleman," was the reply.

Now, _haikara_, is a native corruption of the words "high collar," and denoted at first a variety of Japanese "nut," who aped the European and the American in his habits, manners and dress--of which pose the high collar was the most visible symbol. The word was presumably contemptuous in its origin. It has since, however, changed its character as so to mean anything smart and fashionable. You can live in a _haikara_ house, you can read _haikara_ books, you can wear a _haikara_ hat. It has become indeed practically a Japanese equivalent for that untranslatable expression "_chic_."

* * * * *

Asako Harrington, like all simple people, had little familiarity save with the superficial stratum of her intelligence. She lived in the

gladness of her eyes like a happy young animal. Nothing, not even her marriage, had touched her very profoundly. Even the sudden shock of de Brie's love-making had not shaken anything deeper than her natural pride and her ignorance of mankind.

But in this strange, still land, whose expression looks inwards and whose face is a mask, a change was operating. Ito left her, as he had intended, with a growing sense of her own importance as distinct from her husband. "I was your father's friend: we were at school together here in Tokyo." Why, Geoffrey did not even know her father's name.

Asako did not think as closely as this. She could not. But she must have looked very thoughtful; for when Geoffrey came in, he saw her still sitting in the lounge, and exclaimed,--

"Why, my little Yum Yum, how serious we are! We look as if we were at our own funeral. Couldn't you get the things you wanted?"

"Oh yes," said Asako, trying to brighten up, "and I've had a visitor. Guess!"

"Relations?"

"No and yes. It was Mr. Ito, the lawyer."

"Oh, that little blighter. That reminds me. I must go and see him to-morrow, and find out what he is doing with our money."

"_My_ money," laughed Asako, "Tanaka never lets me forget that."

"Of course, little one," said Geoffrey, "I'd be in the workhouse if it wasn't for you."

"Geoffrey darling," said his wife hesitating, "will you give me something?"

"Yes, of course, my sweetheart, what do you want?"

"I want a motor-car, yes please; and I'd like to have a cheque-book of my own. Sometimes when I am out by myself I would like--"

"Why, of course," said Geoffrey, "you ought to have had one long ago. But it was your own idea; you didn't want to be bothered with money."

"Oh Geoffrey, you angel, you are so good to me."

She clung to his neck; and he, seeing the hotel deserted and nobody about, raised her in his arms and carried her bodily upstairs to the interest and amusement of the chorus of _boy sans_, who had just been discussing why _danna san_ had left _okusan_ for so many hours that afternoon, and who and what was the Japanese gentleman who had been talking to _okusan_ in the hall.

CHAPTER X

THE YOSHIWARA WOMEN

_Kyushu dai-ichi no ume
Kon-ya kimi ga tame ni hiraku.
Hana no shingi wo shiran
to hosseba,
San-ko tsuki wo funde kitare_.

The finest plum-blossom of Kyushu
This night is opening for thee.
If thou wishes to know the true character of this flower,
Come at the third hour singing in the moonlight.

Yoshiwara Popular Song.

As the result of an affecting scene with his wife, Geoffrey's opposition to the Yoshiwara project collapsed. If everybody went to see the place, then it could not be such very Bad Form to do so.

Asako rang up Reggie; and on the next afternoon the young diplomat called for the Barringtons in a motor-car, where Miss Yae Smith was already installed. They drove through Tokyo. It was like crossing London for the space of distance covered; an immense city--yet is it a city, or merely a village preposterously overgrown?

There is no dignity in the Japanese capital, nothing secular or permanent, except that mysterious forest-land in the midst of the moats and the grey walls, where dwell the Emperor and the Spirit of the Race. It is a mongrel city, a vast congeries of native wooden huts, hastily equipped with a few modern conveniences. Drunken poles stagger down the streets, waving their cobwebs of electric wires. Rickety trams jolt past, crowded to overflowing, so crowded that humanity clings to the steps and platforms in clots, like flies clinging to some sweet surface. Thousands of little shops glitter, wink or frown at the passer-by. Many of them have western plate-glass windows and stucco fronts, hiding their savagery, like a native woman tricked out in ridiculous pomp. Some, still grimly conservative, receive the customer in their cavernous interior, and cheat his eyes in their perpetual twilight. Many of these little shops are so small that their stock-in-trade flows over on to the pavement. The toy shops, the china shops, the cake shops, the shops for women's ribbons and hairpins seem to be trying to turn themselves inside out. Others are so reticent that nothing appears save a stretch of clean straw mats, where sulky clerks sit smoking round the _hibachi_ (fireboxes). Then, when the eye gets accustomed to the darkness, one can see behind them the ranks of the tea-jars of Uji, or layers of dark kimono stuff.

The character of the shops changed as the Barringtons and their party approached their destination. The native element predominated more and more. The wares became more and more inexplicable. There were shops in which gold Buddhas shone and brass lamps for temple use, shops displaying queer utensils and mysterious little bits of things, whose secret was hidden in the cabalistic signs of Chinese script. There were stalls of curios, and second-hand goods spread out on the pavement, under the custody of wizened, inattentive old men, who squatted and smoked.

Red-faced maids stared at the foreigners from the balconies of lofty inns and eating-houses near Ujeno station. Further on, they passed

the silence of old temple walls, the spaciousness of pigeon-haunted cloisters, and the huge high-pitched roofs of the shrines, with their twisted horn-like points. Then, down a narrow alley appeared the garish banners of the Asakusa theatres and cinema palaces. They heard the yelling of the door-touts, and the bray of discordant music. They caught a glimpse of hideous placards whose crude illustrations showed the quality of the performance to be seen within, girls falling from aeroplanes, demon ghosts with bloody daggers, melodrama unleashed.

Everywhere the same crowds loitered along the pavements. No hustle, no appearance of business save where a messenger-boy threaded the maze on a break-neck bicycle, or where a dull-faced coolie pulled at an overloaded barrow. Grey and brown, the crowd clattered by on their wooden shoes. Grey and black, passed the haikara young men with their yellow side-spring shoes. Black and sabre-dragging, the policeman went to and fro, invisibly moored to his wooden sentry-box.

The only bright notes among all these drab multitudes were the little girls in their variegated kimonos, who fluttered in and out of the entrances, and who played unscolded on the footpaths. These too were the only notes of happiness; for their grown-up relatives, especially the women, carried an air, if not an actual expression, of animal melancholy, the melancholy of driven sheep or of cows ruminant.

The crowds were growing denser. Their faces were all set in one direction. At last the whole roadway was filled with the slow-moving tide. The Harringtons and their friends had to alight from their car and continue the rest of the way on foot.

"They are all going to see the show," Reggie explained to his party, and he pointed to a line of high houses, which stood out above the low native huts. It was a square block of building some hundreds of yards long, quite foreign in character, having the appearance of factory buildings, or of a barracks or workhouse.

"What a dismal-looking place!" said Asako.

"Yes," agreed Reggie, "but at night it is much brighter. It is all lit up from top to bottom. It is called the Nightless City."

"What bad faces these people have!" said Asako, who was romantically set on seeing evil everywhere, "Is it quite safe?"

"Oh yes," said their guide, "Japanese crowds are very orderly."

Indeed they suffered no inconvenience from the crowd beyond much staring, an ordeal which awaits the foreigner in all corners of Tokyo.

They had reached a very narrow street, where raffish beer-shops were doing a roaring trade. They caught a glimpse of dirty tablecloths and powdered waitresses wearing skirts, aprons and lumpy shoes--all very haikara. On the right hand they passed a little temple from whose exiguous courtyard two stone foxes grinned maliciously, the temple of the god Inari, who brings rich lovers to the girls who pray to him.

They passed through iron gates, like the gates of a park, where two policemen were posted to regulate the traffic. Beyond was a single line of cherry-trees in full bloom, a single wave of pinkish spray, a hanging curtain of vapourous beauty, the subject of a thousand

poems, of a thousand allusions, licentious, delicate and trite,--the cherry-blossoms of the Yoshiwara.

At a street corner stood a high white building plastered with golden letters in Japanese and English--"Asahi Beer Hall."

"That is the place," said Yae, "let us get out of this crowd."

They found refuge among more dirty tablecloths, Europeanised mousmes, and gaping guests. When Yae spoke to the girls in Japanese, there was much bowing and hissing of the breath; and they were invited upstairs on to the first floor where was another beer-hall, slightly more exclusive-looking than the downstairs Gambrinus. Here a table and chairs were set for them in the embrasure of a bow-window, which, protruding over the cross-roads, commanded an admirable view of the converging streets.

"The procession won't be here for two hours more," said Yae, pouting her displeasure.

"One always has to wait in Japan," said Reggie. "Nobody ever knows exactly when anything is going to happen; and so the Japanese just wait and wait. They seem to like it rather. Anyhow they don't get impatient. Life is so uneventful here that I think they must like prolonging an incident as much as possible, like sucking a sweet slowly."

Meanwhile there was plenty to look at. Asako could not get over her shock at the sea of wicked faces which surged below.

"What class of people are these?" Geoffrey asked.

"Oh, shop-people, I think, most of them," said Yae, "and people who work in factories."

"Good class Japanese don't come here, then?" Geoffrey asked again.

"Oh no, only low class people and students. Japanese people say it is a shameful thing to go to the Yoshiwara. And, if they go, they go very secretly."

"Do you know any one who goes?" asked Reggie, with a directness which shocked his friend's sense of Good Form.

"Oh, my brothers," said Yae, "but they go everywhere; or they say they do."

* * * * *

It certainly was an ill-favoured crowd. The Japanese are not an ugly race. The young aristocrat who has grown up with fresh air and healthy exercise is often good-looking, and sometimes distinguished and refined. But the lower classes, those who keep company with poverty, dirt and pawnshops, with the pleasures of the sake barrel and the Yoshiwara, are the ugliest beings that were ever created in the image of their misshapen gods. Their small stature and ape-like attitudes, the colour and discolour of their skin, the flat Mongolian nose, their gaping mouths and bad teeth, the coarse fibre of their lustreless black hair, give them an elvish and a goblin look, as though

this country were a nursery for fairy changelings, a land of the Nibelungen, where bad thoughts have found their incarnation. Yet the faces have not got that character for good and evil as we find them among the Aryan peoples, the deep lines and the firm profiles.

"It is the absence of something rather than its presence which appals and depresses us," Reggie Forsyth observed, "an absence of happiness perhaps, or of a promise of happiness."

The crowd which filled the four roads with its slow grey tide was peaceable enough; and it was strangely silent. The drag and clatter of the clogs made more sound than the human voices. The great majority were men, though there were women among them, quiet and demure. If ever a voice was lifted, one could see by the rolling walk and the fatuous smile that its owner had been drinking. Such a person would be removed out of sight by his friends. The Japanese generally go sight-seeing and merry-making in friendships and companies; and the Verein, which in Japan is called the Kwai, flourishes here as in Germany.

Two coolies started quarreling under the Barringtons' window. They too had been drinking. They did not hit out at each other like Englishmen, but started an interchange of abuse in gruff monosyllables and indistinguishable grunts and snorts.

"Baka! Chikushome! Kuso_! (Fool! Beast! Dung!)"

These amenities exasperating their ill humour, they began to pull at each other's coats and to jostle each other like quarrelsome curs. This was a sign that affairs were growing serious; and the police intervened. Again each combatant was pushed away by his companions into opposite byways.

With these exceptions, all trappings, squeezings, pushings and pokings were received with conventional grins or apathetic staring. Yet in the paper next day it was said that so great had been the crowd that six deaths had occurred, and numerous persons had fainted.

"But where is the Yoshiwara?" Geoffrey asked at last. "Where are these wretched women kept?"

Reggie waved his hand in the direction of the three roads facing them.

"Inside the iron gates, that is all the Yoshiwara, and those high houses and the low ones too. That is where the girls are. There are two or three thousand of them within sight, as it were, from here. But, of course, the night time is the time to see them."

"I suppose so," said Geoffrey vaguely.

"They sit in shop windows, one might say," Reggie went on, "only with bars in front like cages in the Zoo. And they wear gorgeous kimonos, red and gold and blue, and embroidered with flowers and dragons. It is like nothing I can think of, except aviaries full of wonderful parrakeets and humming-birds."

"Are they pretty?" Asako asked.

"No, I can't say they are pretty; and they all seem very much alike to

the mere Westerner. I can't imagine any body picking out one of them and saying, 'I love her'--'she is the loveliest.' There is a fat, impassive type like Buddha. There is a foxy animated type which exchanges _badinage_ with the young nuts through the bars of her cage; and there is a merely ugly lumpy type, a kind of cloddish country-girl who exists in all countries. But the more exclusive houses don't display their women. One can only see a row of photographs. No doubt they are very flattering to their originals."

Asako was staring at the buildings now, at the high square prison houses, and at the low native roofs. These had each its little platform, its _monohoshi_, where much white washing was drying in the sun.

At the farther end of one street a large stucco building, with a Grecian portico, stood athwart the thoroughfare.

"What is that?" said Asako; "it looks like a church."

"That is the hospital," answered Reggie.

"But why is there a hospital here?" she asked again.

Yae Smith smiled ever so little at her new friend's ignorance of the wages of sin. But nobody answered the question.

* * * * *

There was a movement in the crowd, a pushing back from some unseen locality, like the jolting of railway trucks. At the same time there was a craning of necks and a murmur of interest.

In the street opposite, the crowd was opening down the centre. The police, who had sprung up everywhere like the crop of the dragons' teeth, were dividing the people. And then, down the path so formed, came the strangest procession which Geoffrey Barrington had ever seen on or off the stage.

High above the heads of the crowd appeared what seemed to be a life-size automaton, a moving waxwork magnificently garbed in white brocade with red and gold embroidery of phenixes, and a huge red sash tied in a bow in front. The hem of the skirt, turned up with red and thickly wadded, revealed a series of these garments fitting beneath each other, like the leaves of an artichoke. Under a monumental edifice of hair, bristling like a hedgehog with amber-coloured pins and with silver spangles and rosettes, a blank, impassive little face was staring straight in front of it, utterly expressionless, utterly unnatural, hidden beneath the glaze of enamel--the china face of a doll.

It parted the grey multitude like a pillar of light. It tottered forward slowly, for it was lifted above the crowd on a pair of black-lacquered clogs as high as stilts, dangerous and difficult to manipulate. On each side were two little figures, similarly painted, similarly bedizened, similarly expressionless, children of nine or ten years only, the _komuro_, the little waiting-women. They served to support the reigning beauty and at the same time to display her long embroidered sleeves, outstretched on either side like wings.

The brilliant figure and her two attendants moved forward under the shade of a huge ceremonial umbrella of yellow oiled paper, which looked like a membrane or like old vellum, and upon which were written in Chinese characters the personal name of the lady chosen for the honour and the name of the house in which she was an inmate. The shaft of this umbrella, some eight or nine feet long, was carried by a sinister being, clothed in the blue livery of the Japanese artisan, a kind of tabard with close-fitting trousers. He kept twisting the umbrella-shaft all the time with a gyrating movement to and fro, which imparted to the disc of the umbrella the hesitation of a wave. He followed the Queen with a strange slow stride. For long seconds he would pause with one foot held aloft in the attitude of a high-stepping horse, which distorted his dwarfish body into a diabolic convulsion, like Durer's angel of horror. He seemed a familiar spirit, a mocking devil, the wicked Spielmann of the "Miracle" play, whose harsh laughter echoes through the empty room when the last cup is emptied, the last shilling gone, and the dreamer awakes from his dream.

Behind him followed five or six men carrying large oval lanterns, also inscribed with the name of the house; and after them came a representative collection of the officials of the proud establishment, a few foxy old women and a crowd of swaggering men, spotty and vicious-looking. The Orian (Chief Courtesan) reached the cross-roads. There, as if moved by machinery or magnetism, she slowly turned to the left. She made her way towards one of a row of small, old-fashioned native houses, on the road down which the Barringtons had come. Here the umbrella was lowered. The beauty bowed her monumental head to pass under the low doorway, and settled herself on a pile of cushions prepared to receive her.

Almost at once the popular interest was diverted to the appearance of another procession, precisely similar, which was debouching from the opposite road. The new Orian garbed in blue, with a sash of gold and a design of cherry-blossom, supported by her two little attendants, wobbled towards another of the little houses. On her disappearing a third procession came into sight.

"Ah!" sighed Asako, "what lovely kimonos! Where do they get them from?"

"I don't know," said Yae, "some of them are quite old. They come out fresh year after year for a different girl."

Yae, with her distorted little soul, was thinking that it must be worth the years of slavery and the humiliation of disease to have that one day of complete triumph, to be the representative of Beauty upon earth, to feel the admiration and the desire of that vast concourse of men rising round one's body like a warm flood.

Geoffrey stared fascinated, wondering to see the fact of prostitution advertised so unblushingly as a public spectacle, his hatred and contempt breaking over the heads of the swine-faced men who followed the harlot, and picked their livelihood out of her shame.

Reggie was wondering what might be the thoughts of those little creatures muffled in such splendour that their personality, like that of infant queens, was entirely hidden by the significance of what they symbolized. Not a smile, not a glance of recognition passed over the

unnatural whiteness of their faces. Yet they could not be, as they appeared to be, sleep-walkers. Were they proud to wear such finery? Were they happy to be so acclaimed? Did their heart beat for one man, or did their vanity drink in the homage of all? Did their mind turn back to the mortgaged farm and the work in the paddy-fields, to the thriftless shop and the chatter of the little town, to the _sake_-sodden father who had sold them in the days of their innocence, to the first numbing shock of that new life? Perhaps; or perhaps they were too taken up with maintaining their equilibrium on their high shoes, or perhaps they thought of nothing at all. Reggie, who had a poor opinion of the intellectual brightness of uneducated Japanese women, thought that the last alternative was highly probable.

"I wonder what those little houses are where they pay their visits," Reggie said.

"Oh, those are the _hikite chaya_" said Yae glibly, "the Yoshiwara tea-houses."

"Do they live there?" asked Asako.

"Oh, no; rich men who come to the Yoshiwara do not go to the big houses where the _oiran_ live. They go to the tea-houses; and they order food and _geisha_ to sing, and the _oiran_ to be brought from the big house. It is more private. So the tea-houses are called _hikite chaya_, 'tea-houses which lead by the hand.'"

"Yae," said Reggie, "you know a lot about it."

"Yes," said Miss Smith, "my brothers have told me. They tell me lots of things."

After a stay of about half an hour, the _oiran_ left their tea-houses. The processions reformed; and they slowly tottered back to the places whence they had come. Across their path the cherry petals were already falling like snowflakes; for the cherry-blossom is the Japanese symbol of the impermanence of earthly beauty, and of all sweet things and pleasant.

"By Jove!" said Geoffrey Harrington to the world in general, "that was an extraordinary sight. East is East and West is West, eh? I never felt that so strongly before. How often does this performance take place?"

"This performance," said Reggie, "has taken place for three days every Spring for the last three hundred years. But it is more than doubtful whether it will ever happen again. It is called _Oiran Dochu_, the procession of the courtesans. Geoffrey, what you have seen to-day is nothing more or less than the Passing of Old Japan!"

"But whom do these women belong to?" asked Geoffrey. "And who is making money out of all this filth?"

"Various people and companies, I suppose, who own the different houses," answered Reggie. "A fellow once offered to sell me his whole establishment, bedding and six girls for L50 down. But he must have been having a run of bad luck. In most countries it is a most profitable form of investment. Do you remember 'Mrs. Warren's Profession'? Thirty-five per cent I think was the exact figure. I

don't suppose Japan is any exception."

"By Jove!" said Geoffrey, "The women, poor wretches, they can't help themselves; and the men who buy what they sell, one can't blame them either. But the creatures who make fortunes out of all this beastiness and cruelty, I say, they ought to be flogged round the place with a cat-o'-nine-tails till the life is beaten out of them. Let's get away from here!"

As they left the beer-house a small round Japanese man bobbed up from the crowd, raised his hat, bowed and smiled. It was Tanaka. Geoffrey had left him behind on purpose, that his servants, at least, might not know where he was going.

"I think--I meet Ladyship here," said the little man, "but for long time I do not spy her. I am very sorry."

"Is anything wrong? Why did you come?" asked Geoffrey.

"Good _samurai_ never leave Lordship's side. Of course, I come," was the reply.

"Well, hurry up and get back," said his master, "or we shall be home before you."

With renewed bowings he disappeared.

Asako was laughing.

"We can never get rid of Tanaka," she said, "can we? He follows us like a detective."

"Sometimes I think he is deliberately spying on us," said her husband.

"Cheer up," said Reggie, "they all do that."

The party dispersed at the Imperial Hotel. Asako was laughing and happy. She had enjoyed herself immensely as usual; and her innocence had realized little or nothing of the grim significance of what she had seen.

But Geoffrey was gloomy and distraught. He had taken it much to heart. That night he had a horrible dream. The procession of the _oiran_ was passing once more before his eyes; but he could not see the face of the gorgeous doll whom all these crowds had come out to admire. He felt strangely apprehensive, however. Then at a corner of the street the figure turned and faced him. It was Asako, his wife. He struggled to reach her and save her. But the crowds of Japanese closed in upon him; he struggled in vain.

CHAPTER XI

A GEISHA DINNER

_Inishi toshi
Ne-kojite uyeshi

Waga yodo no
Wakaki no ume wa
Hana saki ni keru_.

The young plum tree
Of my house
Which in bygone years
I dug up by the roots and transplanted
Has at last bloomed with flowers.

Next morning Geoffrey rose earlier than was his wont; and arrayed in one of his many kimonos, entered his sitting-room. There he found Tanaka, wrapped in contemplation of a letter. He was scrutinizing it with an attention which seemed to pierce the envelope.

"Who is it from, Tanaka?" asked Geoffrey; he had become mildly ironical in his dealings with the inquisitive guide.

"I think perhaps invitation to pleasure party from Ladyship's noble relatives," Tanaka replied, unabashed.

Geoffrey took the note to his wife, and she read aloud:

"DEAR MR. AND MRS. BARRINGTON--It is now the bright Spring weather. I hope you to enjoy good health. I have been rude thus to absent myself during your polite visit. Much pressing business has hampered me, also stomach trouble, but indeed there is no excuse. Please not to be angry. This time I hope you to attend a poor feast, Maple Club Hotel, next Tuesday, six p.m. Hoping to esteemed favor and even friend,

"Yours obedient,

"G. FUJINAMI."

"What exactly does he mean?"

"As Tanaka says, it is an invitation to a pleasure party at the beginning of next week."

"Answer it, sweetheart," said Geoffrey; "tell them that we are not angry, and that we shall be delighted to accept."

Tanaka explained that the Maple Club Restaurant or Koyokwan, which more strictly should be translated Hall of the Red Leaf, is the largest and most famous of Tokyo "tea-houses"--to use a comprehensive term which applies equally to a shack by the roadside, and to a dainty pleasure resort where entertainments run easily into four or five pounds per head. There are restaurants more secretive and more _elite_, where the aesthetic _gourmet_ may feel more at ease and where the bohemian spirit can loose its wit. But for public functions of all kinds, for anything on a really big scale, the Maple Club stands alone. It is the "Princes" of Tokyo with a flavour of the Guildhall steaming richly through its corridors. Here the great municipal dinners take place, the great political entertainments. Here famous foreigners are officially introduced to the mysteries of Japanese _cuisine_ and the charms of Japanese _geisha_. Here hangs a picture of Lord Kitchener himself, scrambled over by laughing _mousmes_, who seem to be peeping out of his pockets and buttonholes, a Gulliver in

Lilliput.

Both Geoffrey and Asako had treated the invitation as a joke; but at the last moment, while they were threading the mysterious streets of the still unfamiliar city, they both confessed to a certain nervousness. They were on the brink of a plunge into depths unknown. They knew nothing whatever about the customs, tastes and prejudices of the people with whom they were to mix--not even their names and their language.

"Well, we're in for it," said Geoffrey, "we must see it through now."

They drove up a steep gravel drive and stopped before a broad Japanese entrance, three wide steps like altar stairs leading up to a dark cavernous hall full of bowing women and men in black clothes, similar, silent and ghostlike. The first impression was lugubrious, like a feast of mutes.

Boots off! Geoffrey knew at least this rule number one in Japanese etiquette. But who were these fluttering women, so attentive in removing their cloaks and hats? Were they relatives or waitresses? And the silent groups beyond? Were they Fujinami or waiters? The two guests had friendly smiles for all; but they gazed helplessly for a familiar face.

An apparition in evening dress with a long frock coat and a purple tie emerged from that grim chorus of spectators. It was Ito, the lawyer. The free and easy American manner was checked by the responsibility of those flapping coat-tails. He looked and behaved just like a shop-walker. After a stiff bow and handshake he said:

"Very pleased to see you, Sir, and Mrs. Barrington, also. The Fujinami family is proud to make your entertainment."

Geoffrey expected further introductions; but the time had not yet come. With a wave of the arm Mr. Ito added:

"Please step this way, Sir and Lady."

The Barringtons with Ito led the procession; and the mutes closed in behind them. Down endless polished corridors they passed with noiseless steps over the spotless boards. The only sound was the rustling of silk garments. To closed eyes they might have seemed like the arrival of a company of dowagers. The women, who had at first received them, were still fluttering around them like humming-birds escorting a flight of crows. To one of them Geoffrey owed his preservation. He would have struck his forehead against a low doorway in the darkness; but she touched the lintel with her finger and then laid her tiny hand on Barrington's tall shoulder, laughing and saying in infantile English:

"English _danna san_ very high!"

They came to a sudden opening between paper walls. In a little room behind a table stood a middle-aged Japanese couple as stiff as waxworks. For an instant Geoffrey thought they must be the cloakroom attendants. Then, to his surprise, Ito announced:

"Mr. and Mrs. Fujinami Gentaro, the head of the Fujinami family.

Please walk in and shake hands."

Geoffrey and his wife did as they were directed. Three mutual bowings took place in absolute silence, followed by a handshake. Then Ito said:

"Mr. and Mrs. Fujinami Gentaro wish to say they are very pleased you both come to-night. It is very poor food and very poor feast, they say. Japanese food is very simple sort of thing. But they ask you please excuse them, for what they have done they have done from a good heart."

Geoffrey was mumbling incoherently, and wondering whether he was expected to reply to this oration, when Ito again exclaimed, "Please step this way."

They passed into a large room like a concert hall with a stage at one end. There were several men squatting on the floor round hibachi smoking and drinking beer. They looked like black sheep browsing.

These were joined by the mutes who followed the Barringtons. All of these people were dressed exactly alike. They wore white socks, a dark kimono almost hidden by the black cloak upon which the family crest--a wreath of wisteria (fuji) foliage--shone like a star on sleeves and neck, and by the fluted yellowish skirt of heavy rustling silk. This dress, though gloomy and sacerdotal, was dignified and becoming; but the similarity was absurd. It looked like a studied effect at a fancy dress ball. It was particularly exasperating to the guests of honour who were anxious to distinguish their relatives and to know them apart; but Ito alone, with his European clothes and his purple tie, was conspicuous and unmistakable.

"He is like Mrs. Jarley," thought Geoffrey, "he explains the waxworks."

In the middle of the room was a little group of chairs of the weary beast of burden type, which are requisitioned for public meetings. Two of them were dignified by cushions of crimson plush. These were for Geoffrey and Asako.

Among the black sheep there was no movement beyond the steady staring of some thirty pairs of eyes. When the Harringtons had been enthroned, the host and hostess approached them with silent dragging steps and downcast faces. They might have been the bearers of evil tidings. A tall girl followed behind her parents.

Mrs. Fujinami Shidzuye and her daughter, Sadako, were the only women present. This was a compromise, and a consideration for Asako's feelings. Mr. Ito had proposed that since a lady was the chief guest of honour, therefore all the Fujinami ladies ought to be invited to meet her. To Mr. Fujinami's strict conservative mind such an idea was anathema. What! Wives at a banquet! In a public restaurant! With geisha present! Absurd--and disgusting! O tempora! O mores!

Then, argued the lawyer, Asako must not be invited. But Asako was the clou of the evening; and besides, an English gentleman would be insulted if his wife were not invited too. And--as Mr. Ito went on to urge--any woman, Japanese or foreign, would be ill-at-ease in a company composed entirely of men. Besides Sadako could speak English

so well; it was so convenient that she should come; and under her mother's care her morals would not be contaminated by the propinquity of geisha. So Mr. Fujinami gave in so far as concerned his own wife and daughter.

Shidzuye San, as befitted a matron of sober years, wore a plain black kimono; but Sadako's dress was of pale mauve color, with a bronze sash tied in an enormous bow. Her hair was parted on one side and caught up in a bun behind--the latest haikara fashion and a tribute to the foreign guests. Hers was a graceful figure; but her expression was spoiled by the blue-tinted spectacles which completely hid her features.

"Miss Sadako Fujinami, daughter of Mr. Fujinami Gentaro," said Ito. "She has been University undergraduate, and she speaks English quite well."

Miss Sadako bowed three times. Then she said, "How do you do" in a high unnatural voice.

The room was filling up with the little humming-bird women who had been present at the entrance. They were handing cigarettes and tea cups to the guests. They looked bright and pleasant; and they interested Geoffrey.

"Are these ladies relatives of the Fujinami family?" he asked Ito.

"Oh, no, not at all," the lawyer gasped; "you have made great mistake, Mr. Barrington. Japanese ladies all left at home, never go to restaurant. These girls are no ladies, they're geisha girls. Geisha girls very famous to foreign persons."

Geoffrey knew that he had made his first faux pas.

"Now," said Mr. Ito, "please step this way; we go upstairs to the feast room."

The dining-room seemed larger still than the reception room. Down each side of it were arranged two rows of red lacquer tables, each about eighteen inches high and eighteen inches square. Mysterious little dishes were placed on each side of these tables; the most conspicuous was a flat reddish fish with a large eye, artistically served in a rollicking attitude, which in itself was an invitation to eat.

The English guests were escorted to two seats at the extreme end of the room, where two tables were laid in isolated glory. They were to sit there like king and queen, with two rows of their subjects in long aisles to the right and to the left of them.

The seats were cushions merely; but those placed for Geoffrey and Asako were raised on low hassocks. After them the files of the Fujinami streamed in and took up their appointed positions along the sides of the room. They were followed by the geisha, each girl carrying a little white china bottle shaped like a vegetable marrow, and a tiny cup like the bath which hygienic old maids provide for their canary birds.

"Japanese sake," said Sadako to her cousin, "you do not like?"

"Oh, yes, I do," replied Asako, who was intent on enjoying everything. But on this occasion she had chosen the wrong answer; for real ladies in Japan are not supposed to drink the warm rice wine.

The geisha certainly looked most charming as they slowly advanced in a kind of ritualistic procession. Their feet like little white mice, the dragging skirts of their spotless kimonos, their exaggerated care and precision, and their stiff conventional attitudes presented a picture from a Satsuma vase. Their dresses were of all shades, black, blue, purple, grey and mauve. The corner of the skirt folded back above the instep revealed a glimpse of gaudy underwear provoking to men's eyes, and displayed the intricate stenciled flower patterns, which in the case of the younger women seemed to be catching hold of the long sleeves and straying upwards. Little dancing girls, thirteen and fourteen years old--the so-called hangyoku or half jewels--accompanied their elder sisters of the profession. They wore very bright dresses just like the dolls; and their massive coiffure was bedizened with silver spangles and elaborately artificial flowers.

"Oh!" gasped the admiring Asako, "I must get one of those geisha girls to show me how to wear my kimonos properly; they do look smart."

"I do not think," answered Sadako. "These are vulgar women, bad style; I will teach you the noble way."

But all the geisha had a grave and dignified look, quite different from the sprightly butterflies of musical comedy from whom Geoffrey had accepted his knowledge of Japan.

They knelt down before the guests and poured a little of the sake into the shallow saucer held out for their ministrations. Then they folded their hands in their laps and appeared to slumber.

A sucking sound ran round the room as the first cup was drained. Then a complete silence fell, broken only by the shuffle of the girls' feet on the matting as they went to fetch more bottles.

Mr. Fujinami Gentaro spoke to the guests assembled, bidding them commence their meal, and not to stand upon ceremony.

"It is like the one--two--three--go! at a race," thought Geoffrey.

All the guests were manipulating their chop-sticks. Geoffrey raised his own pair. The two slender rods of wood were unparted at one end to show that they had never been used. It was therefore necessary to pull them in two. As he did so a tiny splinter of wood like a match fell from between them.

Asako laughed.

"That is the toothpick," cousin Sadako explained. "We call such chop-sticks komochi-hashi, chopstick with baby, because the toothpick inside the chopstick like the baby inside the mother. Very funny, I think."

There were two kinds of soup--excellent; there was cooked fish and raw fish in red and white slices, chastely served with ice; there were vegetables known and unknown, such as sweet potatoes, French beans, lotus stems and bamboo shoots. These had to be eaten with the aid of

the chop-sticks--a difficult task when it came to cutting up the wing of a chicken or balancing a soft poached egg.

The guests did not eat with gusto. They toyed with the food, sipping wine all the time, smoking cigarettes and picking their teeth.

Geoffrey, according to his own description, was just getting his eye in, when Mr. Fujinami Gentaro rose from his humble place at the far end of the room. In a speech full of poetical quotations, which must have cost his tame students considerable trouble in the composition, he welcomed Asako Barrington, who, he said, had been restored to Japan like a family jewel which has been lost and is found. He compared her visit to the sudden flowering of an ancient tree. This did not seem very complimentary; however, it referred not to the lady's age but to the elder branch of the family which she represented. After many apologies for the tastelessness of the food and the stupidity of the entertainment, he proposed the health of Mr. and Mrs. Harrington, which was drunk by the whole company standing.

Ito produced from his pocket a translation of this oration.

"Now please say a few words in reply," he directed.

Geoffrey, feeling acutely ridiculous, scrambled to his feet and thanked everybody for giving his wife and himself such a jolly good time. Ito translated.

"Now please command to drink health of the Fujinami family," said the lawyer, consulting his agenda. So the health of Mr. and Mrs. Fujinami Gentaro was drunk with relish by everybody, including the lady and gentleman honoured.

"In this country," thought Geoffrey, "one gets the speechmaking over before the dinner. Not a bad idea. It saves that nervous feeling which spoils the appetite."

An old gentleman, with a restless jaw, tottered to his feet and approached Geoffrey's table. He bowed twice before him, and held out a claw-like hand.

"Mr. Fujinami Gennosuke, the father of Mr. Fujinami Gentaro," announced Ito. "He has retired from life. He wishes to drink wine with you. Please wash your cup and give it to him."

There was a kind of finger-bowl standing in front of Geoffrey, which he had imagined might be a spittoon. He was directed to rinse his cup in this vessel, and to hand it to the old gentleman. Mr. Fujinami Gennosuke received it in both hands as if it had been a sacrament. The attendant geisha poured out a little of the greenish liquid, which was drunk with much hissing and sucking. Then followed another obeisance; the cup was returned, and the old gentleman retired.

He was succeeded by Mr. Fujinami Gentaro himself, with whom the same ceremony of the sake drinking was repeated; and then all the family passed by, one after another, each taking the cup and drinking. It was like a visiting figure in the lancers' quadrille.

As each relative bent and bowed, Ito announced his name and quality. These names seemed all alike, alike as their faces and as their

garments were. Geoffrey could only remember vaguely that he had been introduced to a Member of Parliament, a gross man with a terrible wen like an apple under his ear, and to two army officers, tall clean-looking men, who pleased him more than the others. There were several Government functionaries; but the majority were business men. Geoffrey could only distinguish for certain his host and his host's father.

"They look just like two old vultures," he thought.

Then there was Mr. Fujinami Takeshi, the son of the host and the hope of the family, a livid youth with a thin moustache and unhealthy marks on his face like raspberries under the skin.

Still the geisha kept bringing more and more food in a desultory way quite unlike our system of fixed and regular courses. Still Ito kept pressing Geoffrey to eat, while at the same time apologizing for the quality of the food with exasperating repetition. Geoffrey had fallen into the error of thinking that the fish and its accompanying dishes which had been laid before him at first comprised the whole of the repast. He had polished them off with gusto; and had then discovered to his alarm that they were merely hors d'oeuvres. Nor did he observe until too late how little the other guests were eating. There was no discourtesy apparently in leaving the whole of a dish untasted, or in merely picking at it from time to time. Rudeness consisted in refusing any dish.

Plates of broiled meat and sandwiches arrived, bowls of soup, grilled eels on skewers--that most famous of Tokyo delicacies; finally, the inevitable rice with whose adhesive substance the Japanese epicure fills up the final crannies in his well-lined stomach. It made its appearance in a round drum-like tub of clean white wood, as big as a bandbox, and bound round with shining brass. The girls served the sticky grains into the china rice-bowl with a flat wooden ladle.

"Japanese people always take two bowls of rice at least," observed Ito. "One bowl very unlucky; at the funeral we only eat one bowl."

This to Geoffrey was the coup de grace. He had only managed to stuff down his bowl through a desperate sense of duty.

"If I do have a second," he gasped, "it will be my own funeral."

But this joke did not run in the well-worn lines of Japanese humour. Mr. Ito merely thought that the big Englishman, having drunk much sake, was talking nonsense.

All the guests were beginning to circulate now; the quadrille was becoming more and more elaborate. They were each calling on each other and taking wine. The talk was becoming more animated. A few bold spirits began to laugh and joke with the geisha. Some had laid aside their cloaks; and some even had loosened their kimonos at the neck, displaying hairy chests. The stiff symmetry of the dinner party was quite broken up. The guests were scattered like rooks, bobbing, scratching and pecking about on the yellow mats. The bright plumage of the geisha stood out against their sombre monotony.

Presently the geisha began to dance at the far end of the room. Ten of the little girls did their steps, a slow dance full of posturing

with coloured handkerchiefs. Three of the elder _geisha_ in plain grey kimonos squatted behind the dancers, strumming on their _samisens_. But there was very little music either in the instrument or in the melody. The sound of the string's twang and the rattle of the bone plectrum drowned the sweetness of the note. The result was a kind of dry clatter or cackle which is ingenious, but not pleasing.

Reggie Forsyth used to say that there is no melody in Japanese music; but that the rhythm is marvelous. It is a kind of elaborate ragtime without any tune to it.

The guests did not pay any attention to the performance, nor did they applaud when it was over.

Mr. Ito was consulting his _agenda_ paper and his gold watch.

"You will now drink with these gentlemen," he said. Geoffrey must have demurred.

"It is Japanese custom," he continued; "please step this way; I will guide you."

Poor Geoffrey! it was his turn now to do the visiting figure, but his head was buzzing with some thirty cups of _sake_ which he had swallowed out of politeness, and with the unreality of the whole scene.

"Can't do it," he protested; "drunk too much already."

"In Japan we say, 'When friends meet the _sake_ sellers laugh!'" quoted the lawyer. "It is Japanese custom to drink together, and to be happy. To be drunk in good company, it is no shame. Many of these gentlemen will presently be drunk. But if you do not wish to drink more, then just pretend to drink. You take the cup, see; you lift it to your mouth, but you throw away the _sake_ into the basin when you wash the cup. That is _geisha's_ trick when the boys try to make her drunk, but she is too wise!"

Armed with this advice Geoffrey started on his round of visits, first to his host and then to his host's father. The face of old Mr. Fujinami Gennosuke was as red as beet-root, and his jaw was chewing more vigorously than ever. Nothing, however, could have been more perfect than his deportment in exchanging the cup with his guest. But no sooner had Geoffrey turned away to pay another visit than he became aware of a slight commotion. He glanced round and saw Mr. Fujinami, senior, in a state of absolute collapse, being conducted out of the room by two members of the family and a cluster of _geisha_.

"What has happened?" he asked in some alarm.

"It is nothing," said Ito; "old gentleman tipsy very quick."

Everybody now seemed to be smiling and happy. Geoffrey felt the curse of his speechlessness. He was brimming over with good humour, and was most anxious to please. The Japanese no longer appeared so grotesque as they had on his arrival. He was sure that he would have much in common with many of these men, who talked so good-naturedly among themselves, until the chill of his approach fell upon them.

Besides Ito and Sadako Fujinami, the only person present who could talk English at all fluently was that blotchy-faced individual, Mr. Fujinami Takeshi. The young man was in a very hilarious state, and had gathered around him a bevy of _geisha_ with whom he was cracking jokes. From the nature of his gestures they must have been far from decorous.

"Please to sit down, my dear friend," he said to Geoffrey. "Do you like _geisha_ girl?"

"I don't think they like me," said Geoffrey. "I'm too big."

"Oh, no," said the Japanese; "very big, very good. Japanese man too small, no good at all. Why do all _geisha_ love _sumotori_ (professional wrestlers)? Because _sumotori_ very big; but this English gentleman bigger than _sumotori_. So this girl love you, and this girl, and this girl, and this very pretty girl, I don't know?"

He added a question in Japanese. The _geisha_ giggled, and hid her face behind her sleeve.

"She say, she wish to try first. To try the cake, you eat some? Is that right?"

He repeated his joke in Japanese. The girl wriggled with embarrassment, and finally scuttled away across the room, while the others laughed.

All the _geisha_ now hid their faces among much tittering.

Geoffrey was becoming harassed by this _badinage_; but he hated to appear a prude, and said:

"I have got a wife, you know, Mr. Fujinami; she is keeping an eye on me."

"No matter, no matter," the young man answered, waving his hand to and fro; "we all have wife; wife no matter in Japan."

At last Geoffrey got back to his throne at Asako's side. He was wondering what would be the next move in the game when, to his relief and surprise, Ito, after a glance at his watch, said suddenly:

"It is now time to go home. Please say good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Fujinami."

A sudden dismissal, but none the less welcome.

The inner circle of the Fujinami had gathered round. They and the _geisha_ escorted their guests to the rickshaws and helped them on with their cloaks and boots. There was no pressing to remain; and as Geoffrey passed the clock in the entrance hall he noticed that it was just ten o'clock. Evidently the entertainment was run with strict adherence to the time-table.

Some of the guests were too deep in _sake_ and flirtation to be aware of the break-up; and the last vision granted to Geoffrey of the M.P.--the fat man with the wen--was of a kind of Turkey Trot going on in a corner of the room, and the thick arms of the legislator

disappearing up the lady's kimono sleeve.

CHAPTER XII

FALLEN CHERRY-BLOSSOM

_Iro wa nioedo
Chirinuru wo--
Woga yo tore zo
Tsune naran?
Ui no okuyama
Kyo koete,
Asaki yume miji
Ei mo sezu._

The colours are bright, but
The petals fall!
In this world of ours who
Shall remain forever?
To-day crossing
The high mountains of mutability,
We shall see no fleeting dreams,
Being inebriate no longer.

"_O hay[=o] gazaimas!_" (Respectfully early!)

Twitterings of maid-servants salute the lady of the house with the conventional morning greeting. Mrs. Fujinami Shidzuye replies in the high, fluty, unnatural voice which is considered refined in her social set.

The servants glide into the room which she has just left, moving noiselessly so as not to wake the master who is still sleeping. They remove from his side the thick warm mattresses upon which his wife has been lying, the hard wooden pillow like the block of history, the white sheets and the heavy padded coverlet with sleeves like an enormous kimono. They roll up all these yagu (night implements), fold them and put them away into an unsuspected cupboard in the architecture of the veranda.

Mr. Fujinami Gentaro still snores.

After a while his wife returns. She is dressed for the morning in a plain grey silk kimono with a broad olive-green obi (sash). Her hair is arranged in a formidable helmet-like coiffure--all Japanese matrons with their hair done properly bear a remote resemblance to Pallas Athene and Britannia. This will need the attention of the hairdresser so as to wax into obedience a few hairs left wayward by the night in spite of that severe wooden pillow, whose hard, high discomfort was invented by female vanity to preserve from disarray the rigid order of their locks. Her feet are encased in little white tabi like gloves, for the big toe has a compartment all to itself. She walks with her toes turned in, and with the heels hardly touching the ground. This movement produces a bend of the knees and hips so as to maintain the equilibrium of the body, and a sinuous appearance

which is considered the height of elegance in Japan, so that the grace of a beautiful woman is likened to "a willow-tree blown by the wind," and the shuffle of her feet on the floor-matting to the wind's whisper.

Mrs. Fujinami carries a red lacquer tray. On the tray is a tiny teapot and a tiny cup and a tiny dish, in which are three little salted damsons, with a toothpick fixed in one of them. It is the *petit dejeuner* of her lord. She put down the tray beside the head of the pillow, and makes a low obeisance, touching the floor with her forehead.

"*O hay[=o] gazaimas_!*"

Mr. Fujinami stirs, gapes, stretches, yawns, rubs his lean fist in his hollow eyes, and stares at the rude incursion of daylight. He takes no notice of his wife's presence. She pours out tea for him with studied pose of hands and wrists, conventional and graceful. She respectfully requests him to condescend to partake. Then she makes obeisance again.

Mr. Fujinami yawns once more, after which he condescends. He sucks down the thin, green tea with a whistling noise. Then he places in his mouth the damson balanced on the point of the toothpick. He turns it over and over with his tongue as though he was chewing a cud. Finally he decides to eat it, and to remove the stone.

Then he rises from his couch. He is a very small wizened man. Dressed in his night kimono of light blue silk, he passes along the veranda in the direction of the morning ablutions. Soon the rending sounds of throat-clearing show that he has begun his wash. Three maids appear as by magic in the vacated room. The bed is rolled away, the matting swept, and the master's morning clothes are laid out ready for him on his return.

Mrs. Fujinami assists her husband to dress, holding each garment ready for him to slip into, like a well-trained valet. Mr. Fujinami does not speak to her. When his belt has been adjusted, and a watch with a gold fob thrust into its interstice, he steps down from the veranda, slides his feet into a pair of *geta*, and strolls out into the garden.

Mr. Fujinami's garden is a famous one. It is a temple garden many centuries old; and the eyes of the initiated may read in the miniature landscape, in the grouping of shrubs and rocks, in the sudden glimpses of water, and in the bare pebbly beaches, a whole system of philosophic and religious thought worked out by the patient priests of the Ashikaga period, just as the Gothic masons wrote their version of the Bible history in the architecture of their cathedrals.

But for the ignorant, including its present master, it was just a perfect little park, with lawns six feet square and ancient pine trees, with impenetrable forests which one could clear at a bound, with gorges, waterfalls, arbours for lilliputian philanderings and a lake round whose tiny shores were represented the Eight Beautiful Views of the Lake of Biwa near Kyoto.

The bungalow mansion of the family lies on a knoll overlooking the lake and the garden valley, a rambling construction of brown wood with grey scale-like tiles, resembling a domesticated dragon stretching itself in the sun.

Indeed, it is not one house but many, linked together by a number of corridors and spare rooms. For Mr. and Mrs. Fujinami live in one wing, their son and his wife in another, and also Mr. Ito, the lawyer, who is a distant relative and a partner in the Fujinami business. Then, on the farther side of the house, near the pebble drive and the great gate, are the swarming quarters of the servants, the rickshaw men, and Mr. Fujinami's secretaries. Various poor relations exist unobserved in unfrequented corners; and there is the following of University students and professional swashbucklers which every important Japanese is bound to keep, as an advertisement of his generosity, and to do his dirty work for him. A Japanese family mansion is very like a hive--of drones.

Nor is this the entire population of the Fujinami yashiki. Across the garden and beyond the bamboo grove is the little house of Mr. Fujinami's stepbrother and his wife; and in the opposite corner, below the cherry-orchard, is the inkyo, the dower house, where old Mr. Fujinami Gennosuke, the retired Lord--who is the present Mr. Fujinami's father by adoption only--watches the progress of the family fortunes with the vigilance of Charles the Fifth in the cloister of Juste.

* * * * *

Mr. Fujinami Gentaro shuffled his way towards a little room like a kind of summer-house, detached from the main building and overlooking the lake and garden from the most favourable point of vantage.

This is Mr. Fujinami's study--like all Japanese rooms, a square box with wooden framework, wooden ceiling, sliding paper shoji, pale golden tatami and double alcove. All Japanese rooms are just the same, from the Emperor's to the rickshaw-man's; only in the quality of the wood, in the workmanship of the fittings, in the newness and freshness of paper and matting, and by the ornaments placed in the alcove, may the prosperity of the house be known.

In Mr. Fujinami's study, one niche of the alcove was fitted up as a bookcase; and that bookcase was made of a wonderful honey-coloured satinwood brought from the hinterland of China. The lock and the handles were inlaid with dainty designs in gold wrought by a celebrated Kyoto artist. In the open alcove the hanging scroll of Lao Tze's paradise had cost many hundreds of pounds, as had also the Sung dish below it, an intricacy of lotus leaves caved out of a single amethyst.

On a table in the middle of this chaste apartment lay a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and a yellow book. The room was open to the early morning sunlight; the paper walls were pushed back. Mr. Fujinami moved a square silk cushion to the edge of the matting near the outside veranda. There he could rest his back against a post in the framework of the building--for even Japanese get wearied by the interminable squatting which life on the floor level entails--and acquire that condition of bodily repose which is essential for meditation.

Mr. Fujinami was in the habit of meditating for one hour every morning. It was a tradition of his house; his father and his grandfather had done so before him. The guide of his meditations was

the yellow book, the Rongo (Maxims) of Confucius, that Bible of the Far East which has moulded oriental morality to the shape of the Three Obediences, the obedience of the child to his parents, of the wife to her husband, and of the servant to his lord.

Mr. Fujinami sat on the sill of his study, and meditated. Around him was the stillness of early morning. From the house could be heard the swish of the maids' brooms brushing the tatami, and the flip-flap of their paper flickers, like horses' tails, with which they dislodged the dust from the walls and cornices.

A big black crow had been perched on one of the cherry-trees in the garden. He rose with a shaking of branches and a flapping of broad black wings. He crossed the lake, croaking as he flew with a note more harsh, rasping and cynical than the consequential caw of English rooks. His was a malevolent presence "from the night's Plutonian shore," the symbol of something unclean and sinister lurking behind this dainty beauty and this elaboration of cleanliness.

Mr. Fujinami's meditations were deep and grave. Soon he put down the book. The spectacles glided along his nose. His chest rose and fell quickly under the weight of his resting chin. To the ignorant observer Mr. Fujinami would have appeared to be asleep.

However, when his wife appeared about an hour and a half afterwards, bringing her lord's breakfast on another red lacquer table she besought him kindly to condescend to eat, and added that he must be very tired after so much study. To this Mr. Fujinami replied by passing his hand over his forehead and saying, "D[=o]m[=o]! So des' ne! (Indeed, it is so!) I have tired myself with toil."

This little farce repeated itself every morning. All the household knew that the master's hour of meditation was merely an excuse for an after-sleep. But it was a tradition in the family that the master should study thus; and Mr. Fujinami's grandfather had been a great scholar in his generation. To maintain the tradition Mr. Fujinami had hired a starveling journalist to write a series of random essays of a sentimental nature, which he had published under his own name, with the title, Fallen Cherry-Blossoms.

Such is the hold of humbug in Japan that nobody in the whole household, including the students who respected nothing, ever allowed themselves the relief of smiling at the sacred hour of study, even when the master's back was turned.

* * * * *

"O hay[=o] gozaimas_!"

"For honourable feast of yesterday evening indeed very much obliged!"

The oily forehead of Mr. Ito touched the matting floor with the exaggerated humility of conventional gratitude. The lawyer wore a plain kimono of slate-grey silk. His American manners and his pomposity had both been laid aside with the tweed suit and the swallow-tail. He was now a plain Japanese business man, servile and adulatory in his patron's presence. Mr. Fujinami Gentaro bowed slightly in acknowledgment across the remnants of his meal.

"It is no matter," he said, with a few waves of his fan; "please sit at your ease."

The two gentlemen arranged themselves squatting cross-legged for the morning's confidential talk.

"The cherry-flowers," Ito began, with a sweep of the arm towards the garden grove, "how quickly they fall, alas!"

"Indeed, human life also," agreed Mr. Fujinami. "But the guests of last evening, what is one to think?"

"_Ma_! In truth, _sensei_ (master or teacher), it would be impossible not to call that Asa San a beauty."

"Ito Kun," said his relative in a tone of mild censure, "it is foolish always to think of women's looks. This foreigner, what of him?"

"For a foreigner, that person seems to be honourable and grave," answered the retainer, "but one fears that it is a misfortune for the house of Fujinami."

"To have a son who is no son," said the head of the family, sighing.

"_D[=o]m[=o]!_ It is terrible!" was the reply; "besides, as the _sensei_ so eloquently said last night, there are so few blossoms on the old tree."

The better to aid his thoughts, Mr. Fujinami drew from about his person a case which contained a thin bamboo pipe, called _kiseru_ in Japanese, having a metal bowl of the size and shape of the socket of an acorn. He filled this diminutive bowl with a little wad of tobacco, which looked like coarse brown hair. He kindled it from the charcoal ember in the _hibachi_. He took three sucks of smoke, breathing them slowly out of his mouth again in thick grey whorls. Then with three hard raps against the wooden edge of the firebox, he knocked out again the glowing ball of weed. When this ritual was over, he replaced the pipe in its sheath of old brocade.

The lawyer sucked in his breath, and bowed his head.

"In family matters," he said, "it is rude for an outside person to advise the master. But last night I saw a dream. I saw the Englishman had been sent back to England; and that this Asa San with all her money was again in the Fujinami family. Indeed, a foolish dream, but a good thing, I think!"

Mr. Fujinami pondered with his face inclined and his eyes shut.

"Ito Kun," he said at last, "you are indeed a great schemer. Every month you make one hundred schemes. Ninety of them are impracticable, eight of them are foolish, and two of them are masterpieces!"

"And this one?" asked Ito.

"I think it is impracticable," said his patron, "but it would be worth while to try. It would without doubt be an advantage to send away this foreigner. He is a great trouble, and may even become a danger. Besides, the house of Fujinami has few children. Where there are no

sons even daughters are welcome. If we had this Asa, we could marry her to some influential person. She is very beautiful, she is rich, and she speaks foreign languages. There would be no difficulty. Now, as to the present, how about this Osaka business?"

"I have heard from my friend this morning," answered Ito; "it is good news. The Governor will sanction the establishment of the new licensed quarter at Tobita, if the Home Minister approves."

"But that is easy. The Minister has always protected us. Besides, did I not give fifty thousand _yen_ to the funds of the _Seiyukwai_?" said Mr. Fujinami, naming the political party then in the majority in Parliament.

"Yes, but it must be done quickly; for opposition is being organised. First, there was the Salvation Army and the missionaries. Now, there are Japanese people, too, people who make a cry and say this licensed prostitute system is not suitable to a civilised country, and it is a shame to Japan. Also, there may be a political change very soon, and a new Minister."

"Then we would have to begin all over again, another fifty thousand _yen_ to the other side."

"If it is worth it?"

"My father says that Osaka is the gold mine of Japan. It is worth all that we can pay."

"Yes, but Mr. Fujinami Gennosuke is an old man now, and the times are changing."

The master laughed.

"Times change," he said, "but men and women never change."

"It is true," argued Ito, "that rich and noble persons no longer frequent the _yukwaku_ (pleasure enclosure). My friend, Suzuki, has seen the Chief of the Metropolitan Police. He says that he will not be able to permit _Oiran Dochu_ another year. He says too that it will soon be forbidden to show the _jor[=o]_ in their windows. It will be photograph-system for all houses. It is all a sign of the change. Therefore, the Fujinami ought not to sink any more capital in the _yukwaku_."

"But men will still be men, they will still need a laundry for their spirits." Mr. Fujinami used a phrase which in Japan is a common excuse for those who frequent the _demi-monde_.

"That is true, _sensei_," said the counsellor; "but our Japan must take on a show of Western civilisation. It is the thing called progress. It is part of Western civilisation that men will become more hypocritical. These foreigners say our Yoshiwara is a shame; but, in their own cities, immoral women walk in the best streets, and offer themselves to men quite openly. These virtuous foreigners are worse than we are. I myself have seen. They say, 'We have no Yoshiwara system, therefore we are good.' They pretend not to see like a _geisha_ who squints through a fan. We Japanese, we now become more hypocritical, because this is necessary law of civilisation. The two

swords of the _samurai_ have gone; but honour and hatred and revenge will never go. The _kanzashi_ (hair ornaments) of the _oiran_ will go too; but what the _oiran_ lose, the _geisha_ will gain. Therefore, if I were Fujinami San, I would buy up the _geisha_, and also perhaps the _inbai_ (unregistered women)."

"But that is a low trade," objected the Yoshiwara magnate.

"It is very secret; your name need never be spoken."

"And it is too scattered, too disorganised, it would be impossible to control."

"I do not think it would be so difficult. What might be proposed is a _geisha_ trust."

"But even the Fujinami have not got enough money."

"Within one month I guarantee to find the right men, with the money and the experience and the influence."

"Then the business would no longer be the Fujinami only--"

"It would be as in America, a combine, something on a big scale. In Japan one is content with such small business. Indeed, we Japanese are a very small people."

"In America, perhaps, there is more confidence," said the elder man; "but in Japan we say, 'Beware of friends who are not also relatives,' There is, as you know, the temple of Inari Daimy[=o]jin in Asakusa. They say that if a man worships at that temple he becomes the owner of his friend's wealth. I fear that too many of us Japanese make pilgrimage to that temple after nightfall."

With those words, Mr. Fujinami picked up a newspaper to indicate that the audience was terminated; and Mr. Ito, after a series of prostrations, withdrew.

* * * * *

As soon as he was out of sight, Mr. Fujinami Gentaro selected from the pile in front of him a number of letters and newspapers. With these in his hand, he left the study, and followed a path of broad, flat stepping-stones across the garden towards the cherry-orchard. Here the way sloped rapidly downward under a drift of fallen petals. On the black naked twigs of the cherry-trees one or two sturdy blossoms still clung pathetically, like weather-beaten butterflies. Beyond a green shrubbery, on a little knoll, a clean newly-built Japanese house, like a large rabbit hutch, rested in a patch of sunlight. It was the _inkyo_, the "shadow dwelling" or dower house. Here dwelt Mr. Fujinami, senior, and his wife--his fourth matrimonial experiment.

The old gentleman was squatting on the balcony of the front corner room, the one which commanded the best view of the cherry-grove. He looked as if he had just been unpacked; for he was surrounded by reams and reams of paper, some white, and some with Chinese letters scrawled over them. He was busy writing these letters with a kind of thick paint-brush; and he was so deep in his task that he appeared not to notice his son's approach. His restless jaw was still imperturbably

chewing.

"_O hay[=o] gozaimas_"!

"_Tar[=o], yo! O hay[=o]_"! cried the old gentleman, calling his son by his short boy's name, and cutting off all honorifics from his speech. He always affected surprise at this visit, which had been a daily occurrence for many years.

"The cherry-flowers are fallen and finished," said the younger man.
"Ah, human life, how short a thing!"

"Yes, one year more I have seen the flowers," said Mr. Fujinami Gennosuke, nodding his head and taking his son's generalisation as a personal reference. He had laid his brush aside; and he was really wondering what would be Gentaro's comment on last night's feast and its guests of honour.

"Father is practising handwriting again?"

The old man's mania was penmanship, just as his son's was literature. Among Japanese it is considered the pastime becoming to his age.

"My wrist has become stiff. I cannot write as I used to. It is always so. Youth has the strength but not the knowledge; age has the knowledge, but no strength."

As a matter of fact, Mr. Gennosuke was immensely satisfied with his calligraphy, and was waiting for compliments.

"But this, this is beautifully written. It is worthy of Kobo Daishi!" said the younger man, naming a famous scholar priest of the Middle Ages. He was admiring a scroll on which four characters were written in a perpendicular row. They signified, "From the midst of tranquillity I survey the world."

"No," said the artist; "you see the ten (point) there is wrong. It is ill-formed. It should be written thus."

Shaking back his kimono sleeve--he wore a sea-blue cotton kimono, as befitted his years--and with a little flourish of his wrist, like a golfer about to make his stroke, he traced off the new version of the character on the white paper.

Perched on his veranda, with his head on one side he looked very like the marabout stork, as you may see him at the Zoo, that raffish bird with the folds in his neck, the stained glaucous complexion, the bald head and the brown human eye. He had the same look of respectable rascality. The younger Fujinami showed signs of becoming exactly like him, although the parentage was by adoption only. He was not yet so bald. His black hair was patched with grey in a piebald design. The skin of the throat was at present merely loose, it did not yet hang in bags.

"And this Asa San?" remarked the elder after a pause; "what is to be thought of her? Last night I became drunk, as my habit is, and I could not see those people well."

"She is not loud-voiced and bold like foreign women. Indeed, her voice

and her eyes are soft. Her heart is very good, I think. She is timid, and in everything she puts her husband first. She does not understand the world at all; and she knows nothing about money. Indeed, she is like a perfect Japanese wife."

"Hm! A good thing, and the husband?"

"He is a soldier, an honourable man. He seemed foolish, or else he is very cunning. The English people are like that. They say a thing. Of course, you think it is a lie. But no, it is the truth; and so they deceive."

"_Ma, mendo-kusai_ (indeed, smelly-troublesome!) And why has this foreigner come to Japan?"

"Ito says he has come to learn about the money. That means, when he knows he will want more."

"How much do we pay to Asa San?"

"Ten per cent."

"And the profits last year on all our business came to thirty seven and a half per cent. Ah! A fine gain. We could not borrow from the banks at ten per cent. They would want at least fifteen, and many gifts for silence. It is better to fool the husband, and to let them go back to England. After all, ten per cent is a good rate. And we want all our money now for the new brothels in Osaka. If we make much money there, then afterwards we can give them more."

"Ito says that if the Englishman knows that the money is made in brothels, he will throw it all away and finish. Ito thinks it would be not impossible to send the Englishman back to England, and to keep Asa here in Japan."

The old man looked up suddenly, and for once his jaw stopped chewing.

"That would be best of all," he exclaimed. "Then indeed he is honourable and a great fool. Being an Englishman, it is possible. Let him go back to England. We will keep Asa. She too is a Fujinami; and, even though she is a woman, she can be useful to the family. She will stay with us. She would not like to be poor. She has not borne a baby to this foreigner, and she is young. I think also our Sada can teach her many things."

"It is of Sada that I came to speak to father," said Mr. Gentaro. "The marriage of our Sada is a great question for the Fujinami family. Here is a letter from Mr. Osumi, a friend of the Governor of Osaka. The Governor has been of much help to us in getting the concession for the new brothels. He is a widower with no children. He is a man with a future. He is protected by the military clan. He is wishful to marry a woman who can assist his career, and who would be able to take the place of a Minister's wife. Mr. Osumi, who writes, had heard of the accomplishments of our Sada. He mentioned her name to the Governor; and His Excellency was quite willing that Mr. Osumi should write something in a letter to Ito."

"Hm!" grunted the old gentleman, squinting sidelong at his son; "this Governor, has he a private fortune?"

"No, he is a self-made man."

"Then it will not be with him, as it was with that Viscount Kamimura. He will not be too proud to take our money."

The truth of the allusion to Viscount Kamimura was that the name of Sadako Fujinami had figured on the list of possible brides submitted to that young aristocrat on his return from England. At first, it seemed likely that the choice would fall upon her, because of her undisputed cleverness; and the Fujinami family were radiant at the prospect of so brilliant a match. For although nothing had been formally mentioned between the two families, yet Sadako and her mother had learned from their hairdresser that there was talk of such a possibility in the servants' quarter of the Kamimura mansion, and that old Dowager Viscountess Kamimura was undoubtedly making inquiries which could only point to that one object.

The young Viscount, however, on ascertaining the origin of the family wealth, eliminated poor Sadako from the competition for his hand.

It was a great disappointment to the Fujinami, and most of all to the ambitious Sadako. For a moment she had seen opening the doorway into that marvellous world of high diplomacy, of European capitals, of diamonds, duchesses and intrigue, of which she had read in foreign novels, where everybody is rich, brilliant, immoral and distinguished, and where to women are given the roles to play even more important than those of the men. This was the only world, she felt, worthy of her talents; but few, very few, just one in a million Japanese women, ever gets the remotest chance of entering it. This chance presented itself to Sadako--but for a moment only. The doorway shut to again; and Sadako was left feeling more acutely than before the emptiness of life, and the bitterness of woman's lot in a land where men are supreme.

Her cousin, Asako, by the mere luck of having had an eccentric parent and a European upbringing, possessed all the advantages and all the experience which the Japanese girl knew only through the glamorous medium of books. But this Asa San was a fool. Sadako had found that out at once in the course of a few minutes talk at the Maple Club dinner. She was sweet, gentle and innocent; far more Japanese, indeed, than her sophisticated cousin. Her obvious respect and affection for her big rough husband, her pathetic solicitude for the father whose face she could hardly remember and for the mother who was nothing but a name; these traits of character belong to the meek Japanese girl of *_Onna Daigaku_* (Woman's Great Learning), that famous classic of Japanese girlhood which teaches the submission of women and the superiority of men. It was a type which was becoming rare in her own country. Little Asako had nothing in common with the argumentative heroines of Bernard Shaw or with the desperate viragos of Ibsen, to whom Sadako felt herself spiritually akin. Asako must be a fool. She exasperated her Japanese cousin, who at the same time was envious of her, envious above all of her independent wealth. As she observed to her own mother, it was most improper that a woman, and a young woman too, should have so much money of her own. It would be sure to spoil her character.

Meanwhile Asako was a way of access to first-hand knowledge of that world of European womanhood which so strongly attracted Sadako's

intelligence, that almost incredible world in which men and women were equal, had equal rights to property, and equal rights to love. Asako must have seen enough to explain something about it; if only she were not a fool. But it appeared that she had never heard of Strindberg, Sudermann, or d'Annunzio; and even Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde were unfamiliar names.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FAMILY ALTAR

_ Yume no ai wa
Kurushikari keru?
Odorokite
Kaki-saguredomo
Te ni mo fureneba._

(These) meetings in dreams
How sad they are!
When, waking up startled
One gropes about--
And there is no contact to the hand.

Miss Fujinami made up her mind to cultivate Asako's friendship, and to learn all that she could from her. So she at once invited her cousin to the mysterious house in Akasaka, and Asako at once accepted.

The doors seemed to fly open at the magic of the wanderer's return. Behind each partition were family retainers, bowing and smiling. Three maids assisted her to remove her boots. There was a sense of expectation and hospitality, which calmed Asako's fluttering shyness.

"Welcome! Welcome!" chanted the chorus of maids, "_O agari nasaimashi!_" (pray step up into the house!)"

The visitor was shown into a beautiful airy room overlooking the landscape garden. She could not repress an Ah! of wonder, when first this fairy pleasance came in sight. It was all so green, so tiny, and so perfect,--the undulating lawn, the sheet of silver water, the pigmy forests which clothed its shores, its disappearance round a shoulder of rock into that hinterland of high trees which closed the vista and shut out the intrusion of the squalid city.

The Japanese understand better than we do the mesmeric effects of sights and sounds. It was to give her time to assimilate her surroundings that Asako was left alone for half an hour or so, while Sadako and her mother were combing their hair and putting their kimonos straight. Tea and biscuits were brought for her, but her fancy was astray in the garden. Already to her imagination a little town had sprung up along the shingles of the tiny bay which faced her; the sails of white ships were glimpsing where the sunlight struck the water; and from round the rock promontory she could catch the shimmer of the Prince's galleon with its high poop and stern covered with solid gold. He was on his way to rescue the lady who was immured in the top of the red pagoda on the opposite hill.

Asako's legs were getting numb. She had been sitting on them in correct Japanese fashion all this time. She was proud of the accomplishment, which she considered must be hereditary, but she could not keep it up for much longer than half an hour. Sadako's mother entered.

"Asa San is welcome."

Much bowing began, in which Asako felt her disadvantage. The long lines of the kimono, with the big sash tied behind, lend themselves with peculiar grace to the squatting bow of Japanese intercourse. But Asako, in the short blue jacket of her tailor-made serge, felt that her attitude was that of the naughty little boys in English picture books, bending over for castigation.

Mrs. Fujinami wore a perfectly plain kimono, blackish-brown in colour, with a plain gold sash. It is considered correct for middle-aged ladies in Japan to dress with modesty and reserve. She was tall for a Japanese woman and big-boned, with a long lantern-face, and an almost Jewish nose. The daughter was of her mother's build. But her face was a perfect oval, the melon-seed shape which is so highly esteemed in her country. The severity of her appearance was increased, by her blue-tinted spectacles; and like so many Japanese women, her teeth were full of gold stopping. She was resplendent in blue, the blue of the Mediterranean, with fronds of cherry-blossom and floating pink petals designed round her skirts and at the bottom of the long exaggerated sleeves. The sash of broad stiff brocade shone with light blue and silver in a kind of conventional wave pattern. This was tied at the back with a huge bow, which seemed perched upon its wearer like a gigantic butterfly alighting on a cornflower. Her straight black hair was parted on one side in "foreign" style. But her mother wore the helmet-like *marumage*, the edifice of conservative taste in married women, which looks more like a wig than like natural hair.

Rings sparkled on Sadako's fingers, and she wore a diamond ornament across her sash; but neither their taste nor their quality impressed her cousin. Her face was of the same ivory tint as Asako's, but it was hidden under a lavish coating of liquid powder. This hideous embellishment covers not only the Mongolian yellow, which every Japanese woman seems anxious to hide, but also the natural and charming nuances of young skin, under a white monotonous surface like a mask of clay. Painted roses bloomed on the girl's cheeks. The eyebrows were artificially darkened as well as the lines round the eyes. The face and its expression, in fact, were quite obscured by cosmetics; and Miss Fujinami was wrapped in a cloud of cheap scent like a servant-girl on her evening out.

She spoke English well. In fact, at school she had achieved a really brilliant career, and she had even attended a University for a time with the intention of reading for a degree, an attainment rare among Japanese girls. But overwork brought on its inevitable result. Books had to be banished, and glasses interposed to save the tired eyes from the light. It was a bitter disappointment for Sadako, who was a proud and ambitious girl, and it had not improved her disposition.

After the first formalities Asako was shown round the house. The sameness of the rooms surprised her. There was nothing to distinguish them except the different woods used in their ceilings and walls, a

distinction which betrayed its costliness and its taste only to the practised eye. Each room was spotless and absolutely bare, with golden tatami, rice-straw mats with edgings of black braid, fixed into the flooring, by whose number the size of a Japanese room is measured. Asako admired the pale white shoji, the sliding windows of opaque glowing paper along the side of the room open to the outdoor light, the fusuma or sliding partitions between room and room, set in the framework of the house, some of them charmingly painted with sketches of scenery, flowers, or people, some of them plain cream-coloured boards flecked with tiny specks of gold.

Nothing broke the sameness of these rooms except the double alcove, or tokonoma with its inevitable hanging picture, its inevitable ornament, and its spray of blossom. Between the double niche stood that pillar of wood which Sadako explained as being the soul of the room, the leading feature from which its character was taken, being either plain and firm, or twisted and ornate, or else still unshaped, with the bosses of amputated branches seared and black protesting against confinement. The tokonoma, as the word suggests, must originally have been the sleeping-place of the owner of the room, for it certainly is the only corner in a Japanese house which is secured from draughts. But perhaps it was respect for invisible spirits which drove the sleeper eventually to abandon his coign of vantage to the service of aesthetic beauty, and to stretch himself on the open floor.

To Asako the rooms seemed all the same. Each gave the same impression of spotlessness and nudity. Each was stiffly rectangular like the honey squares fitted into a hive. Above all, there was nothing about any of them to indicate their individual use, or the character of the person to whom they were specially assigned. No dining-room, or drawing-room, or library.

"Where is your bedroom?" asked Asako, with a frank demand for that sign of sisterhood among Western girls; "I should so like to see it."

"I generally sleep," answered the Japanese girl, "in that room at the corner where we have been already, where the bamboo pictures are. This is the room where father and mother sleep."

They were standing on the balcony outside the apartment where Asako had first been received.

"But where are the beds?" she asked.

Sadako went to the end of the balcony, and threw open a big cupboard concealed in the outside of the house. It was full of layers of rugs, thick, dark and wadded.

"These are the beds," smiled the Japanese cousin. "My brother Takeshi has a foreign bed in his room; but my father does not like them, or foreign clothes, or foreign food, or anything foreign. He says the Japanese things are best for the Japanese. But he is very old-fashioned."

"Japanese style looks nicer," said Asako, thinking how big and vulgar a bedstead would appear in that clean emptiness and how awkwardly its iron legs would trample on the straw matting; "but isn't it draughty and uncomfortable?"

"I like the foreign beds best," said Sadako; "my brother has let me try his. It is very soft."

So in this country of Asako's fathers, a bedstead was lent for trial as though it had been some fascinating novelty, a bicycle or a piano.

The kitchen appealed most to the visitor. It was the only room to her mind which had any individuality of its own. It was large, dark and high, full of servant-girls scuttering about like little mice, who bowed and then fled when the two ladies came in. The stoves for boiling the rice interested Asako, round iron receptacles like coppers, each resting on a brick fireplace. Everything was explained to her: the high dressers hung with unfamiliar implements in white metal and white wood: the brightly labelled casks of sake and shoyu (sauce) waiting in the darkness like the deputation of a friendly society in its insignia of office: the silent jars of tea, greenish in colour and ticketed with strange characters, the names of the respective tea-gardens: the iron kettle hanging on gibbet chains from the top of the ceiling over a charcoal fire sunk in the floor; the tasteful design of the commonest earthenware bowl: the little board and chopper for slicing the raw fish: the clean white rice-tubs with their brass bindings polished and shining: the odd shape and entirely Japanese character which distinguished the most ordinary things, and gave to the short squat knives a romantic air and to the broad wooden spoons a suggestion of witchcraft: finally, the little shrine to the Kitchen God, perched on a shelf close to the ceiling, looking like the facade of a doll's temple, and decorated with brass vases, dry grasses, and strips of white paper. The wide kitchen was impregnated with a smell already familiar to Asako's nose, one of the most typical odours of Japan, the smell of native cooking, humid, acrid and heavy like the smell of wood smoke from damp logs, with a sour and rotten flavour to it contributed by a kind of pickled horse-radish called Daikon or the Great Root, dear to the Japanese palate.

The central ceremony of Asako's visit was her introduction to the memory of her dead parents. She was taken to a small room, where the alcove, the place of honour, was occupied by a closed cabinet, the butsudan (Buddha shelf), a beautiful piece of joiner's work in a kind of lattice pattern covered with red lacquer and gold. Sadako, approaching, reverently opened this shrine. The interior was all gilt with a dazzling gold like that used on old manuscripts. In the centre of this glory sat a golden-faced Buddha with dark blue hair and cloak, and an aureole of golden rays. Below him were arranged the ihai, the Tablets of the Dead, miniature grave-stones about one foot high, with a black surface edged with gold upon which were inscribed the names of the dead persons, the new names given by the priests.

Sadako stepped back and clapped her hands together three times, repeating the formula of the Nichiren Sect of Buddhists.

"Namu myōhōrenge kyō!" (Adoration to the Wonderful Law of the Lotus Scriptures!)"

She instructed Asako to do the same.

"For," she said, "we believe that the spirits of the dead people are here; and we must be very good to them."

Asako did as she was told, wondering whether her confessor would give her penance for idolatry. Sadako then motioned her to sit on the floor. She took one of the tablets from its place and placed it in front of her cousin.

"That is your father's _ihai_," she said; and then removing another and placing it beside the first, she added,--

"This is your mother."

Asako was deeply moved. In England we love our dead; but we consign them to the care of nature, to the change of the seasons, and the cold promiscuity of the graveyard. The Japanese dead never seem to leave the shelter of their home or the circle of their family. We bring to our dear ones flowers and prayers; but the Japanese give them food and wine, and surround them with every-day talk. The companionship is closer. We chatter much about immortality. We believe, many of us, in some undying particle. We even think that in some other world the dead may meet the dead whom they have known in life. But the actual communion of the dead and the living is for us a beautiful and inspiring metaphor rather than a concrete belief. Now the Japanese, although their religion is so much vaguer than ours, hardly question this survival of the ancestors in the close proximity of their children and grandchildren. The little funeral tablets are for them clothed with an invisible personality.

"This is your mother."

Asako felt influences floating around her. Her mind was in pain, straining to remember something which seemed to be not wholly forgotten.

Just at this moment Mrs. Fujinami arrived, carrying an old photograph album and a roll of silk. Her appearance was so opportune that any one less innocent than Asako might have suspected that the scene had been rehearsed. In the hush and charm of that little chamber of the spirits, the face of the elder woman looked soft and sweet. She opened the volume at the middle, and pushed it in front of Asako.

She saw the photograph of a Japanese girl seated in a chair with a man standing at her side, with one hand resting on the chair back. Her father's photograph she recognised at once, the broad forehead, the deep eyes, the aquiline nose, the high cheek bones, and the thin, angry sarcastic lips; not a typically Japanese face, but a type recurrent throughout our over-educated world, cultured, desperate and stricken. Asako had very little in common with her father; for his character had been moulded or warped by two powerful agencies, his intellect and his disease; and it was well for his daughter that she had escaped this dire inheritance. But never before had she seen her mother's face. Sometimes she had wondered who and what her mother had been; what she had thought of as her baby grew within her; and with what regrets she had exchanged her life for her child's. More often she had considered herself as a being without a mother, a fairy's child, brought into this world on a sunbeam or born from a flower.

Now she saw the face which had reflected pain and death for her. It was impassive, doll-like and very young, pure oval in outline, but lacking in expression. The smallness of the mouth was the most characteristic feature, but it was not alive with smiles like her

daughter's. It was pinched and constrained, with the lower lips drawn in.

The photograph was clearly a wedding souvenir. She wore the black kimono of a bride, and the multiple skirts. A kind of little pocket-book with silver charms dangling from it, an ancient marriage symbol, was thrust into the opening at her breast. Her head was covered with a curious white cap like the "luggage" of Christmas crackers. She was seated rigidly at the edge of her uncomfortable chair; and her personality seemed to be overpowered by the solemnity of the occasion.

"Did she love him," her daughter wondered, "as I love Geoffrey?"

Through Sadako's interpretation Mrs. Fujinami explained that Asako's mother's name had been Yamagata Haruko (Spring child). Her father had been a samurai in the old two-sworded days. The photograph was not very like her. It was too serious.

"Like you," said the elder woman, "she was always laughing and happy. My husband's father used to call her the Semi (the cicada), because she was always singing her little song. She was chosen for your father because he was so sad and wrathful. They thought that she would make him more gentle. But she died; and then he became more sad than before."

Asako was crying very gently. She felt the touch of her cousin's hand on her arm. The intellectual Miss Sadako also was weeping, the tears furrowing her whitened complexion. The Japanese are a very emotional race. The women love tears; and even the men are not averse from this very natural expression of feeling, which our Anglo-Saxon schooling has condemned as babyish. Mrs. Fujinami continued,--

"I saw her a few days before you were born. They lived in a little house on the bank of the river. One could see the boats passing. It was very damp and cold. She talked all the time of her baby. 'If it is a boy,' she said, 'everybody will be happy; if it is a girl, Fujinami San will be very anxious for the family's sake; and the fortune-tellers say that it will surely be a little girl. But,' she used to say, 'I could play better with a little girl; I know what makes them laugh!' When you were born she became very ill. She never spoke again, and in a few days she died. Your father became like a madman, he locked the house, and would not see any of us; and as soon as you were strong enough, he took you away in a ship."

Sadako placed in front of her cousin the roll of silk, and said,--

"This is Japanese obi (sash). It belonged to your mother. She gave it to my mother a short time before you were born; for she said, 'It is too bright for me now; when I have my baby, I shall give up society, and I shall spend all my time with my children.' My mother gives it to you for your mother's sake."

It was a wonderful work of art, a heavy golden brocade, embroidered with fans, and on each fan a Japanese poem and a little scene from the olden days.

"She was very fond of this obi, she chose the poems herself."

But Asako was not admiring the beautiful workmanship. She was thinking of the mother's heart which had beat for her under that long strip of silk, the little Japanese mother who "would have known how to make her laugh." Tears were falling very quietly on to the old sash.

The two Japanese women saw this; and with the instinctive tact of their race, they left her alone face to face with this strange introduction to her mother's personality.

There is a peculiar pathos about the clothes of the dead. They are so nearly a part of our bodies that it seems unnatural almost that they should survive with the persistence of inanimate things, when we who gave them the semblance of life are far more dead than they. It would be more seemly, perhaps, if all these things which have belonged to us so intimately were to perish with us in a general suttee. But the mania for relics would never tolerate so complete a disappearance of one whom we had loved; and our treasuring of hair and ornaments and letters is a desperate--and perhaps not an entirely vain--attempt to check the liberated spirit in its leap for eternity.

Asako found in that old garment of her mother's a much more faithful reflection of the life which had been transmitted to her, than the stiff photograph could ever realise. She had chosen the poems herself. Asako must get them transcribed and translated; for they would be a sure indication of her mother's character. Already the daughter could see that her mother too must have loved rich and beautiful things, happiness and laughter.

Old Mr. Fujinami had called her "the Semi." Asako did not yet know the voice of the little insects which are the summer and autumn orchestra of Japan. But she knew that it must be something happy and sweet; or they would not have told her.

* * * * *

She rose from her knees, and found her cousin waiting for her on the veranda. Whatever real expression she may have had was effectively hidden behind the tinted glasses, and the false white complexion, now renovated from the ravages of emotion. But Asako's heart was won by the power of the dead, of whom Sadako and her family were, she felt, the living representatives.

Asako took both of her cousin's hands in her own.

"It was sweet of you and your mother to give me that," she said--and her eyes were full of tears--"you could not have thought of anything which would please me more."

The Japanese girl was on the point of starting to bow and smile the conventional apologies for the worthlessness of the gift, when she felt herself caught by a power unfamiliar to her, the power of the emotions of the West.

The pressure on her wrists increased, her face was drawn down towards her cousin's, and she felt against the corner of her mouth the warm touch of Asako's lips.

She started back with a cry of "Iya! (don't!)," the cry of outraged Japanese femininity. Then she remembered from her readings that such

kissings were common among European girls, that they were a compliment and a sign of affection. But she hoped that it had not disarranged her complexion again; and that none of the servants had seen.

Her cousin's surprise shook Asako out of her dream; and the kiss left a bitter powdery taste upon her lips which disillusioned her.

"Shall we go into the garden?" said Sadako, who felt that fresh air was advisable.

They joined hands; so much familiarity was permitted by Japanese etiquette. They went along the gravel path to the summit of the little hillock where the cherry-trees had lately been in bloom, Sadako in her bright kimono, Asako in her dark suit. She looked like a mere mortal being introduced to the wonders of Titania's country by an authentic fairy.

The sun was setting in the clear sky, one half of which was a tempest of orange, gold and red, and the other half warm and calm with roseate reflections. Over the spot where the focus point of all this glory was sinking into darkness, a purple cloud hovered like a shred of the monarch's glory caught and torn away on the jag of some invisible obstruction. Its edges were white flame, as though part of the sun's fire were hidden behind it.

Even from this high position little could be seen beyond the Fujinami enclosure except tree-tops. Away down the valley appeared the grey scaly roofs of huddled houses, and on a hill opposite more trees with the bizarre pinnacle of a pagoda forcing its way through the midst of them. It looked like a series of hats perched one on the top of the other by a merchant of Petticoat Lane.

Lights were glimpsing from the Fujinami mansion; more lights were visible among the shrubberies below. This soft light, filtered through the paper walls, shone like a luminous pearl. This is the home light of the Japanese, and is as typical of their domesticity as the blazing log-fire is of ours. It is greenish, still and pure, like a glow-worm's beacon.

Out of the deep silence a bell tolled. It was as though an unseen hand had struck the splendour of that metallic firmament; or as though a voice had spoken out of the sunset cloud.

The two girls descended to the brink of the lake. Here at the farther end the water was broader; and it was hidden from view of the houses. Green reeds grew along the margin, and green iris leaves, like sword blades, black now in the failing light. There was a studied roughness in the tiny landscape, and in the midst of the wilderness a little hut.

"What a sweet little summer-house!" cried Asako.

It looked like a settler's shack, built of rough, unshapen logs and thatched with rushes.

"It is the room for the _chanoyu_, the tea-ceremony," said her cousin.

Inside, the walls were daubed with earth; and a round window barred with bamboo sticks gave a view into what was apparently forest depths.

"Why, it is just like a doll's house," cried Asako, delighted. "Can we go in?"

"Oh, yes," said the Japanese. Asako jumped in at once and squatted down on the clean matting; but her more cautious cousin dusted the place with her handkerchief before risking a stain.

"Do you often have tea-ceremonies?" asked Asako.

The Muratas had explained to her long ago something about the mysterious rites.

"Two or three times in the Spring, and then two or three times in the Autumn. But my teacher comes every week."

"How long have you been learning?" Asako wanted to know.

"Oh, since I was ten years old about."

"Is it so difficult then?" said Asako, who had found it comparatively easy to pour out a cup of drawing-room tea without clumsiness.

Sadako smiled tolerantly at her cousin's naive ignorance of things aesthetic and intellectual. It was as though she had been asked whether music or philosophy were difficult.

"One can never study too much," she said, "one is always learning; one can never be perfect. Life is short, art is long."

"But it is not an art like painting or playing the piano, just pouring out tea?"

"Oh, yes," Sadako smiled again, "it is much more than that. We Japanese do not think art is just to be able to do things, showing off like geisha. Art is in the character, in the spirit. And the tea-ceremony teaches us to make our character full of art, by restraining everything ugly and common, in every movement, in the movement of our hands, in the position of our feet, in the looks of our faces. Men and women ought not to sit and move like animals; but the shape of their bodies, and their way of action ought to express a poetry. That is the art of the chanoyu."

"I should like to see it," said Asako, excited by her cousin's enthusiasm, though she hardly understood a word of what she had been saying.

"You ought to learn some of it," said Sadako, with the zeal of a propagandist. "My teacher says--and my teacher was educated at the court of the Tokugawa Shogun--that no woman can have really good manners, if she has not studied the chanoyu."

Of course, there was nothing which Asako would like more than to sit in this fascinating arbour in the warm days of the coming summer, and play at tea-parties with her new-found Japanese cousin. She would learn to speak Japanese, too; and she would help Sadako with her French and English.

The two cousins worked out the scheme for their future intimacy until

the stars were reflected in the lake and the evening breeze became too cool for them.

Then they left the little hermitage and continued their walk around the garden. They passed a bamboo grove, whose huge plumes, black in the darkness, danced and beckoned like the Erl-king's daughters. They passed a little house shuttered like a Noah's Ark, from which came a monotonous moaning sound as of some one in pain, and the rhythmic beat of a wooden clapper.

"What is that?" asked Asako.

"That is my father's brother's house. But he is illegitimate brother; he is not of the true family. He is a very pious man. He repeats the prayer to Buddha ten thousand times every day; and he beats upon the _mokugy[=o]_ a kind of drum like a fish which the Buddhist priests use."

"Was he at the dinner last night?" asked Asako.

"Oh no, he never goes out. He has not once left that house for ten years. He is perhaps rather mad; but it is said that he brings good luck to the family."

A little farther on they passed two stone lanterns, cold and blind like tombstones. Stone steps rose between them to what in the darkness looked like a large dog-kennel. A lighted paper lantern hung in front of it like a great ripe fruit.

"What is that?" asked Asako.

In the failing twilight this fairy garden was becoming more and more wonderful. At any moment, she felt she might meet the Emperor himself in the white robes of ancient days and the black coal-scuttle hat.

"That is a little temple," explained her cousin, "for Inari Sama."

At the top of the flight of steps Asako distinguished two stone foxes. Their expression was hungry and malign. They reminded her of--what? She remembered the little temple outside the Yoshiwara on the day she had gone to see the procession.

"Do you say prayers there?" she asked her companion.

"No, _I_ do not," answered the Japanese, "but the servants light the lamp every evening; and we believe it makes the house lucky. We Japanese are very superstitious. Besides, it looks pretty in the garden."

"I don't like the foxes' faces," said Asako, "they look bad creatures."

"They _are_ bad creatures," was the reply, "nobody likes to see a fox; they fool people."

"Then why say prayers, if they are bad?"

"It is just because they are bad," said Sadako, "that we must please them. We flatter them so that they may not hurt us."

Asako was unlearned in the difference between religion and devil-worship, so she did not understand the full significance of this remark. But she felt an unpleasant reaction, the first which she had received that day; and she thought to herself that if she were the mistress of that lovely garden, she would banish the stone foxes and risk their displeasure.

The two girls returned to the house. Its shutters were up, and it, too, had that same appearance of a Noah's Ark but of a more complete and expensive variety. One little opening was left in the wooden armature for the girls to enter by.

"Please come again many, many times," was cousin Sadako's last farewell. "The house of the Fujinami is your home. _Sayonara_!"

* * * * *

Geoffrey was waiting for his wife in the hall of the hotel. He was anxious at her late return. His embrace seemed to swallow her up to the amusement of the _boy sans_ who had been discussing the lateness of _okusan_, and the possibility of her having an admirer.

"Thank goodness," said Geoffrey, "what have you been doing? I was just going to organise a search party."

"I have been with Mrs. Fujinami and Sadako," Asako panted, "they would not let me go; and oh!"--She was going to tell him all about her mother's picture; but she suddenly checked herself, and said instead, "They've got such a lovely garden."

She described the home of the cousins in glowing colours, the hospitality of the family, the cleverness of cousin Sadako, and the lessons which they were going to exchange. Yes, she replied to Geoffrey's questions, she had seen the memorial tablets of her father and mother, and their wedding photograph. But a strange paralysis sealed her lips, and her soul became inarticulate. She found herself absolutely incapable of telling that big foreign husband of hers, truly as she loved him, the veritable state of her emotions when brought face to face with her dead parents.

Geoffrey had never spoken to her of her mother. He had never seemed to have the least interest in her identity. These "Jap women," as he called them, were never very real to him. She dreaded the possibility of revealing to him her secret, and then of receiving no response to her emotion. Also she had an instinctive reluctance to emphasise in Geoffrey's mind her kinship with these alien people.

After dinner, when she had gone up to her room, Geoffrey was left alone with his cigar and his reflection.

"Funny that she did not speak more about her father and mother. But I suppose they don't mean much to her, after all. And, by Jove, it's a good thing for me! I wouldn't like to have a wife who was all the time running home to her people, and comparing notes with her mother."

Upstairs in her bedroom, Asako had unrolled the precious _obi_. An unmounted photograph came fluttering out of the parcel. It was a portrait of her father alone taken a short time before his death. At the back of the photograph was some Japanese writing.

"Is Tanaka there?" Asako asked her maid Titine.

Yes, of course, Tanaka was there, in the next room with his ear near the door.

"Tanaka, what does this mean?"

"Japanese poem," he said, "meaning very difficult: very many meanings: I think perhaps it means, having travelled all over the world, he feels very sad."

"Yes, but word for word, Tanaka, what does it mean?"

"This writing means, World is really not the same it says: all the world very many tell lies."

"And this?"

"This means, Travelling everywhere."

"And this at the end?"

"It means, Everything always the same thing. Very bad translation I make. Very sad poem."

"And this writing here?"

"That is Japanese name--Fujinami Katsundo--and the date, twenty-fifth year of Meiji, twelfth month."

Tanaka had turned over the photograph and was looking attentively at the portrait.

"The honoured father of Ladyship, I think," he said.

"Yes," said Asako.

Then she thought she heard her husband's step away down the corridor. Hurriedly she thrust _obi_ and photograph into a drawer.

Now, why did she do that? wondered Tanaka.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DWARF TREES

_Iwa-yado ni
Tateru maisu no ki,
Na wo mireba,
Mukashi no hito wo
Ai-miru gotashi._

O pine-tree standing
At the (side of) the stone house,
When I look at you,

It is like seeing face to face
The men of old time.

For the first time during the journey of their married lives, Geoffrey and Asako were pursuing different paths. It is the normal thing, no doubt, for the man to go out to his work and to his play, while the wife attends to her social and domestic duties. The evening brings reunion with new impressions and new interests to discuss. Such a life with its brief restorative separations prevents love growing stale, and soothes the irritation of nerves which, by the strain of petty repetitions, are exasperated sometimes into blasphemy of the heart's true creed. But the Barrington _menage_ was an unusual one. By adopting a life of travel, they had devoted themselves to a protracted honeymoon, a relentless _tete-a-tete_. So long as they were continually on the move, constantly refreshed by new scenes, they did not feel the difficulty of their self-imposed task. But directly their stay in Tokyo seemed likely to become permanent, their ways separated as naturally as two branches, which have been tightly bound together, spread apart with the loosening of the string.

This separation was so inevitable that they were neither of them conscious of it. Geoffrey had all his life been devoted to exercise and games of all kinds. They were as necessary as food for his big body. At Tokyo he had found, most unexpectedly, excellent tennis-courts and first-class players.

They still spent the mornings together, driving round the city, and inspecting curios. So what could be more reasonable than that Asako should prefer to spend her afternoons with her cousin, who was so anxious to please her and to initiate her into that intimate Japanese life, which of course must appeal to her more strongly than to her husband?

Personally, Geoffrey found the company of his Japanese relatives exceedingly slow.

In return for the hospitalities of the Maple Club the Barringtons invited a representative gathering of the Fujinami clan to dinner at the Imperial Hotel, to be followed by a general adjournment to the theatre.

It was a most depressing meal. Nobody spoke. All of the guests were nervous; some of them about their clothes, some about their knives and forks, all of them about their English. They were too nervous even to drink wine, which would have been the only remedy for such a "frost."

Only Ito, the lawyer, talked, talked noisily, talked with his mouth full. But Geoffrey disliked Ito. He mistrusted the man; but, because of his wife's growing intimacy with her cousins, he felt loath to start subterranean inquiries as to the whereabouts of her fortune. It was Ito who, foreseeing embarrassment, had suggested the theatre party after dinner. For this at least Geoffrey was grateful to him. It saved him the pain of trying to make conversation with his cousins.

"Talking to these Japs," he said to Reggie Forsyth, "is like trying to play tennis all by yourself."

Later on, at his wife's insistence, he attended an informal

garden-party at the Fujinami house. Again he suffered acutely from those cruel silences and portentous waitings, to which he noticed that even the Japanese among themselves were liable, but which apparently they did not mind.

Tea and ice-creams were served by geisha girls who danced afterwards upon the lawn. When this performance was over the guests were conducted to an open space behind the cherry-grove, where a little shooting-range had been set up, with a target, air-guns and boxes of lead lugs. Geoffrey, of course, joined in the shooting-competition, and won a handsome cigarette case inlaid with Damascene work. But he thought that it was a poor game; nor did he ever realize that this entertainment had been specially organized with a view to flattering his military and sporting tastes.

But the greatest disillusionment was the Akasaka garden. Geoffrey was resigned to be bored by everything else. But his wife had grown so enthusiastic about the beauties of the Fujinami domain, that he had expected to walk straight into a paradise. What did he see? A dirty pond and some shrubs, not one single flower to break the monotony of green and drab, and everything so small. Why, he could walk round the whole enclosure in ten minutes. Geoffrey Barrington was accustomed to country houses in England, with their broad acres and their lavish luxuriance of scent and blossom. This niggling landscape art of the Japanese seemed to him mean and insignificant.

* * * * *

He much preferred the garden at Count Saito's home. Count Saito, the late Ambassador at the Court of St. James, with his stooping shoulders, his grizzled hair, and his deep eyes peering under the gold-rimmed spectacles, had proposed the health of Captain and Mrs. Barrington at their wedding breakfast. Since then, he had returned to Japan, where he was soon to play a leading political role. Meeting Geoffrey one day at the Embassy, he had invited him and his wife to visit his famous garden.

It was a hanging garden on the side of a steep hill, parted down the middle by a little stream with its string of waterfalls. Along either bank rose groups of iris, mauve and white, whispering together like long-limbed pre-Raphaelite girls. Round a sunny fountain, the source of the stream, just below the terrace of the Count's mansion, they thronged together more densely, surrounding the music of the water with the steps of a slow sarabande, or pausing at the edge of the pool to admire their own reflection.

Count Saito showed Geoffrey where the roses were coming on, new varieties of which he had brought from England with him.

"Perhaps they will not like to be turned into Japanese," he observed; "the rose is such an English flower."

They passed on to where the azaleas would soon be in fiery bloom. For with the true gardener, the hidden promise of the morrow is more stimulating to the enthusiasm than the assured success of the full flowers.

The Count wore his rustling native dress; but two black cocker spaniels followed at his heels. This combination presented an odd

mixture of English squire-archy and the daimyo of feudal Japan.

On the crest of the hill above him rose the house, a tall Italianate mansion of grey stucco, softened by creepers, jessamine and climbing roses. Alongside ran the low irregular roofs of the Japanese portion of the residence. Almost all rich Japanese have a double house, half foreign and half native, to meet the needs of their amphibious existence. This grotesque juxtaposition is to be seen all over Tokyo, like a tall boastful foreigner tethered to a timid Japanese wife.

Geoffrey inquired in which wing of this unequal bivalve his host actually lived.

"When I returned from England," said Count Saito, "I tried to live again in the Japanese style. But we could not, neither my wife nor I. We took cold and rheumatism sleeping on the floor, and the food made us ill; so we had to give it up. But I was sorry. For I think it is better for a country to keep its own ways. There is a danger nowadays, when all the world is becoming cosmopolitan. A kind of international type is springing up. His language is esperanto, his writing is shorthand, he has no country, he fights for whoever will pay him most, like the Swiss of the Middle Ages. He is the mercenary of commerce, the ideal commercial traveler. I am much afraid of him, because I am a Japanese and not a world citizen. I want my country to be great and respected. Above all, I want it to be always Japanese. I think that loss in national character means loss of national strength."

Asako was being introduced by her hostess to the celebrated collection of dwarf trees, which had made the social fame of the Count's sojourn as Ambassador in Grosvenor Square.

Countess Saito, like her husband, spoke excellent English; and her manner in greeting Asako was of London rather than of Tokyo. She took both her hands and shook them warmly.

"My dear," she said, in her curious deep hoarse voice, "I'm so glad to see you. You are like a little bit of London come to say that you have not forgotten me."

This great Japanese lady was small and very plain. Her high forehead was deeply lined and her face was marked with small-pox. Her big mouth opened wide as she talked, like a nestling's. But she was immensely rich. The only child of one of the richest bankers of Japan, she had brought to her husband the opportunity for his great gifts as a political leader, and the luxury in which they lived.

The little trees were in evidence everywhere, decorating the living rooms, posted like sentinels on the terrace, and staged with the honour due to statuary at points of vantage in the garden. But their chief home was in a sunny corner at the back of a shrubbery, where they were aligned on shelves in the sunlight. Three special gardeners who attended to their wants were grooming and massaging them, soothing and titivating them, for their temporary appearances in public. Here they had a green-house of their own, kept slightly warmed for a few delicate specimens, and also for the convalescence of the hardier trees; for these precious dwarfs are quite human in their ailments, their pleasures and their idiosyncracies.

Countess Saito had a hundred or more of these fashionable pets, of all

varieties and shapes. There were giants of primeval forests reduced to the dimensions of a few feet, like the timbers of a lordly park seen through the wrong end of a telescope. There were graceful maple trees, whose tiny star-like leaves were particularly adapted to the process of diminution which had checked the growth of trunk and branches. There were weeping willows with light-green feathery foliage, such as sorrowing fairies might plant on the grave of some Taliessin of Oberon's court. There was a double cherry in belated bloom; its flowers of natural size hung amid the slender branches like big birds' nests. There was a stunted oak tree, creeping along the earth with gnarled and lumpy limbs like a miniature dinosaur; it waved in the air a clump of demensurate leaves with the truculent mien of boxing-gloves or lobsters' claws. In the centre of the rectangle formed by this audience of trees, and raised on a long table, was a tiny wisteria arbour, formed by a dozen plants arranged in quincunx. The intertwined ropes of branches were supported on shining rods of bamboo; and the clusters of blossom, like bunches of grapes or like miniature chandeliers, still hung over the litter of their fallen beauty, with a few bird-like flowers clinging to them, pale and bleached.

"They are over two hundred years old," said their proud owner, "they came from one of the Emperor's palaces at Kyoto."

But the pride of the collection were the conifers and evergreens--trees which have Japanese and Latin names only, the _hinoki_, the _enoki_, the _sasaki_, the _keyaki_, the _maki_, the _surgi_ and the _kusunoki_--all trees of the dark funereal families of fir and laurel, which the birds avoid, and whose deep winter green in the summer turns to rust. There were spreading cedar trees, black like the tents of Bedouins, and there were straight cryptomerias for the masts of fairy ships. There was a strange tree, whose light-green foliage grew in round clumps like trays of green lacquer at the extremities of twisted brandies, a natural _etagere_. There were the distorted pine-trees of Japan, which are the symbol of old age, of fidelity, of patience under adversity, and of the Japanese nation itself, in every attitude of menace, curiosity, jubilation and gloom. Some of them were leaning out of their pots and staring head downwards at the ground beneath them; some were creeping along the earth like reptiles; some were mere trunks, with a bunch of green needles sprouting at the top like a palm; some with one long pathetic branch were stretching out in quest of the infinite to the neglect of the rest of the tree; some were tall and bent as by some sea wind blowing shoreward. Striking a miniature landscape, they were whispering together the tales of centuries past.

The Japanese art of cultivating these tiny trees is a weird and unhealthy practice, akin to vivisection, but without its excuse. It is like the Chinese custom of dwarfing their women's feet. The result is pleasing to the eye; but it hurts the mind by its abnormality, and the heart by its ruthlessness.

Asako's admiration, so easily stirred, became enthusiastic as Countess Saito told her something of the personal history of her favourite plants, how this one was two hundred years old, and that one three hundred and fifty, and how another had been present at such and such a scene famous in Japanese history.

"Oh, they are lovely," cried Asako. "Where can one get them? I must

have some."

Countess Saito gave her the names of some well-known market gardeners.

"You can get pretty little trees from them for fifty to a hundred _yen_ (L5 to L10)," she said. "But of course the real historical trees are so very few; they hardly ever come on the market. They are like animals, you know. They want so much attention. They must have a garden to take their walks in, and a valet of their own."

This great Japanese lady felt an affection and sympathy for the girl who, like herself, had been set apart by destiny from the monotonous ranks of Japanese women and their tedious dependence.

"Little Asa Chan," she said, calling her by her pet name, "take care; you can become Japanese again, but your husband cannot."

"Of course not, he's too big," laughed Asako; "but I like to run away from him sometimes, and hide behind the _shoji_. Then I feel independent."

"But you are not really so," said the Japanese, "no woman is. You see the wisteria hanging in the big tree there. What happens when the big tree is taken away? The wisteria becomes independent, but it lies along the ground and dies. Do you know the Japanese name for wisteria? It is _fuji_ --Fujinami Asako. If you have any difficulty ever, come and talk to me. You see, I, too, am a rich woman; and I know that it is almost as difficult to be very rich as it is to be very poor."

* * * * *

Captain Barrington and the ex-Ambassador were sitting on one of the benches of the terrace when the ladies rejoined them.

"Well, Daddy," the Countess addressed her husband in English, "what are you talking about so earnestly?"

"About England and Japan," replied the Count.

As a matter of fact, in the course of a rambling conversation, Count Saito had asked his guest:

"Now, what strikes you as the most surprising difference between our two countries?"

Geoffrey pondered for a moment. He wanted to answer frankly, but he was still awed by the canons of Good Form. At last he said: "This Yoshiwara business."

The Japanese statesman seemed surprised.

"But that is just a local difference in the manner of regulating a universal problem," he said.

"Englishmen aren't any better than they should be," said Geoffrey; "but we don't like to hear of women put up for sale like things in a shop."

"Then you have not actually seen them yourself?" said the Count.

He could not help smiling at the characteristic British habit of criticising on hearsay.

"Not actually; but I saw the procession last month."

"You really think that it is better to let immoral women stray about the streets without any attempt to control them and the crime and disease they cause?"

"It's not that," said Geoffrey; "it seems to me horrible that women should be put up to sale and exposed in shop windows ticketed and priced."

Count Saito smiled again and said:

"I see that you are an idealist like so many Englishmen. But I am only a practical statesman. The problem of vice is a problem of government. No law can abolish it. It is for us statesmen to study how to restrain it and its evil consequences. Three hundred years ago these women used to walk about the streets as they do in London to-day. Tokugawa Iyeyasu, the greatest of all Japanese statesmen, who gave peace to the whole country, put in order this untidiness also. He had the Yoshiwara built, and he put all the women there, where the police could watch both them and the men who visited them. The English might learn from us here, I think. But you are an unruly people. It is not only that you object for ideal reasons to the imprisonment of these women; but it is your men who would object very strongly to having the eye of the policeman watching them when they paid their visits."

Geoffrey was silenced by the experience of his host. He was afraid, as most Englishmen are, of arguing that the British determination to ignore vice, however disastrous in practice, is a system infinitely nobler in conception than the acquiescence which admits for the evil its right to exist, and places it among the commonplaces of life.

"And how about the people who make money out of such a place?" asked Geoffrey. "They must be contemptible specimens."

The face of the wise statesman became suddenly gentle.

"I really don't know much about them," he said. "If we do meet them they do not boast about it."

CHAPTER XV

EURASIA

_ Mono-sugo ya
Ara omoshiro no
Kaeri-bana._

Queer--
Yes, but attractive
Are the flowers which bloom out of season.

Although he felt a decreasing interest in the Japanese people, Geoffrey was enjoying his stay in Tokyo. He was tired of traveling, and was glad to settle down in the semblance of a home life.

He was very keen on his tennis. It was also a great pleasure to see so much of Reggie Forsyth. Besides, he was conscious of the mission assigned to him by Lady Cynthia Cairns to save his friend from the dangerous connection with Yae Smith.

Reggie and he had been at Eton together. Geoffrey, four years the senior, a member of "Pop," and an athlete of many colours, found himself one day the object of an almost idolatrous worship on the part of a skinny little being, discredibly clever at Latin verses, and given over to the degrading habit of solitary piano practicing on half-holidays. He was embarrassed but touched by a devotion which was quite incomprehensible to him; and he encouraged it furtively. When Geoffrey left Eton the friends did not see each other again for some years, though they watched each other's careers from a distance, mutually appreciative. Their next meeting took place in Lady Everington's drawing-room, where Barrington had already heard fair ladies praising the gifts and graces of the young diplomat. He heard him play the piano; and he also heard the appreciation of discerning judgment. He heard him talking with arabesque agility. It was Geoffrey's turn to feel on the wrong side of a vast superiority, and in his turn he repaid the old debt of admiration; generosity filled the gulf and the two became firm friends. Reggie's intelligence flicked the inertia of Geoffrey's mind, quickened his powers of observation, and developed his sense of interest in the world around him. Geoffrey's prudence and stolidity had more than once saved the young man from the brink of sentimental precipices.

For Reggie's unquestionable musical talent found its nourishment in love affairs dangerously unsophisticated. He refused to consider marriage with any of the sweet young things, who would gladly have risked his lukewarm interest for the chance of becoming an Ambassador's wife. He equally avoided pawning his youth to any of the maturer married ladies, whose status and character, together with those of their husbands, license them to practice as certificated Egerias. His dangerous penchant was for highly spiced adventuresses, and for pastoral amourettes, wistful and obscure. But he never gave away his heart; he lent it out at interest. He received it again intact, with the profit of his musical inspiration. Thus his liaison with Veronique Gerson produced the publication of Les demi-jours, a series of musical poems which placed him at once in the forefront of young composers; but it also alarmed the Foreign Office, which was paternally interested in Reggie's career. This brought about his banishment to Japan. The Attente d'hiver, now famous, is his candid musical confession that the coma inflicted upon him by Veronique's unconcern was merely the drowsiness of the waiting earth before the New Year brought back the old story.

Reggie would never be attracted to native women; and he had not the dry inquisitiveness of his predecessor, Aubrey Laking, which might induce him to buy and keep a woman for whom he felt no affection. The love which can exchange no thoughts in speech was altogether too crude for him. It was his emotions, rather than his senses, which were always craving for amorous excitement. His frail body claimed merely its right to follow their lead, as a little boat follows the strong wind which fills its sails. But ever since he had loved Geoffrey

Barrington at Eton it was a necessity for his nature to love some one; and as the haze of his young conceptions cleared, that some one became necessarily a woman.

He soon recognized the wisdom of the Foreign Office in choosing Japan. It was a starvation diet which had been prescribed for him. So he settled down to his memories and to *L'attente d'hiver*, thinking that it would be two long years or more before his Spring blossomed again.

* * * * *

Then he heard the story of the duel fought for Yae Smith by two young English officers, both of them her lovers, so people said, and the vaguer tale of a fiance's suicide. Some weeks later, he met her for the first time at a dance. She was the only woman present in Japanese dress, and Reggie thought at once of Asako Barrington. How wise of these small women to wear the kimono which drapes so gracefully their stumpy figures. He danced with her, his right hand lodged somewhere in the folds of the huge bow with the embroidered peacock, which covered her back. Under this stiff brocade he could feel no sensation of a living body. She seemed to have no bones in her, and she was as light as a feather. It was then that he imagined her as Lilith, the snake-girl. She danced with ease, so much better than he, that at the end of a series of canons she suggested that they might sit out the dance. She guided him into the garden, and they took possession of a rustic seat. In the ballroom she had seemed timid, and had spoken in undertones only; but in this shadowy *tete-a-tete* beneath the stars, she began to talk frankly about her own life.

She told him about her one visit to England with her father; how she had loved the country, and how dull it was for her here in Japan. She asked him about his music. She would so like to hear him play. There was an old piano at her home. She did not think he would like it very much--indeed, Reggie was already shuddering in anticipation--or else? Would she come to tea with him at the Embassy? That would be nice! She could bring her mother or one of her brothers? She would rather come with a girl friend. Very well, to-morrow?

On the morrow she came.

Reggie hated playing in public. He said that it was like stripping naked before a multitude, or like having to read one's own love letters aloud in a divorce court. But there is nothing more soothing than to play to one attentive listener, especially if that listener be feminine and if the interest shown be that personal interest, which with so many women takes the place of true appreciation, and which looks over the art to the artist.

Yae came with the girl friend, a lean and skinny half-caste girl like a gipsy, whom Yae patronized. She came once again with the girl friend; and then she came alone.

Reggie was relieved, and said so. Yae laughed and replied:

"But I brought her for your own sake; I always go everywhere by myself."

"Then please don't take me into consideration ever again," answered Reggie.

So those afternoons began which so soon darkened into evenings, while Reggie sat at the piano playing his thoughts aloud, and the girl lay on the sofa or squatted on the big cushion by the fire, with cigarettes within reach and a glass of liqueur, wrapped in an atmosphere of laziness and well-being such as she had never known before. Then Reggie would stop playing. He would sit down beside her, or he would take her on his knee; and they would talk.

He talked as poets talk, weaving stories out of nothing, finding laughter and tears in what she would have passed by unnoticed. She talked to him about herself, about the daily doings of her home, its sadness and isolation since her father died. He had been the playfellow of her childhood. He had never grudged his time or his money for her amusement. She had been brought up like a little princess. She had been utterly spoiled. He had transferred to her precocious mind his love of excitement, his inquisitiveness, his courage and his lack of scruple; and then, when she was sixteen, he had died, leaving as his last command to the Japanese wife who would obey him in death as she had obeyed him living, the strict injunction that Yae was to have her own way always and in everything.

He left a respectable fortune, a Japanese widow and two worthless sons.

Poor Yae! Surrounded by the friends and amusements of an English girl's life, the qualities of her happy disposition might have borne their natural fruit. But at her father's death she found herself isolated, without friends and without amusements. She found herself marooned on the island of Eurasia, a flat and barren land of narrow confines and stunted vegetation. The Japanese have no use for the half-castes; and the Europeans look down upon them. They dwell apart in a limbo of which Baroness Miyazaki is the acknowledged queen.

Baroness Miyazaki is a stupendous old lady, whose figure might be drawn from some eighteenth-century comedy. Her late husband--and gossip says that she was his landlady during a period of study in England--held a high position in the Imperial Court. His wife, by a pomposity of manner and an assumption of superior knowledge, succeeded, where no other white woman has succeeded, in acquiring the respect and intimacy of the great ladies of Japan. She has inculcated the accents of Pentonville, with its aitches dropped and recovered again, among the high Japanese aristocracy.

But first her husband died; and then the old Imperial Court of the Emperor Meiji passed away. So Baroness Miyazaki had to retire from the society of princesses. She passed not without dignity, like an old monarch _en disponibilite_, to the vacant throne of the Eurasian limbo, where her rule is undisputed.

Every Friday afternoon you may see her presiding over her little court in the Miyazaki mansion, with its mixture of tinsel and dust. The Bourbonian features, the lofty white wig, the elephantine form, the rustling taffeta, and the ebony stick with its ivory handle, leads one's thoughts backwards to the days of Richardson and Sterne.

But her loyal subjects who surround her--it is impossible to place them. They are poor, they are untidy, they are restless. Their black hair is straggling, their brown eyes are soft, their clothes are

desperately European, but ill-fitting and tired. They chatter together ceaselessly and rapidly like starlings, with curious inflections in their English speech, and phrases snatched up from the vernacular. They are forever glancing and whispering, bursting at times into wild peals of laughter which lack the authentic ring of gladness. They are a people of shadows blown by the harsh winds of destiny across the face of a land where they can find no permanent resting place. They are the children of Eurasia, the unhappiest people on earth.

It was among these people that Yae's lot was cast. She stepped into an immediate ascendancy over them, thanks to her beauty, her personality and, above all, to her money. Baroness Miyazaki saw at once that she had a rival in Eurasia. She hated her, but waited calmly for the opportunity to assist in her inevitable collapse, a woman of wide experience watching the antics of a girl innocent and giddy, the Baroness playing the part of Elizabeth of England to Yae's Mary Queen of Scots.

Meanwhile, Yae was learning what the Eurasian girls were whispering about so continually--love affairs, intrigues with secretaries of South American legations, secret engagements, disguised messages.

This seed fell upon soil well-prepared. Her father had been a reprobate till the day of his death, when he had sent for his favourite Japanese girl to come and massage the pain out of his wasted body. Her brothers had one staple topic of conversation which they did not hesitate to discuss before their sister--_geisha_, assignation houses, and the licensed quarters. Yae's mind was formed to the idea that for grown-up people there is one absorbing distraction, which is to be found in the company of the opposite sex.

There was no talk in the Smith's home of the romance of marriage, of the love of parents and children, which might have turned this precocious preoccupation in a healthy direction. The talk was of women all the time, of women as instruments of pleasure. Nor could Mrs. Smith, the Japanese mother, guide her daughter's steps. She was a creature of duty, dry-featured and self-effaced. She did her utmost for her children's physical wants, she nursed them devotedly in sickness, she attended to their clothes and to their comforts. But she did not attempt to influence their moral ideas. She had given up any hope of understanding her husband. She schooled herself to accept everything without surprise. Poor man! He was a foreigner and had a fox (i.e. he was possessed); and unfortunately his children had inherited this incorrigible animal.

To please her daughter she opened up her house for hospitality with unseemly promptitude after her husband's death. The Smiths gave frequent dances, well-attended by young people of the Tokyo foreign community. At the first of these series, Yae listened to the passionate pleadings of a young man called Hoskin, a clerk in an English firm. On the second opportunity she became engaged to him. On the third, she was struck with admiration and awe by a South American diplomat with the green ribbon of a Bolivian order tied across his false shirt front. Don Quebrado d'Acunha was a practiced hand at seduction and Yae became one of his victims soon after her seventeenth birthday, and just ten days before her admirer sailed away to rejoin his legitimate spouse in Guayaquil. The engagement with Hoskin still lingered on; but the young man, who adored her was haggard and pale. Yae had a new follower, a teacher of English in a Japanese school, who

recited beautifully and wrote poetry about her.

Then Baroness Miyazaki judged that her time was ripe. She summoned young Hoskin into her dowager presence, and, with a manner heavily maternal, she warned him against the lightness of his fiancée. When he refused to believe evil of her she produced a pathetic letter full of half-confessions, which the girl herself had written to her in a moment of expansion. A week later the young man's body was washed ashore near Yokohama.

Yae was sorry to hear of the accident; but she had long ceased to be interested in Hoskin, the reticence of whose passion had seemed like a touch of ice to her fevered nerves. But this was Baroness Miyazaki's opportunity to discredit Yae, to crush her rival out of serious competition, and to degrade her to the *_demi-monde_*. It was done promptly and ruthlessly; for the Baroness's gossip carried weight throughout the diplomatic, professional and missionary circles, even where her person was held in ridicule. The facts of Hoskin's suicide became known. Nice women dropped Yae entirely; and bad men ran after her with redoubled zest. Yae did not realize her ostracism.

The Smith's dances next winter became so many competitions for the daughter's corruption, and were rendered brilliant by the presence of several of the young officers attached to the British Embassy, who made the running, and finally monopolized the prize.

Next year the Smiths acquired a motor-car which soon became Yae's special perquisite. She would disappear for whole days and nights. None of her family could restrain her. Her answer to all remonstrances was:

"You do what you want; I do what I want."

That summer two English officers whom she especially favoured fought a duel with pistols--for her beauty or for her honour. The exact motive remained unknown. One was seriously wounded; and both of them had to leave the country.

Yae was grieved by this sudden loss of both her lovers. It left her in a condition of double widowhood from which she was most anxious to escape. But now she was becoming more fastidious. The school teachers and the *dagos* fascinated her no longer. Her soldier friends had introduced her into Embassy circles, and she wished to remain there. She fixed on Aubrey Laking for her next attempt, but from him she received her first rebuff. Having lured him into a *_tete-a-tete_*, as her method was, she asked him for counsel in the conduct of her life.

"If I were you," he said dryly, "I should go to Paris or New York. You will find much more scope there."

Fortunately fate soon exchanged Aubrey Laking for Reggie Forsyth. He was just what suited her--for a time. But a certain impersonality in his admiration, his fits of reverie, the ascendancy of music over his mind, made her come to regret her more masculine lovers. And it was just at this moment of dissatisfaction that she first saw Geoffrey Barrington, and thought how lovely he would look in his uniform. From that moment desire entered her heart. Not that she wanted to lose Reggie; the peace and harmony of his surroundings soothed her like a warm and scented bath. But she wanted both. She had had two before,

and had found them complimentary to one another and agreeable to her. She wanted to sit on Geoffrey's knee and to feel his strong arms round her. But she must not be too sudden in her advances, or she would lose him as she had lost Laking.

It is easy to condemn Yae as a bad girl, a born *_cocotte_*. Yet such a judgment would not be entirely equitable. She was a laughter-loving little creature, a child of the sun. She never sought to do harm to anybody. Rather was she over-amiable. She wished above all to make her men friends happy and to be pleasing in their eyes. She was never swayed by mercenary motives. She was to be won by admiration, by good looks, and by personal distinction, but never by money. If she tired of her lovers somewhat rapidly, it was as a child tires of a game or of a book, and leaves it forgotten to start another.

She was a child with bad habits, rather than a mature sinner. It never occurred to her that, because Geoffrey Harrington was married, he at least ought to be immune from her attack. In her dreams of an earthly paradise there was no marrying or giving in marriage, only the sweet mingling of breath, the quickening of the heart-beats like the pulsation of her beloved motor-car, the sound as of violin arpeggios rising higher and ever higher, the pause of the ecstatic moment when the sense of time is lost--and then the return to earth on lazy languorous wings like a sea-gull floating motionless on a shoreward breeze. Such was Yae's ideal of Love and of Life too. It is not for us to condemn Yae, but rather should we censure the blasphemy of mixed marriages which has brought into existence these thistledown children of a realm which has no kings or priests or laws or Parliaments or duty or tradition or hope for the future, which has not even an acre of dry ground for its heritage or any concrete symbol of its soul--the Cimmerian land of Eurasia.

Reggie Forsyth understood the pathos of the girl's position; and being a rebel and an anarchist at heart, he readily condoned the faults which she confided to him frankly. Gradually Pity, most dangerous of all counsellors, revealed her to him as a girl romantically unfortunate, who never had a fair chance in life, who had been the sport of bad men and fools, who needed only a measure of true friendship and affection for the natural sunshine of her disposition to scatter the rank vapours of her soul's night. What Reggie grasped only in that one enlightened moment when he had christened her Lamia, was the tragic fact that she had no soul.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GREAT BUDDHA

*_*Tsuki-yo yoshi
Tachitsu itsu netsu
Mitsu-no-hama.*_*

The sea-shore of Mitsu!
Standing, sitting or lying
down,
How lovely is the moonlight
night!

Before the iris had quite faded, and before the azaleas of Hibiya were set ablaze--in Japan they count the months by the blossoming of the flowers--Reggie Forsyth had deserted Tokyo for the joys of sea bathing at Kamakura. He attended at the Embassy for office hours during the morning, but returned to the seaside directly after lunch. This departure disarranged Geoffrey's scheme for his friend's salvation; for he was not prepared to go the length of sacrificing his daily game of tennis.

"What do you want to leave us for?" he remonstrated.

"The bathing," said Reggie, "is heavenly. Besides, next month I have to go into _villegiatura_ with my chief. I must prepare myself for the strain with prayer and fasting. But why don't you come down and join us?"

"Is there any tennis?" asked Geoffrey.

"There is a court, a grass court with holes in it; but I've never seen anybody playing."

"Then what is there to do?"

"Oh, bathing and sleeping and digging in the sand and looking at temples and bathing again; and next week there is a dance."

"Well, we might come down for that if her Ladyship agrees. How is Lamia?"

"Don't call her that, please. She has got a soul after all. But it is rather a disobedient one. It runs away like a little dog, and goes rabbit-hunting for days on end. She is in great form. We motor in the moonlight."

"Then I think it is quite time I did come," said Geoffrey.

So the Harringtons arrived in their sumptuous car on the afternoon before the dance of which Reggie Forsyth had spoken.

On the beach they found him in a blue bathing-costume sitting under an enormous paper umbrella with Miss Smith and the gipsy half-caste girl. Yae wore a cotton kimono of blue and white, and she looked like a figurine from a Nanking vase.

"Geoffrey," said the young diplomat, "come into the sea at once. You look thoroughly dirty. Do you like sea-bathing, Mrs. Harrington?"

"I have only paddled," said Asako, "when I was a little girl."

Geoffrey could not resist the temptation of the blue water and the lazy curling waves. In a few minutes the two men were walking down to the sea's edge, Geoffrey laughing at Reggie's chatter. His arms were akimbo, with hands on the hips, hips which looked like the boles of a mighty oak-tree. He touched the ground with the elasticity of Mercury; he pushed through the air with the shoulders of Hercules. The line of his back was pliant as a steel blade. In his hair the sun's reflection shone like wires of gold. The Gods were come down in the semblance of

men.

Yae did not repress a sharp intake of her breath; and she squeezed the hand of the gipsy girl as if pain had gripped her.

"How big your husband is!" she said to Asako. "What a splendid man!"

Asako thought of her husband as "dear old Geoffrey." She never criticized his points; nor did she think that Yae's admiration was in very good taste. However, she accepted it as a clumsy compliment from an uneducated girl who knew no better. The gipsy companion watched with a peculiar smile. She understood the range of Yae's admiration.

"Isn't it a pity they have to wear bathing dress?" Miss Smith went on. "It's so ugly. Look at the Japanese."

Farther along the beach some Japanese men were bathing. They threw their clothes down on the sand and ran into the water with nothing on their bodies except a strip of white cotton knotted round the loins. They dashed into the sea with their arms lifted above their head, shouting wildly like savage devotees calling upon their gods. The sea sparkled like silver round their tawny skin. Their torsos were well formed and hardy; their dwarfed and ill-shaped legs were hidden by the waves. Certainly they presented an artistic contrast with the sodden blue of the foreigners' bathing suits. But Asako, brought up to the strict ideals of convent modesty, said:

"I think it's disgusting; the police ought to stop those people bathing with no clothes on."

The dust and sun of the motor ride, the constant anxiety lest they might run over some doddering old woman or some heedless child, had given her a headache. As soon as Geoffrey returned from his dip, she announced that she would go back to her room.

As the headache continued, she abandoned the idea of dancing. She would go to bed, and listen to the music in the distance. Geoffrey wished to stay with her, but she would not hear of it. She knew that her husband was fond of dancing; she thought that the change and the brightness would be good for him.

"Don't flirt with Yae Smith," she smiled, as he gave her the last kiss, "or Reggie will be jealous."

At first Geoffrey was bored. He did not know many of the dancers, business people from Yokohama, most of them, or strangers stopping at the hotel. Their appearance depressed him. The women had hard faces, the lustre was gone from their hair, they wore ill-fitting dresses without style or charm. The men were gross, heavy-limbed and plethoric. The music was appalling. It was produced out of a piano, a cello, and a violin driven by three Japanese who cared nothing for time or tune. Each dance, evidently, was timed to last ten minutes. At the end of the ten minutes the music stopped without finishing the phrase or even the bar; and the movement of the dancers was jerked into stability.

Reggie entered the room with Yae Smith. His manner was unusually excited and elate.

"Hello, Geoffrey, enjoying yourself?"

"No," said Geoffrey, "my wife has got a headache; and that music is simply awful."

"Come and have a drink," proposed Reggie.

He took them aside into the bar and ordered champagne.

"This is to drink our own healths," he announced, "and many years of happiness to all of us. It is also, Geoffrey, to drive away your English spleen, and to make you into an agreeable grass-widower into whose hands I may commend this young lady, because you can dance and I cannot. My evening is complete. This is my *_Nunc Dimittis_*."

He led them back to the ballroom. Then, with a low bow and a flourish of an imaginary cocked-hat, he disappeared.

Geoffrey and Yae danced together. Then they sat out a dance; and then they danced again. Yae was tiny, but she danced well; and Geoffrey was used to a small partner. For Yae it was sheer delight to feel the size and strength of this giant man bending over her like a sheltering tree; and then to be lifted almost in his arms and to float on tiptoe over the floor with the delightful airiness of dreams.

What strange orgies our dances are! To the critical mind what a strange contradiction to our sheepish passion-hiding conventions! A survival of the corroboree, of the immolation of the tribal virgins, a ritual handed down from darkest antiquity like the cult of the Christmas Tree and the Easter Egg; only their significance is lost, while that of the dance is transparently evident.

Maidens as chaste as Artemis, wives as loyal as Lucretia pass into the arms of men who are scarcely known to them with touchings of hands and legs, with crossings of breath, to the sound of music aphrodisiac or fescennine.

The Japanese consider, not unreasonably, that our dancing is disgusting.

A nice girl no doubt, and a nice man too, thinks of a dance as a graceful exercise or as a game like tennis or hockey. But Yae was not a nice girl; and when the music stopped with its hideous abruptness, it awoke her from a kind of trance in which she had been lost to all sensations except the grip of Geoffrey's hand and arm, the stooping of his shadow above her, and the tingling of her own desire.

Geoffrey left his partner at the end of their second dance. He went upstairs to see his wife. He found her sleeping peacefully; so he returned to the ballroom again. He looked in at the bar, and drank another glass of champagne. He was beginning to enjoy himself.

He could not find Yae, so he danced with the gipsy girl, who had a stride like a kangaroo. Then Yae reappeared. They had two more dances together, and another glass of champagne. The night was fine. There was a bright moonlight. Geoffrey remarked that it was jolly hot for dancing. Yae suggested a stroll along the sea-shore; and in a few minutes they were standing together on the beach.

"Oh! Look at the bonfires," cried Yae.

A few hundred yards down the sea-front, where the black shadows of the native houses overhung the beach, the lighted windows gleamed softly like flakes of mica. The fishermen were burning seaweed and jetsam for ashes which would be used as fertilizer. Tongues of fire were flickering skywards. It was a blue night. The sky was deep blue, and the sea an oily greenish blue. Blue flames of salt danced and vanished over the blazing heaps. The savage figures squatting round the fires were dressed in tunics of dark blue cloth. Their legs were bare. Their healthy faces lit up by the blaze were the color of ripe apricots. Their attitudes and movements were those of apes. The elder men were chattering together; the younger ones were gazing into the fire with an expression of healthy stupor. A boat was coming in from the sea. A ruby light hung at the prow. It was rowed by four men standing and yulohing, two in the stern and two at the bow. They were intoning a rhythmic chant to which their bodies moved. The boat was slim and pointed; and the rowers looked like Vikings.

The shadows cast by the moonlight were inky black, the shadows of the beaked ships, the shadows of the savage huts, of the ape-like men, of the huge round fish-baskets like immense amphorae.

Far out from land, where the wide floating nets were spread, lights were scattered like constellations. The foreland was clearly visible, with the high woods which clothed its summit. But the farther end of the beach faded into an uneven string of lights, soft and spectral as will-o'-the-wisps. Warmth rose from the sleeping earth; and a breeze blew in from the sea, making a strange metallic rustling, which to Japanese ears is the sweetest natural music, in the gaunt sloping pine-trees, whose height in the semi-darkness was exaggerated to monstrous and threatening proportions.

Geoffrey felt a little hand in his, warm and moist.

"Shall we go and see Dai-Butsu?" said Yae.

Geoffrey had no idea who Dai-Butsu might be, but he gladly agreed. She fluttered on beside him with her long kimono sleeves like a big moth. Geoffrey's head was full of wine and waltz tunes.

They dived into a narrow street with dwellings on each side. Some of the houses were shuttered and silent. Others were open to the street with a completeness of detail denied by our stingy window-casements--women sitting up late over their needlework, men talking round the firebox, shopkeepers adding up their accounts, fishermen mending their tackle.

The street led inland towards abrupt hills, which looked like a wall of darkness. It was lit by the round street lamps, the luminous globules with Chinese letters on them which had pleased Geoffrey first at Nagasaki. The road entered a gorge between two precipices, the kind of cleft into which the children of Hamelin had followed the Pied Piper.

"I would not like to come here alone," said Yae, clinging tighter.

"It looks peaceful enough," said Geoffrey.

"There is a little temple just to the left, where a nun was murdered by a priest only last year. He chopped her with a kitchen knife."

"What did he do it for?" asked Geoffrey.

"He loved her, and she would not listen to him; so he killed her. I think I would feel like that if I were a man."

They passed under an enormous gateway, like a huge barn door with no barn behind it. Two threatening gods stood sentinel on either hand. Under the influence of the moonlight the carved figures seemed to move.

Yae led her big companion along a broad-flagged path between a pollarded avenue. Geoffrey still did not know what they had come so far to see. Nor did he care. Everything was so dreamy and so sweet.

The path turned; and suddenly, straight in front of them, they saw the God--the Great Buddha--the immense bronze statue which has survived from the days of Kamakura's sovereignty. The bowed head and the broad shoulders were outlined against the blue and starry sky; against the shadow of the woods the body, almost invisible, could be dimly divined. The moonlight fell on the calm smile and on the hands palm upwards in the lap, with finger-tips and thumb-tips touching in the attitude of meditation. That ineffably peaceful, smiling face seemed to look down from the very height of heaven upon Geoffrey Barrington and Yae Smith. The presence of the God filled the valley, patient and powerful, the Creator of the Universe and the Maintainer of Life.

Geoffrey had never seen anything so impressive. He stooped down towards his little companion, listening for a response to his own emotion. It came. Before he could realize what was happening he felt the soft kimono sleeves like wings round his neck, and the girl's burning mouth pressing his lips.

"Oh, Geoffrey," she whispered.

He sat down on a low table in front of a shuttered refreshment bar with Yae on his knee, his strong arm round her, even as she had dreamed. The Buddha of Infinite Understanding smiled down upon them.

Geoffrey was too little of a prig to scold the girl, and too much of a man not to be touched and flattered by the sincerity of her embrace. He was too much of an Englishman to ascribe it to its real passionate motive, and to profit by the opportunity.

Instead, he told himself that she was only a child excited by the beauty and the romance of the night even as he was. He did not begin to realize that he or she were making love. So he took her on his knee and stroked her hand.

"Isn't he fine?" he said, looking up at the God.

She started at the sound of his voice, and put her arms round his neck again.

"Oh, Geoffrey," she murmured, "how strong you are!"

He stood up laughing, with the girl in his arms.

"If it wasn't for your big _obi_" he said, "you would weigh nothing at all. Now hold tight; for I am going to carry you home."

He started down the avenue with a swinging stride. Yae could watch almost within range of her lips the powerful profile of his big face, a soldier's face trained to command strong men and to be gentle to women and children. There was a delicious fragrance about him, the dry heathery smell of clean men. He did not look down at her. He was staring into the black shadows ahead, his mind still full of that sudden vision of Buddha Amitabha. He was scarcely thinking of the half-caste girl who clung tightly to his neck.

Yae had no interest in the _Dai-Butsu_ except as a grand background for love-making, a good excuse for hand squeezings and ecstatic movements. She had tried it once before with her school-master lover. It never occurred to her that Geoffrey was in any way different from her other admirers. She thought that she herself was the sole cause of his emotion and that his fixed expression as he strode in the darkness was an indication of his passion and a compliment to her charms. She was too tactful to say anything, or to try to force the situation; but she felt disappointed when at the approach of lighted houses he put her down without further caresses. In silence they returned to the hotel, where a few tired couples were still revolving to a spasmodic music.

Geoffrey was weary now; and the enchantment of the wine had passed away.

"Good-night, Yae," he said.

She was holding the lapels of his coat, and she would have dearly loved to kiss him again. But he stood like a tower without any sign of bending down to her; and she would have had to jump for the forbidden fruit.

"Good-night, Geoffrey," she purred, "I will never forget to-night."

"It was lovely," said the Englishman, thinking of the Great Buddha.

* * * * *

Geoffrey retired to his room, where Asako was sleeping peacefully. He was very English. Only the first surprise of the girl's kiss had startled his loyalty. With the ostrich-like obtuseness, which our continental neighbours call our hypocrisy, he buried his head in his principles. As Asako's husband, he could not flirt with another woman. As Reggie's friend, he would not flirt with Reggie's sweetheart. As an honourable man, he would not trifle with the affections of a girl who meant nothing whatever to him. Therefore the incident of the Great Buddha had no significance. Therefore he could lie down and sleep with a light heart.

Geoffrey had been sleeping for half an hour or so when he was awakened by a sudden jolt, as though the whole building had met with a violent collision, or as though a gigantic fist had struck it. Everything in the room was in vibration. The hanging lamp was swinging like a pendulum. The pictures were shaking on the walls. A china ornament on the mantelpiece reeled, and fell with a crash.

Geoffrey leapt out of bed to cross to where his wife was sleeping. Even the floor was unsteady like a ship's deck.

"Geoffrey! Geoffrey!" Asako called out.

"It must be an earthquake," her husband gasped, "Reggie told me to expect one."

"It has made me feel so sick," said Asako.

The disturbance was subsiding. Only the lamp was still oscillating slightly to prove that the earthquake was not merely a nightmare.

"Is any one about?" asked Asako.

Geoffrey went out on to the veranda. The hotel having survived many hundreds of earthquake shocks, seemed unaware of what had happened. Far out to sea puffs of fire were dimly seen like the flashes of a battleship in action, where the island volcano of Oshima was emptying its wrath against the sky.

There were hidden and unfamiliar powers in this strange country, of which Geoffrey and Asako had not yet taken account.

Beneath a tall lamp-post on the lawn, round whose smooth waxy light scores of moths were flitting, stood the short stout figure of a Japanese, staring up at the hotel.

"It looks like Tanaka," thought Geoffrey, "by Jove, it is Tanaka!"

They had definitely left their guide behind in Tokyo. Had Asako yielded at the last moment unable to dispense with her faithful squire? Or had he come of his own accord? and if so, why? These Japs were an unfathomable and exasperating people.

Sure enough next morning it was Tanaka who brought the early tea.

"Hello," said Geoffrey, "I thought you were in Tokyo."

"Indeed," grinned the guide, "I am sorry for you. Perhaps I have commit great crime so to come. But I think and I think Ladyship not so well. Heart very anxious. Go to theatre, wish to make merry, but all the time heart very sad. I think I will take last train. I will turn like bad penny. Perhaps Lordship is angry."

"No, not angry, Tanaka, just helpless. There was an earthquake last night?"

"Not so bad jishin (earth-shaking). Every twenty, thirty years one very big jishin come. Last big jishin Gifu jishin twenty years before. Many thousand people killed. Japanese people say that beneath the earth is one big fish. When the fish move, the earth shake. Silly fabulous myth! Tanaka say, 'It is the will of God!'"

The little man crossed himself devoutly.

* * * * *

A few minutes later there was a loud banging at the door, followed by Reggie's voice, shouting,--

"Are you coming down for a bath?"

"Earthquakes are horrible things," commented Reggie, on their way to the sea. "Foreigners are supposed always to sleep through their first one. Their second they find an interesting experience; but the third and the fourth and the rest are a series of nervous shocks in increasing progression. It is like feeling God--but a wicked, cruel God! No wonder the Japanese are so fatalistic and so desperate. It is a case of 'Eat and drink, for to-morrow ye die.'"

The morning sea was cold and bracing. The two friends did not remain in for long. When they were dried and dressed again, and when Geoffrey was for returning to breakfast, Reggie held him back.

"Come and walk by the sea," he said, "I have something to tell you."

They turned in the direction of the fishing village, where Geoffrey and Yae had walked together only a few hours ago. But the fires were quenched. Black circles of charred ashes remained; and the magic world of the moonlight had become a cluster of sordid hovels, where dirty women were sweeping their frowsty floors, and scrofulous children were playing among stale bedding.

"Did you notice anything unusual in my manner last night?" Reggie began very seriously.

"No," laughed Geoffrey, "you seemed rather excited. But why did you leave so early?"

"For various reasons," said his friend. "First, I hate dancing, but I feel rather envious of people who like it. Secondly, I wanted to be alone with my own sensations. Thirdly, I wanted you, my best friend, to have every opportunity of observing Yae and forming an opinion about her."

"But why?" Geoffrey began.

"Because it would now be too late for me to take your advice," said Reggie mysteriously.

"What do you mean?" Barrington asked.

"Last night I asked Yae to marry me; and I understand that she accepted."

Geoffrey sat in the sunlight on the gunwale of a fishing-boat.

"You can't do that," he said.

"Oh, Geoffrey, I was afraid you'd say it, and you have," said his friend, half laughing. "Why not?"

"Your career, old chap."

"My career," snorted Reggie, "protocol, protocol and protocol. I am fed up with that, anyway. Can you imagine me a be-ribboned Excellency,

worked by wires from London, babbling platitudes over teacups to other old Excellencies, and giving out a lot of gas for the F.O. every morning. No, in the old days there was charm and power and splendour, when an Ambassador was really plenipotentiary, and peace and war turned upon a court intrigue. All that is as dead as Louis Quatorze. Personality has faded out of politics. Everything is business, now, concessions, vested interests, dividends and bond-holders. These diplomats are not real people at all. They are shadowy survivals of the grand siecle, wraiths of Talleyrand; or else just restless bagmen. I don't call that a career."

Geoffrey had listened to these tirades before. It was Reggie's froth.

"But what do you propose doing?" he asked.

"Doing? Why, my music of course. Before I left England some music-hall people offered me seventy pounds a week to do stunts for them. Their first offer was two hundred and fifty, because they were under the illusion that I had a title. My official salary at this moment is two hundred per annum. So you see there would be no financial loss."

"Then are you giving up diplomacy because you are fed up with it? or for Yae Smith's sake? I don't quite understand," said Geoffrey.

He was still pondering over the scene of last evening, and he found considerable comfort in ascribing Yae's behaviour to excitement caused by her engagement.

"Yae is the immediate reason: utter fed-upness is the original cause," replied Reggie.

"Do you feel that you are very much in love with her?" asked his friend.

The young man considered for a moment, and then answered,--

"No, not in love exactly. But she represents what I have come to desire. I get so terribly lonely, Geoffrey, and I must have some one, some woman, of course; and I hate intrigue and adultery. Yae never grates upon me. I hate the twaddling activities of our modern women, their little sports, their little sciences, their little earnestnesses, their little philanthropies, their little imitations of men's ways. I like the seraglio type of woman, lazy and vain, a little more than a lovely animal. I can play with her, and hear her purring. She must have no father or mother or brothers or sisters or any social scheme to entangle me in. She must have no claim on my secret mind, she must not be jealous of my music, or expect explanations. Still less explain me to others,--a wife who shows one round like a monkey, what horror!"

"But Reggie! old chap, does she love you?"

Geoffrey's ideas were stereotyped. To his mind, only great love on both sides could excuse so bizarre a marriage.

"Love!" cried Reggie. "What is Love? I can feel Love in music. I can feel it in poetry. I can see it in sunshine, in the wet woods, and in the phosphorescent sea. But in actual life! I think of things in too abstract a way ever to feel in love with anybody. So I don't think

anybody could really fall in love with me. It is like religious faith. I have no faith, and yet I believe in faith. I have no love, and yet I have a great love for love. Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed!"

When Reggie was in this mood Geoffrey despaired of getting any sense out of him, and he felt that the occasion was too serious for smiles.

They were walking back to the hotel in the direction of breakfast.

"Reggie, are you quite sure?" said his friend, solemnly.

"No, of course I'm not, I never could be."

"And are you intending to get married soon?"

"Not immediately, no: and all this is quite in confidence, please."

"I'm glad there's no hurry," grunted Geoffrey. He knew that the girl was light and worthless; but to have shown Reggie his proofs would have been to admit his own complicity; and to give a woman away so callously would be a greater offence against Good Form than his momentary and meaningless trespass.

"But there is one thing you have forgotten," said Reggie, rather bitterly.

"What's that, old chap?"

"When a fellow announces his engagement to the dearest little girl in all the world, his friends offer their congratulations. It's Good Form," he added maliciously.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RAINY SEASON

_Fugu-jiru no
Ware ikite ir
Ne-zame kana!_

Poisonous delicacies (last night)!
I awake
And I am still alive.

Geoffrey Barrington tried not to worry about Yae Smith; and, of course, he did not mention the episode of the Great Buddha either to his wife or to Reggie Forsyth. He did not exactly feel ashamed of the incident; but he realised that it was open to misinterpretation. He certainly had no love for Yae; and she, since she was engaged to his friend, presumably had no love for him. There are certain unnatural states of mind in which we are not altogether morally responsible beings. Among these may be numbered the ballroom mood, which drives quite sane people to act madly. The music, the wine, the giddy turning, the display of women's charms and the confusing proximity of

them produce an unwonted atmosphere, of which we have most of us been aware, so bewildering that admiration of one woman will drive sane men to kiss another. Explanation is of course impossible; and circumstances must have their way. Scheming people, mothers with daughters to marry, study the effects of this psychological chemistry and profit by their knowledge. Under similar influences Geoffrey himself had been guilty of wilder indiscretions than the kissing of a half-caste girl.

But when he thought the matter over, he was sorry that it had occurred; and he was profoundly thankful that nobody had seen him.

Somebody had seen him, however.

The faithful Tanaka, who had been charged by Mr. Ito, the Fujinami lawyer, not to let his master out of his sight, had followed him at a discreet distance during the whole of that midnight stroll. He had observed the talk and the attitudes, the silences and the holding of hands, the glad exchange of kisses, the sitting of Yae on Geoffrey's knees, and her triumphant return, carried in his arms.

To the Japanese mind such conduct could only mean one thing. The Japanese male is frankly animal where women are concerned. He does not understand our fine shades of self-deception, which give to our love-making the thrill of surprise and the palliation of romance. Tanaka concluded that there could be only one termination to the scene which he had witnessed.

He also learned that Yae Smith was Reggie Forsyth's mistress, that he visited her room at night, that she was a girl of no character at all, that she had frequently stopped at the Kamakura hotel with other men, all of them her lovers.

All this information Tanaka collected with a wealth and precision of detail which is only possible in Japan, where the espionage habit is so deeply implanted in the every-day life of the people.

* * * * *

Mr. Ito could scarcely believe such welcome tidings. The Barrington menage had seemed to him so devoted that he had often despaired of his boast to his patron that he would divide the wife from her husband, and restore her to her family. Now, if Tanaka's story were true, his task would be child's play. A woman charged with jealousy becomes like a weapon primed and cocked. If Ito could succeed in making Asako jealous, then he knew that any stray spark of misunderstanding would blast a black gulf between husband and wife, and might even blow the importunate Englishman back to his own country--alone.

The lawyer explained his plan to the head of the family, who appreciated its classic simplicity. Sadako was given to understand the part which she was to play in alienating her cousin's affections from the foreigner. She was to harp on the faithlessness of men in general, and on husbands in particular, and on the importance of money values in matrimonial considerations.

She was to suggest that a foreign man would never choose a Japanese bride merely for love of her. Then when the psychological moment had

struck, the name of Yae Smith was to be flashed into Asako's mind with a blinding glare.

Asako had been visiting her Japanese cousins almost every day. Her conversation lessons were progressing rapidly; for the first stages of the language are easy. The new life appealed to Asako's love of novelty, and the strangeness of it to her child's love of make-believe. The summoning of her parents' spirits awakened in her the desire for a home, which lurks in every one of us; the love of old family things around us, the sense of an inheritance and a tradition. She was tired of hotel life; and she turned for relaxation to playing at Japan with cousin Sadako, just as her husband turned to tennis.

Her favourite haunt was the little tea-house among the reeds at the edge of the lake, which seemed so hidden from everywhere. Here the two girls practised their languages. Here they tried on each others clothes, and talked about their lives and purposes. Sadako was intellectually the cleverer of the two, but Asako had seen and heard more; so they were fairly equally matched.

Often the cousins shocked each other's sense of propriety. Asako had already observed that to the Japanese mind, the immediate corollary to being married is to produce children as promptly and as rapidly as possible. Already she had been questioned on the subject by Tanaka, by _boy sans_ and by shop-attendants.

"It is a great pity," said cousin Sadako, "that you have no baby. In Japan if a wife have no baby, she is often divorced. But perhaps it is the fault of Mr. Barrington?"

Asako had vaguely hoped for children in the future, but on the whole she was glad that their coming had been delayed. There was so much to do and to see first of all. It had never occurred to her that her childlessness might be the _fault_ of either herself or her husband. But her cousin went on ruthlessly,--

"Many men are like that. Because of their sickness their wives cannot have babies."

Asako shivered. This beautiful country of hers seemed to be full of bogeys like a child's dream.

Another time Sadako asked her with much diffidence and slanting of the eyes,--

"I wish to learn about--kissing."

"What is the Japanese for 'kiss'?" laughed Asako.

"Oh! There is no such word," expostulated Sadako, shocked at her cousin's levity, "we Japanese do not speak of such things."

"Then Japanese people don't kiss?"

"Oh, no," said the girl.

"Not ever?" asked Asako, incredulous.

"Only when they are--quite alone."

"Then when you see foreign people kissing in public, you think it is very funny?"

"We think it is disgusting," answered her cousin.

It is quite true. Foreigners kiss so recklessly. They kiss on meeting: they kiss on parting. They kiss in London: they kiss in Tokyo. They kiss indiscriminately their fathers, mothers, wives, mistresses, cousins and aunts. Every kiss sends a shiver down the spine of a Japanese observer of either sex, as we should be shocked by the crude exhibition of an obscene gesture. For this blossoming of our buds of affection suggests to him, with immediate and detailed clearness, that other embrace of which in his mind it is the inseparable concomitant.

The Japanese find the excuse that foreigners know no better, just as we excuse the dirty habits of natives. But they quote the kiss as an indisputable proof of the lowness of our moral standard, and as a sign of the guilt, not of individuals so much as of our whole civilisation.

"Foreign people kiss too much," said cousin Sadako, "it is a bad thing. If I had a husband, I would always fear he kiss somebody else."

"That is why I am so happy with Geoffrey," said Asako, "I know he would never love any one but me."

"It is not safe to be so sure," said her cousin darkly, "a woman is made for one man, but a man is made for many women."

Asako, arrayed in a Japanese kimono, and to all appearance as Japanese as her cousin, was sitting in the Fujinami tea-parlour. She had not understood much of the lesson in tea-ceremony at which she had just assisted. But the exceeding propriety and dignity of the teacher, the daughter of great people fallen upon evil days, had impressed her. She longed to acquire that tranquillity of deportment, that slow graceful poise of hand and arm, that low measured speech. When the teacher had gone, she began to mimic her gestures with all the seriousness of appreciative imitation.

Sadako laughed. She supposed that her cousin was fooling. Asako thought that she was amused by her clumsiness.

"I shall never be able to do it," she sighed.

"But of course you will. I laugh because you are so like Kikuye San."

Kikuye San was their teacher.

"If only I could practise by myself!" said Asako, "but at the hotel it would be impossible."

Then they both laughed together at the incongruity of rehearsing those dainty rites of old Japan in the over-furnished sitting-room at the Imperial Hotel, with Geoffrey sitting back in his arm-chair and puffing at his cigar.

"If only I had a little house like this," said Asako.

"Why don't you hire one?" suggested her cousin.

Why not? The idea was an inspiration. So Asako thought; and she broached the matter to Geoffrey that very evening.

"Wouldn't it be sweet to have a ducky little Japanese house all our very own?" she urged.

"Oh yes," her husband agreed, wearily, "that would be great sport."

Mr. Fujinami Gentaro was delighted at the success of his daughter's diplomacy. He saw that this plan for a Japanese house meant a further separation of husband and wife, a further step towards recovery of his errant child. For he was beginning to regard Asako with parental sentiment, and to pity her condition as the wife of this coarse stranger.

Miss Sadako was under no such altruistic delusions. She envied her cousin. She envied her money, her freedom, and her frank happiness. She had often pondered about the ways of Japanese husbands and wives; and the more she thought over the subject, the more she envied Asako her happy married life. She envied her with a woman's envy, which seeks to hurt and spoil. She was smarting from her own disappointment; and by making her cousin suffer, she thought that she could assuage her own grief. Besides, the intrigue in itself interested her, and provided employment for her idolent existence and her restless mind. Of affection for Asako she had none at all, but then she had no affection for anybody. She was typical of a modern Japanese womanhood, which is the result of long repression, loveless marriages and sudden intellectual licence.

Asako thought her charming, because she had not yet learned to discern. She confided to her all her ideas about the new house; and together the two girls explored Tokyo in the motor-car which Ito provided for them, inspecting properties.

Asako had already decided that her home was to be on the bank of the river, where she could see the boats passing, something like the house in which her father and mother had lived. The desired abode was found at last on the river-bank at Mukojima just on the fringe of the city? where the cherry-trees are so bright in Springtime, where she could see the broad Sumida river washing her garden steps, the fussy little river boats puffing by, the portly junks, the crews of students training for their regattas, and, away on the opposite bank, the trees of Asakusa, the garish river restaurants so noisy at nightfall, the tall peaceful pagoda, the grey roofs and the red plinths of the temple of the Goddess of Mercy.

Just when the new home was ready for occupation, just when Asako's enthusiasm was at its height and the purchases of silken bedding and dainty trays were almost complete, Geoffrey suddenly announced his intention of leaving Japan.

"I can't stick it any longer," he said fretfully, "I don't know what's coming over me."

"Leave Japan?" cried his wife, aghast.

"Well, I don't know," grunted her husband, "it's no good stopping here and going all to seed."

The rainy season was just over, the hot season of steaming rain which the Japanese call _nyubai_. It had played havoc with Geoffrey's nerves. He had never known anything so unpleasant as this damp, relaxing heat. It made the walls of the room sweat. It impregnated paper and blotting-paper. It rotted leather; and spread mould on boots and clothes. It made matches unstrikeable. It drenched Geoffrey's bed with perspiration, and drove away sleep. It sent him out on long midnight walks through the silent city in an atmosphere as stifling as that of a green-house. It beat down upon Tokyo its fetid exhalations, the smell of cooking, of sewage and of humanity, and the queer sickly scent of a powerful evergreen tree aflower throughout the city, which resembled the reek of that Nagasaki brothel, and recalled the dancing of the _Chonkina_.

It bred swarms of bloodthirsty mosquitoes from every drop of stagnant water. They found their way through the musty mosquito-net which separated his bed from Asako's. They eluded his blow in the evening light; and he could only wreak his vengeance in the morning, when they were heavy with his gore.

The colour faded from the Englishman's cheeks. His appetite failed. He was becoming, what he had never been before, cross and irritable. Reggie Forsyth wrote to him from Chuzenji,--

"Yae is here, and we go in for yachting in a kind of winged punt, called a 'lark.' For five pounds you can become a ship-owner. I fancy myself as a skipper, and I have already won two races. But more often we escape from the burble of the diplomats, and take our sandwiches and _thermata_--or is _thermoi_ the plural?--to the untenanted shores of the lake, and picnic _a deux_. Then, if the wind does not fall we are lucky; but if it does, I have to row home. Yae laughs at my oaranship; and says that, if you were here, you would do it so much better. You are a dangerous rival, but for this once I challenge you. I have a spare pen in my rabbit-hutch. There is just room for you and Mrs. Barrington. You must be quite melted by now."

But Asako did not want to go to Chuzenji. All her thoughts were centred on the little house by the river.

"Geoffrey darling," she said, stroking his hair with her tiny waxen fingers, "it is the hot weather which is making you feel cross. Why don't you go up to the mountains for a week or so, and stop with Reggie?"

"Will you come?" asked her husband, brightening.

"I can't very well. You see they are just laying down the _tatami_: and when that is done the house will be ready. Besides, I feel so well here. I like the heat."

"But I've never been away without you!" objected Geoffrey, "I think it would be beastly."

This side of the question had not struck Asako. She was so taken up with her project. Now, however, she felt a momentary thrill of relief. She would be able to give all her time to her beloved Japanese home. Geoffrey was a darling, but he was so uninterested in everything.

"It will only be for a few days," she said, "you want the change; and when you come back it will be like being married again."

CHAPTER XVIII

AMONG THE NIKKO MOUNTAINS

Io chikaki
Tsumagi no michi ya
Kure-nuramu;
Nokiba ni kudaruru
Yama-bito no koye_!

Dusk, it seems, has come
To the wood-cutter's track
That is near my hut;
The voices of the mountainmen
Going down to the shed!

Geoffrey left early one morning in a very doubtful frame of mind, after having charged Tanaka to take the greatest care of his lady, and to do exactly what she told him.

It was not until half-way up the steep climb between Nikko and Chuzenji that his lungs suddenly seemed to break through a thick film, and he breathed fresh air again. Then he was glad that he had come.

He was afoot. A coolie strode on before him with his suit-case strapped on his back. They had started in pouring rain, a long tramp through narrow gorges. Geoffrey could feel the mountains around him; but their forms were wrapped in cloud. Now the mist was lifting; and although in places it still clung to the branches like wisps of cotton-wool, the precipitous slopes became visible; and overhead, peeping through the clouds at impossible elevations, pieces of the mountain seemed to be falling from the grey sky. Everything was bathed in rain. The sandstone cliffs gleamed like marble, the luxuriant foliage like polished leather. The torrent foamed over its wilderness of grey boulders with a splendid rush of liberty.

Country people passed by, dressed in straw overcoats which looked like bee-hives, or with thin capes of oiled paper, saffron or salmon-coloured. The kimono shirts were girt up like fishers--both men and women--showing gnarled and muscular limbs. The complexions of these mountain folk were red like fruit; the Mongolian yellow was hardly visible.

Some were leading long files of lean-shanked horses, with bells to their bridles and high pack-saddles like cradles, painted red. Rough girls rode astride in tight blue trunk-hose. It was with a start that Geoffrey recognised their sex; and he wondered vaguely whether men could fall in love with them, and fondle them. They were on their way to fetch provision for the lake settlements, or for remote mining-camps way beyond the mountains.

The air was full of the clamour of the torrent, the heavy splashing

of raindrops delayed among the leaves, and the distant thunder of waterfalls.

What a relief to breath again, and what a pleasure to escape from the tortuous streets and the toy houses, from the twisted prettiness of the Tokyo gardens and the tiresome delicacy of the rice-field mosaic, into a wild and rugged nature, a land of forests and mountains reminiscent of Switzerland and Scotland, where the occasional croak of a pheasant fell like music upon Geoffrey's ear!

The two hours' climb ended abruptly in a level sandy road running among birch trees. At a wayside tea-house a man was sitting on a low table. He wore white trousers, a coat of cornflower shade and a Panama hat--all very spick and span. It was Reggie Forsyth.

"Hello," he cried, "my dear old Geoffrey! I'm awfully glad you've come. But you ought to have brought Mrs. Harrington too. You seem quite incomplete without her."

"Yes, it's a peculiar sensation, and I don't like it. But the heat, you know, at Tokyo, it made me feel rotten. I simply had to come away. And Asako is so busy now with her new cousins and her Japanese house and all the rest of it."

For the first time Reggie thought that he detected a tone in his friend's voice which he had been expecting to hear sooner or later, a kind of "flagging" tone--he found the word afterwards in working out a musical sketch called *_Love's Disharmony_*. Geoffrey looked white and tired, he thought. It was indeed high time that he came up to the mountains.

They were approaching the lake, which already showed through the tree-trunks. A path led away to the left across a rustic bridge.

"That's the way to the hotel. Yae is there. Farther along are the Russian, French and British Embassies. That's about half an hour from here."

Reggie's little villa stood at a few minutes' distance in the opposite direction, past two high Japanese hotels which looked like skeleton houses with the walls taken out of them, past sheds where furs were on sale, and picture post-cards, and dry biscuits.

The garden of the villa jutted out over the lake on an embankment of stones. The house was discreetly hidden by a high hedge of evergreens.

"William Tell's chapel," explained Reggie, "a week in lovely Lucerne!"

It was a Japanese house, another skeleton. From the wicket gate, Geoffrey could see its simple scheme open to the four winds, its scanty furniture unblushingly displayed; downstairs, a table, a sofa, some bamboo chairs and a piano--upstairs, two beds, two washstands, and the rest. The garden consisted of two strips of wiry grass on each side of the house; and a flight of steps ran down to the water's edge, where a small sailing-boat was moored.

The landscape of high wooded hills was fading into evening across the leaden ripples of the lake.

"What do you think of our highland home?" asked Reggie.

There was not a sign of life over the heavy waters, not a boat, not a bird, not an island even.

"Not much doing," commented Geoffrey, "but the air's good."

"Not quite like a lake, it is?" his host reflected.

That was true. A lake had always appealed to Geoffrey, both to his sense of natural beauty and to his instinct for sport. There is a soothing influence in the imprisoned waters, the romance of the sea without its restlessness and fury. The freshness of untrodden islands, the possibilities of a world beneath the waters, of half-perceived Venetas, the adventure of entrusting oneself and one's fortunes to a few planks of wood, are delights which the lake-lover knows well. He knows too, the delicious sense of detachment from the shore--the shore of ordinary affairs and monotonous people--and the charm of unfamiliar lights and colours and reflections. Even on the Serpentine he can find this glamour, when the birds are flocking to roost in the trees of Peter Pan's island.

But on this lake of Chuzenji there was a sullen brooding, an absence of life, a suggestion of tragedy.

"It isn't a lake," explained Reggie; "it's the crater of an old volcano which has filled up with water. It is one of the earth's pockmarks healed over and forgotten. But there is something lunar about it still, some memory of burned out passions, something creepy in spite of the beauty of the place. It is too dark this evening to see how beautiful it is. In places the lake is unfathomably deep, and people have fallen into the water and have never been seen again."

The waters were almost blue now, a deep dull greyish blue.

Suddenly, away to the left, lines of silver streaked the surface; and, with a clapping and dripping commotion, a flight of white geese rose. They had been dozing under the bank, and some one had disturbed them. A pale figure like a little flame was dimly discernible.

"It's Yae!" cried Reggie; and he made a noise which was supposed to be a jodel. The white figure waved an answer.

Reggie picked up a megaphone which seemed to be kept there for the purpose.

"Good night," he shouted, "same time to-morrow!"

The figure waved again and disappeared.

Next morning Geoffrey was awakened by the boom of a temple bell. He stepped out on to his balcony, and saw the lake and the hills around clear and bright under the yellow sunshine. He drank in the cool breath of the dew. For the first time after many limp and damp awakenings he felt the thrill of the wings of the morning. He thanked God he had come. If only Asako were here! he thought. Perhaps she was right in getting a Japanese home just for the two of them. They would be happier there than jostled by the promiscuity of hotels.

At breakfast, Reggie had found a note from the Ambassador.

"Oh, damn!" he cried, "I must go over and beat a typewriter for two or three hours. I must therefore break my tryst. But I expect you to replace me like the immortal Cyrano, who should be the ideal of all soldiers. Will you take Yae for an hour or two's sail? She likes you very much."

"And if I drown your fiancee? I don't know anything about sailing."

"I'll show you. It's very easy. Besides, Yae really knows more about it than I do."

So Geoffrey after a short lesson in steering, tacking, and the manipulation of the centreboard, piloted his host safely over to British Bay, the exclusive precinct of the temporary Embassy on the opposite shore of the lake. He then made his way round French Cape past Russia Cove to the wooden landing-stage of the Lakeside Hotel. There he found Yae, sitting on a bench and throwing pebbles at the geese.

She wore the blue and white cotton kimono, which is the summer dress of Japanese women. It is a cheap garment, but most effective--so clean and cool in the hot weather. Silk kimonos soon become stale-looking; but this cotton dress always seems to be fresh from the laundry. A rope of imitation pearls was entwined in her dark hair; and her broad sash of deep blue was secured in front with an old Chinese ornament of jade.

"Oh, big captain," she cried, "I am so glad it is you. I heard you were coming."

She stepped into the boat, and took over the tiller and the command. Geoffrey explained his friend's absence.

"The bad boy," she said, "he wants to get away from me in order to think about a lot of music. But I don't care!"

Under a steady wind they sheered through the water. On the right hand was Chuzenji village, a Swiss effect of brown chalets dwarfed to utter insignificance by the huge wooded mountain dome of Nantai San which rose behind it. On the left the forest was supreme already, except where in small clearings five or six houses, tenanted by foreign diplomats, stood out above the lake. A little farther on a Buddhist temple slumbered above a flight of broad stone steps. The sacred buildings were freshly lacquered, and red as a new toy. In front, on the slope of golden sand, its base bathed by the tiny waves, stood the _torii_, the wooden archway which is Japan's universal religious symbol. Its message is that of the Wicket Gate in the Pilgrim's Progress. Wherever it is to be seen--and it is to be seen everywhere--it stands for the entering in of the Way, whether that way be "_Shinto_" (The Way of the Gods), or "_Butsudo_" (The Way of the Buddhas), or "_Bushido_" (The Way of the Warriors).

There was plenty of breeze. The boat shot down the length of the lake at a delicious speed. The two voyagers reached at last a little harbour, Sh[=o]bu-ga-Hama--The Beach of the Lilies--a muddy shore with slimy rocks, a few brown cottages and a saw-mill.

"Let's go and see the waterfall," suggested Yae, "it's only a few minutes."

They walked together up a steep winding lane. The fresh air and the birch trees, the sight of real Alderney cows grazing on patches of real grass, the distant rumble of the cataract brought back to Geoffrey a feeling of strength and well-being to which he had for weeks been a stranger.

If only the real Asako had been with him instead of this enigmatic and disquieting image of her!

The Japanese, who have an innate love for natural beauty, never fail to mark an exceptional view with a little bench or shelter for travelers, whence they can obtain the best perspective. If sight-seers frequent the spot in any number, there will be an old dame _en guerite_ with her picture post-cards and her Ebisu Beer, her "Champagne Cider," her _sembei_ (round and salted biscuits) and her tale of the local legend.

"_Irrasshai! Irrasshai!_" she pipes. "Come, come, please rest a little!"

But the cascade above Sh[=o]bu-ga-Hama is only one among the thousand lesser waterfalls of this mountain country. It is honoured merely by an unsteady bench under a broken roof, and by a rope knotted round the trunk of a tall tree in mid-stream to indicate that the locality is an abode of spirits, and to warn passers-by against inconsiderately offending the Undine.

Geoffrey and Yae were balancing themselves on the bench, gazing at the race of foam and at the burnished bracken. The Englishman was clearing his mind for action.

"Miss Smith," he began at last, "do you think you will be happy with Reggie?"

"He says so, big captain," answered the little half-caste, her mouth queerly twisted.

"Because if you are not happy, Reggie won't be happy; and if you are neither of you happy, you will be sorry that you married.!"

"But we are not married yet," said the girl, "we are only engaged."

"But you will be married sometime, I suppose?"

"This year, next year, sometime, never!" laughed Yae. "It is nice to be engaged, and it is such a protection. When I am not engaged, all the old cats, Lady Cynthia and the rest, say that I flirt. Now when I am engaged, my fiance is here to shield me. Then they dare not say things, or it comes round to him, and he is angry. So I can do anything I like when I am engaged."

This was a new morality for Geoffrey. It knocked the text from under the sermon which he had been preparing. She was as preposterous as Reggie; but she was not, like him, conscious of her preposterousness.

"Then, when you are married, will you flirt?" asked her companion.

"I think so," said Yae gravely. "Besides, Reggie only wants me to dress me up and write music about me. If I am always the same like an English doll wife, he won't get many tunes to play. Reggie is like a girl."

"Reggie is too good for you," said the Englishman, roughly.

"I don't think so," said Yae, "I don't want Reggie, but Reggie wants me."

"What do you want then?"

"I want a great big man with arms and legs like a wrestler. A man who hunts lions. He will pick me up like you did at Kamakura, big captain, and throw me in the air and catch me again. And I will take him away from the woman he loves, so that he will hate me and beat me for it. And when he sees on my back the marks of the whip and the blood he will love me again so strongly that he will become weak and silly like a baby. Then I will look after him and nurse him; and we will drink wine together. And we will go for long rides together on horseback in the moonlight galloping along the sands by the edge of the sea!"

Geoffrey was gazing at her with alarm. Was she going mad? The girl jumped up and laid her little hands on his shoulder.

"There, big captain," she cried, "don't be frightened. That is only one of Reggie's piano tunes. I never heard tunes like his before. He plays them, and then explains to me what each note means; and then he plays the tune again, and I can see the whole story. That is why I love him--sometimes!"

"Then you do love him?" Geoffrey was clutching pathetically for anything which he could understand or appeal to in this elusive person.

"I love him," said Yae, pirouetting on her white toes near the edge of the chasm, "and I love you and I love any man who is worth loving!"

They returned to the lake in silence. Geoffrey's sermon was abortive. This girl was altogether outside the circle of his code of Good Form. He might as well preach vegetarianism to a leopard. Yet she fascinated him, as she fascinated all men who were not as dry as Aubrey Laking. She was so pretty, so frail and so fearless. Life had not given her a fair chance; and she appealed to the chivalrous instinct in men, as well as to their less creditable passions. She was such a butterfly creature; and the flaring lamps of life had such a fatal attraction for her.

The wind was blowing straight against the harbour. The bay of Sh[=o]bu-ga-Hama was shallow water. Try as he might, Geoffrey could not manoeuvre the little yacht into the open waters of the lake.

"We are on a lee-shore," said Geoffrey.

At the end he had to get down and wade bare-legged, towing the boat after him until at last Yae announced that the centreboard had been lowered and that the boat was answering to the helm.

Geoffrey clambered in dripping. He shook himself like a big dog after a swim.

"Reggie could never have done that," said Yae, with fervent admiration. "He would be afraid of catching cold."

* * * * *

At last they reached the steps of the villa. They were both hungry.

"I am going to stop to lunch, big captain," said Yae, "Reggie won't be back."

"How do you know?"

"Because I saw Gwendolen Cairns listening last evening when he spoke to me through the big trumpet. She tells Lady Cynthia, and that means a lot of work next day for poor Reggie, so that he can't spend his time with me. You see! Oh, how I hate women!"

After lunch, at Chuzenji, all the world goes to sleep. It awakes at about four o'clock, when the white sails come gliding out of the green bays like swans. They greet, or avoid. They run side by side for the length of a puff of breeze. They coquet with one another like butterflies; or they head for one of those hidden beaches which are the principal charm of the lake, where baskets are unpacked and cakes and sandwiches appear, where dry sticks are gathered for a rustic fire, and after an hour or more of anxious stoking the kettle boils.

"Of all the Japanese holiday places, Chuzenji is the most select and the most agreeable," Reggie Forsyth explained; "it is the only place in all Japan where the foreigner is genuinely popular and respected. He spends his money freely, he does not swear or scold. The woman-chasing, whisky-swilling type, who has disgraced us in the open ports, is unknown here. These native mountaineers are rough and uneducated savages, but they are honest and healthy. We feel on easy terms with them, as we do with our own peasantry. In the village street of Chuzenji I have seen a young English officer instructing the sons of boatmen and woodcutters in the mysteries of cricket."

In Chuzenji there are no Japanese visitors except the pilgrims who throng to the lake during the season for climbing the holy mountain of Nantai. These are country people, all of them, from villages all over Japan, who have drawn lucky lots in the local pilgrimage club. One can recognize them at once by their dingy white clothes, like grave-clothes--men and women are garbed alike--by their straw mushroom hats, by the strip of straw matting strapped across their shoulders, and by the long wooden staves which they carry and which will be stamped with the seal of the mountain-shrine when they have reached the summit. These pilgrims are lodged free by the temple on the lake-side, in long sheds like cattle-byres.

The endless files of lean pack-horses, laden with bags of rice and other provisions, the ruddy sexless girls who lead them, and the women who have been foraging for wood and come down from the mountain with enormous faggots on their bent shoulders, provide a foreground for the Chuzenji landscape.

* * * * *

Geoffrey was sleeping upstairs in his bedroom. Yae was sleeping downstairs on the sofa. He had expected her to return to the hotel after lunch, but her attitude was that of " _J'y suis, j'y reste_."

He awoke with a start to find the girl standing beside his bed. Afterwards he became sure that he had been awakened by the touch of soft fingers on his face.

"Wake up, big captain," she was saying. "It is four o'clock, and the Ark's coming."

"What Ark?" he yawned.

"Why, the Embassy boat."

Out of sheer devilry, Miss Smith waited for the arrival of Lady Cynthia. The great lady paid no more attention to her existence than if she had been a piece of the house. But she greeted Geoffrey most cordially.

"Come for a walk," she said in her abrupt way.

As they turned down the village street she announced:

"The worst has happened--I suppose you know?"

"About Reggie?"

"Yes; he's actually engaged to be married to the creature. Has he told you?"

"In the greatest confidence."

"Well, he forgot to bind his young lady to secrecy. She has told everybody."

"Can't he be recalled to London?"

"The old man says that would just push him over the edge. He has talked of resigning from the service."

"Is there anything to be done?"

"Nothing! Let him marry her. It will spoil his career in diplomacy, of course. But he will soon get tired of her fooling him. He will divorce her, and will give up his life to music to which, of course, he belongs. People like Reggie Forsyth have no right to marry at all."

"But are you sure that she wants to marry him?" said his friend; and he related his conversation with Yae that morning.

"That's very interesting and encouraging," said Her Excellency. "So she has been trying her hand on you already."

"I never thought of that," exclaimed Geoffrey. "Why, she knows that Reggie is my best friend; and that I am married."

The judicial features of Lady Cynthia lightened with a judicial smile.

"You have been through so many London seasons, Captain Barrington, and there is still no guile in you!"

They walked on in silence past the temple terraces down a winding country lane.

"Captain Barrington, would you care to play the part of a real hero, a real theatre hero, playing to the gallery?"

Geoffrey was baffled. Had the talk suddenly swung over to amateur theatricals? Lady Cynthia was a terrible puller of legs.

"Did you ever hear of Madge Carlyle?" she asked, "or was she before your time?"

"I have heard of her."

She was a famous London cocotte in the days when mashers wore whiskers and "Champagne Charlie" was sung.

"At the age of forty-three" said Lady Cynthia, "Madge decided to marry for the third or fourth time. She had found a charming young man with plenty of money and a noble heart, who believed that Madge was a much slandered woman. His friends were sorry for the young man; and one of them decided to give a dinner to celebrate the betrothal. In the middle of the feast an urgent message arrived for the enamoured one, summoning him to his home. When he had gone the others started plying poor Madge with drinks. She was very fond of drinks. They had splendid fun. Then one of the guests--he was an old lover of Madge's--suggested--Good-bye to the old days and the rest of it!"

"But what did he think of his friends?" asked Geoffrey. "It seems a low-down sort of trick."

"He was very sore about it at the time," said Lady Cynthia; "but afterwards he understood that they were heroes, real theatre heroes."

"It looks like rain," said Geoffrey, uneasily.

So they turned back, talking about London people.

The first drops fell as they were passing through the wicket gate; and they entered the house during a roar of thunder. Reggie was alone.

"I see that my fate is sealed," he said, as he rose to meet them.

"The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes!"

CHAPTER XIX

YAE SMITH

Nusubito wo
Toraete mireba
Waga ko nari_.

The thief--
When I caught him and looked
at him,
Lo! My own child!

A week of very hard work began for Reggie. The Ambassador was reporting home on every imaginable subject from political assassination to the manufacture of celluloid. This was part of Lady Cynthia's scheme. She was determined to throw Yae Smith and Geoffrey Barrington together all the time, and to risk the consequences.

So Yae though she had her room at the hotel, became an inmate of Reggie's villa. She took all her meals there, and her siesta during most of the afternoons. She even passed whole nights with Reggie; and their relations could no longer be a secret even to Geoffrey's laborious discretion.

This knowledge troubled him; for the presence of lovers, and the shadows cast by their intimacies are always disquieting even to the purest minds. But Geoffrey felt that it was no business of his; and that Reggie and Yae being what they were, it would be useless hypocrisy for him to censure their pleasures.

Meanwhile, Asako was writing to him, bewailing her loneliness. So one morning at breakfast he announced that he must be getting back to Tokyo. A cloud passed over Yae's face.

"Not yet, big captain," she expostulated; "I want to take you right to the far end of the lake where the bears live."

"Very well," agreed Geoffrey, "to-morrow morning early, then; for the next day I really must go."

He wrote to Asako a long letter with much about the lake and Yae Smith, promising to return within forty-eight hours.

At daybreak next morning Yae was hammering at Geoffrey's door.

"Wake up, old sleepy captain," she cried.

Geoffrey got the boat ready; and Yae prepared a picnic breakfast to be eaten on the way. Poor Reggie, of course, had work at the Embassy; he could not come.

It was an ideal excursion. They reached Senju, the wood-cutter's village at the end of the lake. They ascended the forest path as far as the upper lake, a mere pond of reeds and sedges, which the bears are supposed to haunt.

Geoffrey and Yae, however, saw nothing more alarming than the village curs.

"Returned in safety from the land of danger!" cried the girl, as she sprang ashore at the steps of the villa.

The air and exercise had wearied Geoffrey. After lunch he changed into a kimono of Reggie's. Then he lay down on his bed and was soon fast asleep.

How long he slept he could not say; but he awoke slowly out of confusing dreams. Somebody was in his room. Somebody was near his bed. Was it Asako? Was it a dream?

No, it was his comrade of the morning's voyage. It was Yae Smith. She was sitting on the bed beside him. She was gazing into his face with her soft, still, cat-like eyes. What was she doing that for? She was stroking his arm. Her touch was soft. He did not stop her.

Her hair was let down to below her waist, long black hair, more silky in texture and more wavy than that of a pure Japanese woman. Her kimono was wide open at the throat. A sweet fragrance exhaled from her body.

"Big captain, may I?" she pleaded.

"What?" said Geoffrey, still half asleep.

"Just lie by your side--just once,--just for the last time," she cooed.

Geoffrey was for going to sleep again, well pleased with his dream. But Yae slipped an arm across his chest, and caught his shoulder in her hand. She nestled closer to him.

"Geoffrey," she murmured, "I love you so much. You are so strong and so big, Geoffrey. I want to stay like this always, always, holding on to you till I make you love me. Love me just a little, Geoffrey. Nobody will ever know. Geoffrey, it must be nice to have me near you. Geoffrey, you must, you must want to love me."

She was hugging his body now in an embrace astonishingly powerful for so small a creature. It was this pressure which finally awoke Geoffrey. Gently he disengaged her arms and sat up in the bed.

She was clinging to his neck now, wild-eyed like a Maenad. He felt pitifully ridiculous. The role of Joseph is so thankless and humiliating. A month ago he would have ordered her sternly to get out of the room and behave herself. But the hot month in Tokyo had relaxed his firmness of mind; and familiarity with Reggie's bohemian morality has sapped his fortress of Good Form.

"Don't be so naughty, Yae," he said feebly. "Reggie may be coming. For God's sake, control yourself."

Her voice was terrible now.

Geoffrey had lost the first moment when he might have been stern with her. Clumsily he tried to loosen her embrace. But for the first time in his life he was in the grip of an elemental natural force, a thing foreign to his experience of women in marriage or out of it.

"Yae, don't," he gasped, pushing the girl away. "I can't; I'm married."

"Married!" she screamed. "Does marriage hurt like this? Love me, love me, Geoffrey. You must love me, you will!"

* * * * *

"The rhapsody is ended!"

A voice which nobody would have recognized as Reggie's put a sudden end to this frantic assault.

He was standing in the doorway smiling queerly. He had watched the two from the garden, whence indeed all Chuzenji could have seen them in the open bedroom. He had slipped off his shoes and had stolen up quietly in order to listen to them. Now he judged it time to intervene.

Yae started up from the bed. For a moment she hovered on the edge, uncertain of her tactics. Geoffrey stared, one hand to his forehead. Then the girl darted across the room, fell at Reggie's feet, clasped his knees, and sobbed convulsively.

"Reggie, Reggie, forgive me!" she cried. "It's not my fault. He's been asking me and asking me to do this--ever since Kamakura--and all the time here. This is what he came to stay here for. Reggie, forgive me. I will never be naughty again."

Reggie looked across at his friend for confirmation or denial. The queer smile had vanished. Good Form decreed that the man must lie for the woman's sake, if necessary till his soul were damned. But, with Geoffrey, Good Form had long since been thrown to the winds, like International Law in war time. Besides, the woman was no better than a cocotte; and Reggie's friendship was at stake.

"No," he said huskily; "that is not true. I was quietly sleeping here and she came up to me. She is man-mad."

The tangled heap at Reggie's feet leaped up, her green eyes blazing.

"Liar!" she cried. "Reggie, do you believe him? The hypocrite, the goody-goody, the white slave man, the pimp!"

"What does she mean?" said Geoffrey. Thank God, the woman was clearly mad.

"Fujinami! Fujinami!" she yelled. "The great girl king! The Yoshiwara daimyo! Every scrap of money which his fool wife spends on sham curios was made in the Yoshiwara, made by women, made out of filth, made by prostitutes!"

The last word brought Geoffrey to his feet. In his real agony he had quite forgotten his sham sin.

"Reggie, for God's sake, tell me, is this true?"

"Yes," said Reggie quietly, "it is quite true."

"Then why did no one tell me?"

"Husbands," said the young man, "and prospective husbands are always the last to learn. Yae, go back to the hotel. You have done enough harm for to-day."

"Not unless you forgive me, Reggie," the girl pleaded. "I will never go unless you forgive."

"I can't forgive," he said, "but I can probably forget."

The wrath of these two men fascinated her. She would have waited if she could, listening at the door. Reggie knew this.

"If you don't clear out, Yae, I will have to call T[=o] to take you," he threatened.

To his great relief she went quietly.

* * * * *

Reggie returned to the bare bedroom, where Geoffrey with bowed head was staring at the floor. In Reggie's short kimono the big man looked decidedly ridiculous.

"Good," thought Reggie. "Thank God for the comic spirit. It will be easier to get through with this now."

His first action was to wash his hands. He had an unconscious instinct for symbolism. Then he sat down opposite his friend.

The action of sitting reduces tragedy to comedy at once,--this was one of Napoleon's maxims.

Then he opened his cigarette case and offered it to Geoffrey. This, too, was symbolic. Geoffrey took a cigarette mechanically, and sucked it between his lips, unlighted.

"Geoffrey," said his friend very quietly, "let us try to put these women and all their rottenness out of our heads. We will try to talk this over decently."

Geoffrey was so stunned by the shock of what he had just learned that he had thought of nothing else. Now, all of a sudden he remembered that he owed serious explanations to his friend.

"Reggie," he said dully, "I'm most awfully sorry. I had never dreamed of this. I was good pals with Yae because of you. I never dreamed of making love to her. You know how I love my wife. She must have been mad to think of me like that. Besides," he added sheepishly, "nothing actually happened."

"I'm sure I don't care what actually happened or did not happen. Damn actual facts. They distort the truth. They are at the bottom of every injustice. What actually happened never matters. It is the picture which sticks in one's brain. True or false, it sticks just the same; and suddenly or slowly it alters every thing. But I can wipe up my own mess, I think. It is much more serious with you than with me, Geoffrey. She has bruised my heel, but she has broken your head. No, don't protest, for Heaven's sake! I am not interested."

"Then what she says is absolutely true?" said Geoffrey, lighting his cigarette at last, and throwing the match aside as if it were Hope. "For a whole year I have been living on prostitutes' earnings. I am no better than those awful _ponces_ in Leicester Square, who can be

flogged if they are caught, and serve them right too. And all that filthy Yoshiwara, it belongs to Asako, to my sweet innocent little girl, just as Brandan belongs to my father; and with all this filthy money we have been buying comforts and clothes and curios and rubbish."

Reggie was pouring out whiskies and sodas, two strong ones. Geoffrey gulped down his drink, and then proceeded with his lamentation:

"I understand it all now. Everybody knew. The secrecy and the mystery. Even at my wedding they were saying, 'Don't go to Japan, don't go.' They must have all known even then. And then those damned Fujinami, so anxious to be civil for the beastly money's sake, and yet hiding everything and lying all the time. And you knew, and the Ambassador, and Count Saito, and the servants too--always whispering and laughing behind our backs. But you, Reggie, you were my friend, you ought to have told me."

"I asked Sir Ralph," said Reggie candidly, "whether you ought to be told. He is a very wise man. He said, 'No.' He said, 'It would be cruel and it would be useless. They will go back to England soon and then they will never know.' Where ignorance is bliss, you understand?"

"It was unfair," groaned Geoffrey; "you were all deceiving me."

"I said to Sir Ralph that it seemed to me unfair and dangerous. But he has more experience than I."

"But what am I to do now?" said the big man helplessly. "This money must be given up, yes, and everything we have. But whom to? Not to those filthy Fujinami?"

"Go slow," advised Reggie. "Go back to England first. Get your brain clear. Talk it over with your lawyers. Don't be too generous. Magnanimity has spoiled many noble lives. And remember that your wife is in this too. You must consider her first. She is very young and she knows nothing. I don't think that she wants to be poor, or that she will understand your motives."

"I will make her understand then," said Geoffrey.

"Don't talk like a brute. You will have to be very patient and considerate for her. Go slow!"

"Can I stop here to-night, then?" asked Barrington, plaintively.

"No," said Reggie with firmness; "that is really more than I could stick. I told you--truth or untruth, the mind keeps on seeing pictures. Pack up your things. Call a coolie. The evening walk down to Nikko will do you more good than my jawing. Good-bye."

An unreal handshake--and he was gone.

Then, of a sudden, Geoffrey realized that, how very unwittingly, he had deeply wronged this man who was his best friend and upon whom he was leaning in his hour of trial. Like Job, his adversities were coming upon him from this side and from that, until he must curse God and die. Now his friend had given him his dismissal. He would probably never see Reggie Forsyth again.

As he was starting on his long walk downhill a motor car passed him. Only one motor car that season had climbed the precipitous road from the plains. It must be Yae Smith's. Just as it was passing the girl leaned out of the carriage and blew a kiss to Geoffrey.

She was not alone. There was a small fat man in the car beside her, a Japanese with a round impertinent face. With a throb of bitter heart-sickness Geoffrey recognized his own servant, Tanaka.

* * * * *

Next morning Reggie Forsyth crossed the lake as usual to his work at the Embassy. He met the Ambassadors on the terrace of her villa.

"Good morning, Lady Cynthia," he said, "I congratulate you on your masterly diplomacy."

"What do you mean?"

Her manner nowadays was very chilly towards her former favourite.

"In accordance with your admirable arrangements," he said, "my marriage is off."

"Oh, Reggie," her coolness changed at once, "I'm so glad--"

He held up a warning hand.

"But--you have broken a better man than I."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Geoffrey Barrington. He has learned who the Fujinami are, and where his money comes from."

"You told him?"

"I'm not such a skunk as all that, Lady Cynthia."

Her Excellency was pondering what had better be done for Geoffrey.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"He stopped the night at Nikko. He is probably in the train for Tokyo by now."

If she were a hero, a real theatre hero, as Geoffrey had been apparently, she would go straight off to Tokyo also; and perhaps she would be able to prevent a catastrophe. Or perhaps she would not. Perhaps she would only make things worse. On the whole, she had better stop in Chuzenji and look after her own husband.

"Reggie," she said, "you've had a lucky escape. How did you know that I had any hand in this? You're more of a girl than a man. A rotten marriage would have broken you. Geoffrey Barrington is made of stronger stuff. He is in for a bad time. But he will learn a lot which you know already; and he will survive."

CHAPTER XX

THE KIMONO

Na we to wa wo
Hito zo saku naru.
Ide, wagimi!
Hito no naka-goto
Kiki-kosu na yume!_

It is other people who have separated
You and me.
Come, my Lord!
Do not dream of listening
To the between-words of people!

After a ghastly night of sleeplessness at Nikko, Geoffrey Barrington reached Tokyo in time for lunch. His thoughts were confused and discordant.

"I feel as if I had been drunk for a week," he kept on saying to himself. Indeed, he felt a fume of unreality over all his actions.

One thing was certain: financially, he was a ruined man. The thousands a year which yesterday morning had been practically his, the ease and comfort which had seemed so secure, were lost more hopelessly than if his bank had failed. Even the cash in his pocket he touched with the greatest disgust, as if those identical bills and coins had been paid across the brothel counter as the price for a man's dirty pleasures and a girl's shame and disease. He imagined that the Nikko hotel-keeper looked at his notes suspiciously as though they were endorsed with the seal of the Yoshiwara.

Geoffrey was ruined. He was henceforth dependent on what his brain could earn and on what his father would allow him, five hundred pounds a year at the outside. If he had been alone in the world it would not have mattered much; but Asako, poor little Asako, the innocent cause of this disaster, she was ruined too. She who loved her riches, her jewellery, her pretty things, she would have to sell them all. She would have to follow him into poverty, she, who had no experience of its meaning. This was his punishment, perhaps, for having steadily pursued the idea of a rich marriage. But what had Asako done to deserve it? Thank God, his marriage had at least not been a loveless one.

Geoffrey felt acutely the need of human sympathy in his trouble. By sheer bad luck he had forfeited Reggie's friendship. But he could still depend upon his wife's love.

So he ran up the stairs at the Imperial Hotel longing for Asako's welcome, though he dreaded the obligation to break the bad news.

He threw open the door. The room was empty. He looked for cloaks and hats and curios, for luggage, for any sign of her presence. There was nothing to indicate that the room was hers.

Sick with apprehension, he returned to the corridor. There was a _boy san_ near at hand.

"_Okusan_ go away," said the _boy san_. "No come back, I think."

"Where has she gone?" asked Geoffrey.

The _boy san_, with the infuriating Japanese grin, shook his head.

"I am very sorry for you," he said. "To-day very early plenty people come, Tanaka San and two Japanese girls. Very plenty talk. _Okusan_ cry tears. All nice kimono take away very quick."

"Then Tanaka, where is he?"

"Go away with _okusan_" the boy grinned again, "I am very sorry--"

Geoffrey slammed the door in the face of his tormentor. He staggered into a chair and collapsed, staring blankly. What could have happened?

Slowly his ideas returned. Tanaka! He had seen the little beast in Yae's motor car at Chuzenji. He must have come spying after his master as he had done fifty times before. He and that half-caste devil had raced him back to Tokyo, had got in ahead of him, and had told a pack of lies to Asako. She must have believed them, since she had gone away. But where had she gone to? The _boy san_ had said "two Japanese girls." She must have gone to the Fujinami house, and to her horribly unclean cousins.

He must find her at once. He must open her eyes to the truth. He must bring her back. He must take her away from Japan--forever.

Harrington was crossing the hall of the hotel muttering to himself, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, when he felt a hand laid on his arm. It was Titine, Asako's French maid.

"_Monsieur le capitaine_" she said, "_madame est partie_." It is not my fault, _monsieur le capitaine_. I say to madame, do not go, wait for monsieur. But madame is bewitched. She, who is _bonne catholique_, she say prayers to the temples of these yellow devils. I myself have seen her clap her hands--so!--and pray. Her saints have left her. She is bewitched."

Titine was a Breton peasant girl. She believed implicitly in the powers of darkness. She had long ago decided that the gods of the Japanese and the _korrigans_ of her own country were intimately related. She had served Asako since before her marriage, and would have remained with her until death. She was desperately faithful. But she could not follow her mistress to the Fujinami house and risk her soul's salvation.

"_Monsieur le capitaine_ go away, and madame very, very unhappy. Every night she cry. Why did monsieur stay away so long time?"

"It was only a fortnight," expostulated Geoffrey.

"For the first parting it was too long," said Titine judicially.

"Every night madame cry; and then she write to monsieur and say, 'Come

back." Monsieur write and say, 'Not yet.' Then madame break her heart and say, 'It is because of some woman that he stay away so long time!' She say so to Tanaka; and Tanaka say, 'I go and detect, and come again and tell madame;' and madame say, 'Yes, Tanaka can go: I wish to know the truth!' And still more she cry and cry. This morning very early Tanaka came back with Mademoiselle Smith and mademoiselle _la cousine_. They all talk a long time with madame in bedroom. But they send me away. Then madame call me. She cry and cry. 'Titine,' she say, 'I go away. Monsieur do not love me now. I go to the Japanese house. Pack all my things, Titine.' I say, 'No, madame, never. I never go to that house of devils. How can madame tell the good confessor? How can madame go to the Holy Mass? Will madame leave her husband and go to these people who pray to stone beasts? Wait for monsieur!' I say, 'What Tanaka say, it is lies, all the time lies. What Mademoiselle Smith say all lies.' But madame say, 'No come with me, Titine!' But I say again, 'Never!' And madame go away, crying all the time: and sixteen rickshaw all full of baggage. "Oh, _monsieur le capitaine_, what shall I do?"

"I'm sure, I don't know," said the helpless Geoffrey.

"Send me back to France, monsieur. This country is full of devils, devils and lies."

He left her sobbing in the hall of the hotel with a cluster of _boy sans_ watching her.

* * * * *

Geoffrey took a taxi to the Fujinami house. No one answered his ringing; but he thought that he could hear voices inside the building. So he strode in, unannounced, and with his boots on his feet, an unspeakable offence against Japanese etiquette.

He found Asako in a room which overlooked the garden where he had been received on former occasions. Her cousin Sadako was with her and Ito, the lawyer. To his surprise and disgust, his wife was dressed in the Japanese kimono and _obi_ which had once been so pleasing to his eyes. Her change of nationality seemed to be already complete.

This was an Asako whom he had never known before. Her eyes were ringed with weeping, and her face was thin and haggard. But her expression had a new look of resolution. She was no longer a child, a doll. In the space of a few hours she had grown to be a woman.

They were all standing. Sadako and the lawyer had formed up behind the runaway as though to give her moral support.

"Asako," said Geoffrey sternly, "what does this mean?"

The presence of the two Japanese exasperated him. His manner was tactless and unfortunate. His tall stature in the dainty room looked coarse and brutal. Sadako and Ito were staring at his offending boots with an expression of utter horror. Geoffrey suddenly remembered that he ought to have taken them off.

"Oh, damn," he thought.

"Geoffrey," said his wife, "I can't come back. I am sorry. I have

decided to stay here."

"Why?" asked Geoffrey brusquely.

"Because I know that you do not love me. I think you never loved anything except my money."

The hideous irony of this statement made poor Geoffrey gasp. He gripped the wooden framework of the room so as to steady himself.

"Good God!" he shouted. "Your money! Do you know where it comes from?"

Asako stared at him, more and more bewildered.

"Send these people out of the room, and I'll tell you," said Geoffrey.

"I would rather they stayed," his wife answered.

It had been arranged beforehand that, if, Geoffrey called, Asako was not to be left alone with him. She had been made to believe that she was in danger of physical violence. She was terribly frightened.

"Very well," Geoffrey blundered on, "every penny you have is made out of prostitution, out of the sale of women to men. You saw the Yoshiwara, you saw the poor women imprisoned there, you know that any drunken beast can come and pay his money down and say, 'I want that girl,' and she has to give herself up to be kissed and pulled about by him, even if she hates him and loathes him. Well, all this filthy Yoshiwara and all those poor girls and all that dirty money belongs to these Fujinami and to you. That is why they are so rich, and that is why we have been so rich. If we were in England, we could be flogged for this, and imprisoned, and serve us right too. And all this money is bad; and, if we keep it, we are worse than criminals; and neither of us can ever be happy, or look any one in the face again."

Asako was shaking her head gently like an automaton, understanding not a word of all this outburst. Her mind was on one thing only, her husband's infidelity. His mind was on one thing only, the shame of his wife's money. They were like card-players who concentrate their attention exclusively on the cards in their own hands, oblivious to what their partners or opponents may hold.

Asako remaining silent, Mr. Ito began to speak. His voice seemed more squeaky than ever.

"Captain Barrington," he said, "I am very sorry for you. But you see now true condition of things. You must remember you are English gentleman. Mrs. Barrington wishes not to return to you. She has been told that you make misconduct with Miss Smith at Kamakura, and again at Chuzenji. Miss Smith herself says so. Mrs. Harrington thinks this story must be true; or Miss Smith do not tell so bad story about herself. We think she is quite right--"

"Shut up!" thundered Geoffrey. "This is a matter for me and my wife alone. Please, leave us. My wife has heard one side of a story which is unfair and untrue. She must hear from me what really happened."

"I think, some other day, it would be better," cousin Sadako intervened. "You see, Mrs. Barrington cannot speak to-day. She is too

unhappy."

It was quite true. Asako stood like a dummy, neither seeing nor hearing apparently, neither assenting nor contradicting. How powerful is the influence of clothes! If Asako had been dressed in her Paris coat and skirt, her husband would have crossed the few mats which separated them, and would have carried her off willy-nilly. But in her kimono did she wholly belong to him? Or was she a Japanese again, a Fujinami? She seemed to have been transformed by some enchanter's spell; as Titine had said, she was bewitched.

"Asako, do you mean this?" The big man's voice was harsh with grief. "Do you mean that I am to go without you?"

Asako still showed no sign of comprehension.

"Answer me, my darling; do you want me to go?"

Her head moved in assent, and her lips answered "Yes."

That whisper made such a wrench at her husband's heart that his grip tightened on the frail _shoji_, and with a nervous spasm he sent it clattering out of its socket flat upon the floor of the room, like a screen blown down by the wind. Ito dashed forward to help Geoffrey replace the damage. When they turned round again, the two women had disappeared.

"Captain Barrington," said Ito, "I think you had better go away. You make bad thing worse."

Geoffrey frowned at the little creature. He would have liked to have crushed him underfoot like a cockroach. But as that was impossible, nothing remained for him to do but to depart, leaving the track of his dirty boots on the shining corridor. His last glimpse of his cousins' home was of two little serving-maids scuttering up with dusters to remove the defilement.

Asako had fainted.

* * * * *

As Reggie had said in Chuzenji, "What actually happens does not matter: it is the thought of what might have happened, which sticks." If Reggie's tolerant and experienced mind could not rid itself of the picture conjured up by the possibility of his friend's treachery and his mistress's lightness, how could Asako, ignorant and untried, hope to escape from a far more insistent obsession? She believed that her husband was guilty. But the mere feeling that it was possible that he might be guilty would have been enough to numb her love for him, at any rate for a time. She had never known heartache before. She did not realise that it is a fever which runs its appointed course of torment and despair, which at length after a given term abates, and then disappears altogether, leaving the sufferer weak but whole again. The second attack of the malady finds its victim familiar with the symptoms, resigned to a short period of misery and confident of recovery. A broken heart like a broken horse is of great service to its owner.

But Asako was like one stricken with an unknown disease. Its violence

appalled her, and in her uncertainty she prayed for death. Moreover, she was surrounded by counsellors who traded on her little faith, who kept on reminding her that she was a Japanese, that she was among her father's people who loved her and understood her, that foreigners were notoriously treacherous to women, that they were blue-eyed and cruel-hearted, that they thought only of money and material things. Let her stay in Japan, let her make her home there. There she would always be a personage, a member of the family. Among those big, bold-voiced foreign women, she was overshadowed and out of place. If her husband left her for a half-caste, what chance had she of keeping him when once he got back among the women of his own race? Mixed marriages, in fact, were a mistake, an offence against nature. Even if he wished to be faithful to her, he could not really care for her as he could for an Englishwoman.

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As soon as Geoffrey Barrington had left the house, Mr. Ito went in search of the head of the Fujinami, whom he found at work on the latest literary production of his tame students, The Pinegrove by the Sea-shore.

Mr. Fujinami Gentaro put his writing-box aside with a leisurely gesture, for a Japanese gentleman of culture must never be in a hurry.

"Indeed, it has been so noisy, composition has become impossible," he complained; "has that foreigner come, to the house?"

He used the uncomplimentary word "ket[=o]jin" which may be literally translated "hairy rascal". It is a survival from the time of Perry's black ships and the early days of foreign intercourse, when "Expel the Barbarians!" was a watchword in the country. Modern Japanese assure their foreign friends that it has fallen altogether into disuse; but such is not the case. It is a word loaded with all the hatred, envy and contempt against foreigners of all nationalities, which still pervade considerable sections of the Japanese public.

"This Barrington," answered the lawyer, "is indeed a rough fellow, even for a foreigner. He came into the house with his boots on, uninvited. He shouted like a coolie, and he broke the shoji. His behaviour was like that of Susa-no-O in the chambers of the Sun-Goddess. Perhaps he had been drinking whisky-sodas."

"A disgusting thing, is it not?" said the master. "At this time I am writing an important chapter on the clear mirror of the soul. It is troublesome to be interrupted by these quarrels of women and savages. You will have Keiichi and Gor[=o] posted at the door of the house. They are to refuse entrance to all foreigners. It must not be allowed to turn our yashiki into a battlefield."

Mr. Fujinami's meditations that morning had been most bitter. His literary preoccupation was only a sham. There was a tempest in the political world of Japan. The Government was tottering under the revelations of a corruption in high places more blatant than usual. With the fall of the Cabinet, the bribes which the Fujinami had lavished to obtain the licences and privileges necessary to their trade, would become waste money. True, the Governor of Osaka had not yet been replaced. A Fujinami familiar had been despatched thither at full speed to secure the new Tobita brothel concessions as a fait

accompli_ before the inevitable change should take place.

The head of the house of Fujinami, therefore, being a monarch in a small way, had much to think of besides "the quarrels of women and savages." Moreover, he was not quite sure of his ground with regard to Asako. To take a wife from her husband against his will, seems to the Japanese mind so flagrantly illegal a proceeding; and old Mr. Fujinami Gennosuke had warned his irreligious son most gravely against the danger of tampering with the testament of Asako's father, and of provoking thereby a visitation of his "rough spirit."

CHAPTER XXI

SAYONARA (GOOD-BYE)

_Tomo ni narite
Onaji minato wo
Izuru fune no
Yuku-ye mo shirazu
Kogi-wakari-nuru!_

Those ships which left
The same harbour
Side by side
Towards an unknown destination
Have rowed away from one another!

Reggie Forsyth, remaining in Chuzenji, had become a prey to a most crushing reaction. At the time of trial, he had been calm and clear-sighted. For a moment he had experienced a sensation of relief at shaking off the shackles which Yae's fascination had fastened upon him. He had been aware all along that she was morally worthless. He was glad to have the matter incontestably proved. But his paradise, though an artificial one, had been paradise all the same. It had nourished him with visions and music. Now, he had no companion except his own irrepressible spirit jibing at his heart's infirmity. He came to the reluctant conclusion that he must take Yae back again. But she must never come again to him on the same terms. He would take her for what she really was, a unique and charming _fille-de-joie_, and he knew that she would be glad to return. Without something, somebody, some woman to interest him, he could not face another year in this barren land.

Then what about Geoffrey, his friend who had betrayed him? No, he could not regard him in such a tragic light. He was angry with Geoffrey, but not indignant. He was angry with him for being a blunderer, an elephant, for being so easily amenable to Lady Cynthia's intrigues, for being so good-natured, stupid and gullible. He argued that if Geoffrey had been a wicked seducer, a bold Don Juan, he would have excused him and would have felt more sympathy for him. He would have thoroughly enjoyed sitting down with him to a discussion of Yae's psychology. But what did an oaf like Geoffrey understand about that bundle of nerves and instincts, partly primitive and partly artificial, bred out of an abnormal cross between East and West, and doomed from conception to a life astray between light and darkness?

He had been disillusioned about his old friend, and he wished never to see him again.

"What frauds these noble natures are!" he said to himself, "these Old Honests, these sterling souls! And as an excuse he tells me, 'Nothing actually happened!' Disgusting!"

'To play with light loves in the portal,
To kiss and embrace and refrain!'

"The virtue of our days is mostly impotence! Lust and passion and love and marriage! Why do our dull insular minds mix up these four entirely separate notions? And how can we jump with such goat-like agility from one circle of thought into another without ever noticing the change in the landscape?"

He strolled over to the piano to put these ideas into music.

Lady Cynthia had decided that it would be bad for him to stop in Chuzenji. Mountain scenery is demoralising for a nature so Byronic. He was forthwith despatched to Tokyo to represent his Embassy at a Requiem Mass to be celebrated for the souls of an Austrian Archduke and his wife, who had recently been assassinated by a Serbian fanatic somewhere in Bosnia. Reggie was furious at having to undertake this mission. For the mountains were soothing to him, and he was not yet ready for encounters. When he arrived in Tokyo, he was in a very bad temper.

* * * * *

Asako had heard from Tanaka that Reggie Forsyth was expected at the Embassy. That useful intelligence-officer had been posted by the Fujinami to keep watch on the Embassy compound, and to report any movements of importance; for the conspirators were not entirely at ease as to the legality of abducting the wife of a British subject, and keeping her against her husband's demands.

Asako had received that day a pathetic letter from Geoffrey, giving detail for detail his account of his dealings with Yae Smith, begging her to understand and believe him, and to forgive him for the crime which he had never committed.

In spite of her cousin's incredulity, Asako's resolution was shaken by this appeal. At last, now that she had lost her husband, she was beginning to realise how very much she loved him. Reggie Forsyth would be a more or less impartial witness.

Late that evening, in a hooded rickshaw she crossed the short distance which led to the Embassy. Mr. Forsyth had just arrived.

Mr. Forsyth was very displeased to hear Mrs. Barrington announced. It was just the kind of meeting which would exasperate and unnerve him.

Her appearance was against her. She wore a Japanese kimono, unpleasantly reminiscent of Yae. Her hair was disordered and frantic-looking. Her eyes were red with weeping.

"Let me say at once," observed Reggie, as he offered her a chair, "that I am in no way responsible for your husband's shortcomings. I

have too many of my own."

Asako could never understand Reggie when he talked in that sarcastic tone.

"I want to know exactly what happened," she begged. "I have no one else who can tell me."

"Your husband says that nothing actually happened," replied Reggie brutally.

The girl realised that this statement was far from being the vindication of Geoffrey which she had begun to hope for.

"But what did you actually see?" she asked.

"I saw Miss Smith with your husband. As it was in my house, they might have asked my leave first."

Asako shivered.

"But do you think Geoffrey had been--love-making to Miss Smith?"

"I don't know," said Reggie wearily. "From what I heard, I think Miss Smith was doing most of the love-making to Geoffrey; but he did not seem to object to the process."

Asako's yearnings for proof of her husband's innocence were crushed.

"What shall I do?" she pleaded.

"I'm sure I don't know." This scene to Reggie was becoming positively silly. "Take him back to England as soon as possible, I should think."

"But would he fall in love with women in England?"

"Possibly."

"Then what am I to do?"

"Grin and bear it. That's what we all have to do."

"Oh, Mr. Forsyth," Asako implored, "you know my husband so well. Do you think he is a bad man?"

"No, not worse than the rest of us," answered Reggie, who felt quite maddened by this talk. "He is a bit of a fool, and a good deal of a blunderer."

"But do you think Geoffrey was to blame for what happened?"

"I have told you, my dear Mrs. Barrington, that your husband assured me that nothing actually happened. I am quite sure this is true, for your husband is a very honourable man--in details."

"You mean," said Asako, gulping out the words, "that Miss Smith was not actually Geoffrey's--mistress; they did not--sin together."

Asako did not know how intimate were the relations between Reggie and

Yae. She did not understand therefore how cruelly her words lanced him. But, more than the shafts of memory it was the imbecility of the whole scene which almost made the young man scream.

"Exactly," he answered. "In the words of the Bible, she lay with him, but he knew her not."

"Then, do you think I ought to forgive Geoffrey?"

This was too much. Reggie leaped to his feet.

"My dear lady, that is really a question for yourself and yourself alone. Personally, I do not at present feel like forgiving anybody. Least of all, can I forgive fools. Geoffrey Harrington is a fool. He was a fool to marry, a fool to marry you, a fool to come to Japan when everybody warned him not to, a fool to talk to Yae when everybody told him that she was a dangerous woman. No, personally, at present I cannot forgive Geoffrey Barrington. But it is very late and I am very tired, and I'm sure you are, too. I would advise you to go home to your erring husband; and to-morrow morning we shall all be thinking more clearly. As the French say, *_L'oreiller raccommode tout_*."

Asako still made no movement.

"Well, dear lady, if you wish to wait longer, you will excuse me, if, instead of talking rot, I play to you. It is more soothing to the nerves."

He sat down at the piano, and struck up the *_Merry Widow_* chorus,--

"I'll go off to Maxim's: I've done with lovers' dreams;
The girls will laugh and greet me, they will not trick
and cheat me;
Lolo, Dodo, Joujou,
Cloclo, Margot, Frou-frou,
I'm going off to Maxim's, and you may go to--"

The pianist swung around on his stool: his visitor had gone.

* * * * *

"Thank God," he sighed; and within a quarter of an hour he was asleep.

He awoke in the small hours with that sick restless feeling on his chest, which he described as a conviction of sin.

"Good God!" he said aloud; "what a cad I've been!"

He realised that an unspoiled and gentle creature had paid him the greatest of all compliments by coming to him for advice in the extremity of her soul's misery. He had received her with silly *_badinage_* and cheap cynicism.

At breakfast he learned that things were much more serious than he had imagined, that Asako had actually left her husband and was living with her Japanese cousins. What he had thought to be a lover's quarrel, he now recognised to be the shipwreck of two lives. With a kindly word he might have prevented this disaster.

He drove straight to the Fujinami mansion, at the risk of being late for the Requiem Mass. He found two evil-eyed hooligans posted at the gate, who stopped his rickshaw, and, informing him that none of the Fujinami family were at home, seemed prepared to resist his entry with force.

During the reception of the Austrian Embassy which followed the Mass, an incident occurred which altered the whole set of the young diplomat's thoughts, and, most surprisingly, sent him posting down to the Imperial Hotel to find Geoffrey Harrington, as one who has discovered a treasure and must share it with his friend.

The big Englishman was contemplating a whisky-and-soda in the hall of the hotel. It was by no means the first of its series. He gazed dully at Reggie.

"Thought you were at Chuzenji," he said thickly.

"I had to come down for the special service for the Archduke Franz Ferdinand," said Reggie, excitedly. "They gave us a regular wake, champagne by the gallon! Several of the _corps diplomatique_ became inspired! They saw visions and made prophesyings. Von Falkenturm, the German military attache, was shouting out, 'We've got to fight. We're going to fight! We don't care who we fight! Russia, France, England: yes, the whole lot of them!' The man was drunk, of course; but, after, all, _in vino veritas_. The rest of the square-heads were getting very rattled, and at last they succeeded in suppressing Falkenturm. But, I tell you, Geoffrey, it's coming at last; it's really coming!"

"What's coming?"

"Why, the Great War. Thank God, it's coming!"

"Why thank God?"

"Because we've all become too artificial and beastly. We want exterminating, and to start afresh. We shall escape at last from women and drawing-rooms and silly gossip. We shall become men. It will give us all something to do and something to think about."

"Yes," echoed Geoffrey, "I wish I could get something to do."

"You'll get it all right. I wish I were a soldier. Are you going to stop in Japan much longer?"

"No--going next week--going home."

"Look here, I'll put in my resignation right away, and I'll come along with you."

"No, thanks," said Geoffrey, "rather not."

In his excitement Reggie had failed to observe the chilliness of his friend's demeanour. This snub direct brought up the whole chain of events, which Reggie had momentarily forgotten, or which were too recent as yet to have assumed complete reality.

"I'm sorry, Geoffrey," he said, as he rose to go.

"Not at all," said Barrington, ignoring his friend's hand and turning aside to order another drink.

Geoffrey had a letter in his pocket, received from his wife that morning. It ran:--

"DEAR GEOFFREY,--I am very sorry. I cannot come back. It is not only what has happened. I am Japanese. You are English. You can never really love me. Our marriage was a mistake. Everybody says so even Reggie Forsyth. I tried my best to want to come back. I went to Reggie last night, and asked him what actually happened. He says that our marriage was a mistake, and that our coming to Japan was a mistake. So do I. I think we might have been happy in England. I want you to divorce me. It seems to be very easy in Japan. You only have to write a letter, which Mr. Ito will give you. Then I can become quite Japanese again, and Mr. Fujinami can take me back into his family. Also you will be free to marry an English girl. But don't have anything to do with Miss Smith. She is a very bad girl. I shall never marry anybody else. My cousins are very kind to me. It is much better for me to stay in Japan. Titine said I was wrong to go away. Please give her fifty pounds from me, and send her back to France, if she wants to go. I don't think it is good for us to see each other. We only make each other unhappy. Tanaka is here. I do not like him now. Good-bye! Good-bye!

"Your loving,

"ASAKO."

From this letter Geoffrey understood that Reggie Forsyth also was against him. The request for a divorce baffled him entirely. How could he divorce his wife, when he had nothing against her? In answer, he wrote another frantic appeal to her to return to him. There was no answer.

Then he left Tokyo for Yokohama--it is only eighteen miles away--to wait there until his boat started.

Thither he was pursued by Ito.

"I am sorry for you." The revolting little man always began his discourse now with this exasperating phrase. "Mrs. Barrington would like very much to obtain the divorce. She wishes very much to have her name inscribed on family register of Fujinami house. If there is no divorce, this is not possible."

"But," objected Geoffrey, "it is not so easy to get divorced as to get married--unfortunately."

"In Japan," said the lawyer, "it is more easy, because we have different custom."

"Then there must be a lot of divorces," said Geoffrey grimly.

"There are very many," answered the Japanese, "more than in any other country. In divorce Japan leads the world. Even the States come second to our country. Among the low-class persons in Japan there are even

women who have been married thirty-five times, married properly, honourably and legally. In upper society, too, many divorce, but not so many, for it makes the family angry."

"Marvellous!" said Geoffrey. "How do you do it?"

"There is divorce by law-courts, as in your country," said Ito. "The injured party can sue the other party, and the court can grant decree. But very few Japanese persons go to the court for divorce. It is not nice, as you say, to wash dirty shirt before all people. So there is divorce by custom."

"Well?" asked the Englishman.

"Now, as you know, our marriage is also by custom. There is no ceremony of religion, unless parties desire. Only the man and the woman go to the _Shiyakusho_, to the office of the city or the village; and the man say, 'This woman is my wife; please, write her name on the register of my family,' Then when he want to divorce her, he goes again to the office of the city and says, 'I have sent my wife away; please, take her name from the register of my family, and write it again on the register of her father's family.' You see, our custom is very convenient. No expense, no trouble."

"Very convenient," Geoffrey agreed.

"So, if Captain Barrington will come with me to the office of Akasaka, Tokyo, and will give notice that he has sent Mrs. Barrington back to her family, then the divorce is finished. Mrs. Barrington becomes again a Japanese subject. Her name becomes Fujinami. She is again one of her family. This is her prayer to you."

"And Mrs. Barrington's money?" asked Geoffrey sarcastically. "You have forgotten that."

"Oh no," was the answer, "we don't forget the money. Mr. Fujinami quite understand that it is great loss to send away Mrs. Barrington. He will give big compensation as much as Captain Barrington desires."

To Ito's surprise, his victim left the table and did not return. So he inquired from the servants about Captain Barrington's habits; and learned from the _boy sans_ that the big Englishman drank plenty whisky-soda; but he did not talk to any one or go to the brothels. Perhaps he was a little mad.

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Ito returned to the charge next day. This time Geoffrey had an inspiration. He said that if he could be granted an interview alone with Asako, he would discuss with her the divorce project, and would consent, if she asked him personally. After some demur, the lawyer agreed.

The last interview between husband and wife took place in Ito's office, which Geoffrey had visited once before in his search for the fortune of the Fujinami. The scene of the rendezvous was well chosen to repress any revival of old emotions. The varnished furniture, the sham mahogany, the purple plush upholstery, the gilt French clock, the dirty bust of Abraham Lincoln and the polyglot law library checked the

tender word and the generous impulse. The Japanese have an instinctive knowledge of the influence of inanimate things, and use this knowledge with an unscrupulousness, which the crude foreigner only realises--if ever--after it is too late.

Geoffrey's wife appeared hand in hand with cousin Sadako. There was nothing English in her looks. She had become completely Japanese from her black helmet-like _coiffure_ to the little white feet which shuffled over the dusty carpet. There was no hand-shaking. The two women sat down stiffly on chairs against the wall remote from Geoffrey, like two swallows perched uneasily on an unsteady wire. Asako held a fan. There was complete silence.

"I wish to see my wife alone," said Geoffrey.

He spoke to Ito, who grinned with embarrassment and looked at the two women. Asako shook her head.

"I made it quite clear to you, Mr. Ito," said Geoffrey angrily, "that this was my condition. I understand that pressure has been used to keep my wife away from me. I will apply to my Embassy to get her restored."

Ito muttered under his breath. That was a contingency which he had greatly dreaded. He turned to Sadako Fujinami and spoke to her in voluble Japanese. Sadako whispered in her cousin's ear. Then she rose and withdrew with Ito.

Geoffrey was left alone with Asako. But was she really the same Asako? Geoffrey had often seen upper class Japanese ladies at receptions in the hotel at Tokyo. He had thought how picturesque they were, how well mannered, how excellent their taste in dress. But they had seemed to him quite unreal, denizens of a shadow world of bowing, gliding figures.

He now realised that his former wife had become entirely a Japanese, a person absolutely different from himself, a visitant from another sphere. He was English she was Japanese. They were divorced already.

The big man rose from his chair, and held out his hand to his wife.

"I'm sorry, little Asako!" he said, very gently. "You are quite right. It was a mistake. Good-bye, and--God bless you always!"

With immense relief and gratitude she took the giant's paw in her own tiny hand. It seemed to have lost its grip, to have become like a Japanese hand.

He opened the door for her. Once again, as on the altar-steps of St. George's, the tall shoulders bent over the tiny figure with a movement of instinctive protection and tenderness. He closed the door behind her, recrossed the room and stared into the empty fireplace.

After a time, Ito returned. The two men went together to the district office of the Akasaka Ward. There Geoffrey signed a declaration in Japanese and English to the effect that his marriage with Asako Fujinami was cancelled, and that she was free to return to her father's family.

Next morning, at daylight his ship left Yokohama.

Before he reached Liverpool, war had been declared.

CHAPTER XXII

FUJINAMI ASAKO

_Okite mitsu
Nete mitsu kaya no
Hirosa kana_.

When I rise, I look--
When I lie down, I look--
Alas, how vast is the mosquito-curtain.

Asako Barrington was restored to the name and home of the Fujinami. Her action had been the result of hereditary instinct, of the natural current of circumstances, and of the adroit diplomacy of her relatives. She had been hunted and caught like a wild animal; and she was soon to find that the walls of her enclosure, which at first seemed so wide that she perceived them not, were closing in upon her day by day as in a mediaeval torture chamber, forcing her step by step towards the unfathomable pit of Japanese matrimony.

The Fujinami had not adopted their foreign cousin out of pure altruism. Far from it. Like Japanese in general, they resented the intrusion of a "_tanin_" (outside person) into their intimacy. They took her for what she was worth to them.

Since Asako was now a member of the family, custom allowed Mr. Fujinami Gentaro to control her money. But Mr. Ito warned his patron that, legally, the money was still hers, and hers alone, and that in case of her marrying a second time it might again slip away. It was imperative, therefore, to the policy of the Fujinami house that Asako should marry a Fujinami, and that as soon as possible.

A difficulty here arose, not that Asako might object to her new husband--it never occurred to the Fujinami that this stranger from Europe might have opinions quite opposed to Japanese conventions--but that there were very few adequately qualified suitors. Indeed, in the direct line of succession there was only young Mr. Fujinami Takeshi, the youth with the purple blotches, who had distinguished himself by his wit and his "_savoir vivre_" on the night of the first family banquet.

True, he had a wife already; but she could easily be divorced, as her family were nobodies. If he married Asako, however, was he still capable of breeding healthy children? Of course, he might adopt the children whom he already possessed by his first wife, but the elder boy showed signs of being mentally deficient, the younger was certainly deaf and dumb, and the two others were girls and did not count.

Grandfather Fujinami Gennosuke, who hated and despised his grandson,

was for sweeping him and his brood out of the way altogether, and for adopting a carefully selected and creditable _yoshi_ (adopted son) by marriage with either Sadako or Asako.

"But if this Asa is barren?" said Mrs. Fujinami Shidzuye, who naturally desired that her daughter Sadako's husband should be the heir of the Fujinami. "That Englishman was strong and healthy. There was living together for more than a year, and still no child."

"If she is barren, then a son must be adopted," said the old gentleman.

"To adopt twice in succession is unlucky," objected Mr. Fujinami Gentaro.

"Then," said Mrs. Shidzuye, "the old woman of Akabo shall come for consultation. She shall tell if it is possible for her to have babies."

Akabo was the up-country village, whence the first Fujinami had come to Tokyo to seek his fortune. The Japanese never completely loses touch with his ancestral village; and for over a hundred years the Tokyo Fujinami had paid their annual visit to the mountains of the North to render tribute to the graves of their forefathers. They still preserved an inherited faith in the "wise woman" of the district, who from time to time was summoned to the capital to give her advice. Their other medical counselor was Professor Kashio, who held degrees from Munich and Vienna.

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During the first days of her self-chosen widowhood Asako was little better than a convalescent. She had never looked at sorrow before; and the shock of what she had seen had paralyzed her vitality without as yet opening her understanding. Like a dog, who in the midst of his faithful affection has been struck for a fault of which he is unconscious, she took refuge in darkness, solitude and despair.

The Japanese, who are as a rule intuitively aware of others' emotions, recognized her case. A room was prepared for her in a distant wing of the straggling house, a "foreign-style" room in an upper story with glass in the windows--stained glass too--with white muslin blinds, a colored lithograph of Napoleon and a real bed, recently purchased on Sadako's pleading that everything must be done to make life happy for their guest.

"But she is a Japanese," Mr. Fujinami Gentaro had objected. "It is not right that a Japanese should sleep upon a tall bed. She must learn to give up luxurious ways."

Sadako protested that her cousin's health was not yet assured; and so discipline was relaxed for a time.

Asako spent most of her days in the tall bed, gazing through the open doorway, across the polished wood veranda like the toffee veranda of a confectioner's model, past the wandering branch of an old twisted pine-tree which crouched by the side of the mansion like a faithful beast, over the pigmy landscape of the garden, to the scale-like roofs of the distant city, and to the pagoda on the opposite hill.

It rested her to lie thus and look at her country. From time to time Sadako would steal into the room. Her cousin would leave the invalid in silence, but she always smiled; and she would bring some offering with her, a dish of food--Asako's favorite dishes, of which Tanaka had already compiled a complete list--or sometimes a flower. At the open door she would pause to shuffle off her pale blue _zori_ (sandals); and she would glide across the clean rice-straw matting shod in her snow-white _tabi_ only.

Asako gradually accustomed herself to the noises of the house. First, there was the clattering of the _amado_, the wooden shutters whose removal announced the beginning of the day, then the gurgling and the expectorations which accompanied the family ablutions, then the harsh sound of the men's voices and their rattling laughter, the sound of their _geta_ on the gravel paths of the garden like the tedious dropping of heavy rain on an iron roof, then the flicking and dusting of the maids as they went about their daily _soji_ (house-cleaning), their shrill mouselike chirps and their silly giggle; then the afternoon stillness when every one was absent or sleeping; and then, the revival of life and bustle at about six o'clock, when the clogs were shuffled off at the front door, when the teacups began to jingle, and when sounds of swishing water came up from the bath-house, the crackle of the wood-fire under the bathtub, the smell of the burning logs, and the distant odours of the kitchen.

Outside, the twilight was beginning to gather. A big black crow flopped lazily on to the branch of the neighbouring pine-tree. His harsh croak disturbed Asako's mind like a threat. High overhead passed a flight of wild geese in military formation on their way to the continent of Asia. Lights began to peep among the trees. Behind the squat pagoda a sky of raspberry pink closed the background.

The twilight is brief in Japan. The night is velvety; and the moonlight and the starlight transfigure the dolls' house architecture, the warped pine-trees, the feathery bamboo clumps and the pagoda spires.

From a downstairs room there came the twang of cousin Sadako's _koto_, a kind of zither instrument, upon which she played interminable melancholy sonatas of liquid, detached notes, like desultory thoughts against a background of silence. There was no accompaniment to this music and no song to chime with it; for, as the Japanese say, the accompaniment for _koto_ music is the summer night-time and its heavy fragrance, and the voice with which it harmonizes is the whisper of the breeze in the pine-branches.

Long after Sadako had finished her practice, came borne upon the distance the still more melancholy pipe of a student's flute. This was the last human sound. After that the night was left to the orchestra of the insects--the grasshoppers, the crickets and the _semi_ (cicadas). Asako soon was able to distinguish at least ten or twelve different songs, all metallic in character, like clock springs being slowly wound up and then let down with a run. The night and the house vibrated with these infinitesimal chromatics. Sometimes Asako thought the creatures must have got into her room, and feared for entanglements in her hair. Then she remembered that her mother's nickname had been "the _Semi_" and that she had been so called because she was always happy and singing in her little house by the river.

This memory roused Asako one day with a wish to see how her own house was progressing. This wish was the first positive thought which had stirred her mind since her husband had left her; and it marked a stage in her convalescence.

"If the house is ready," she thought "I will go there soon. The Fujinamis will not want me to live here permanently."

This showed how little she understood as yet the Japanese family system, whereby relatives remain as permanent guests for years on end.

"Tanaka" she said one morning, in what was almost her old manner, "I think I will have the motor car to-day."

Tanaka had become her body servant as in the old days. At first she had resented the man's reappearance, which awakened such cruel memories. She had protested against him to Sadako, who had smiled and promised. But Tanaka continued his ministrations; and Asako had not the strength to go on protesting. As a matter of fact, he was specially employed by Mr. Fujinami Gentaro to spy on Asako's movements, an easy task hitherto, since she had not moved from her room.

"Where is the motor car, Tanaka?" she asked again.

He grinned, as Japanese always do when embarrassed.

"Very sorry for you," he answered; "motor car has gone away."

"Has Captain Barrington--?" Asako began instinctively; then, remembering that Geoffrey was now many thousands of miles from Japan, she turned her face to the wall and began to cry.

"Young Fujinami San," said Tanaka, "has taken motor car. He go away to mountains with _geisha_ girl. Very bad, young Fujinami San, very _roue_."

Asako thought that it was rather impertinent to borrow her own motor car without asking permission, even if she was their guest. She did not yet understand that she and all her possessions belonged from henceforth to her family--to her male relatives, that is to say; for she was only a woman.

"Old Mr. Fujinami San," Tanaka went on, happy to find his mistress, to whom he was attached in a queer Japanese sort of way, interested and responsive at last, "old Mr. Fujinami San, he also go to mountain with _geisha_ girl, but different mountain. Japanese people all very _roue_. All Japanese people like to go away in summer season with _geisha_ girl. Very bad custom. Old Mr. Fujinami San, not so very bad, keep same _geisha_ girl very long time. Perhaps Ladyship see one little girl, very nice little girl, come sometimes with Miss Sadako and bring meal-time things. That little girl is _geisha_ girl's daughter. Perhaps old Mr. Fujinami San's daughter also, I think: very bastard: I don't know!"

So he rambled on in the fashion of servants all the world over, until Asako knew all the ramifications of her relatives, legitimate and illegitimate.

She gathered that the men had all left Tokyo during the hot season, and that only the women were left in the house. This encouraged her to descend from her eyrie, and to endeavour to take up her position in her family, which was beginning to appear the less reassuring the more she learned about its history.

The life of a Japanese lady of quality is peculiarly tedious. She is relieved from the domestic cares which give occupation to her humbler sisters. But she is not treated as an equal or as a companion by her menfolk, who are taught that marriage is for business and not for pleasure, and consequently that home-life is a bore. She is supposed to find her own amusements, such as flower-arrangement, tea-ceremony, music, kimono-making and the composition of poetry. More often, this refined and innocent ideal degenerates into a poor trickle of an existence, enlivened only by scrappy magazine reading, servants' gossip, empty chatter about clothes, neighbours and children, backbiting, envying and malice.

Once Sadako took her cousin to a charity entertainment given for the Red Cross at the house of a rich nobleman. A hundred or more ladies were present; but stiff civility prevailed. None of the guests seemed to know each other. There was no friendly talking. There were no men guests. There was three hours' agony of squatting, a careful adjustment of expensive kimonos, weak tea and tasteless cakes, a blank staring at a dull conjuring performance, and deadly silence.

"Do you ever have dances?" Asako asked her cousin.

"The geisha dance, because they are paid," said Sadako primly. Her pose was no longer cordial and sympathetic. She set herself up as mentor to this young savage, who did not know the usages of civilized society.

"No, not like that," said the girl from England; "but dancing among yourselves with your men friends."

"Oh, no, that would not be nice at all. Only tipsy persons would dance like that."

Asako tried, not very successfully, to chat in easy Japanese with her cousin; but she fled from the interminable talking parties of her relatives, where she could not understand one word, except the innumerable parentheses--naruhodo (indeed!) and so des'ka (is it so?)--with which the conversation was studded. As the realization of her solitude made her nerves more jumpy, she began to imagine that the women were forever talking about her, criticizing her unfavorably and disposing of her future.

The only man whom she saw during the hot summer months, besides the inevitable Tanaka, was Mr. Ito, the lawyer. He could talk quite good English. He was not so egotistical and bitter as Sadako. He had traveled in America and Europe. He seemed to understand the trouble of Asako's mind, and would offer sympathetic advice.

"It is difficult to go to school when we are no longer children," he would say sententiously. "Asa San must be patient. Asa San must forget. Asa San must take Japanese husband. I think it is the only way."

"Oh, no," the poor girl shivered; "I wouldn't marry again for anything."

"But," Ito went on relentlessly, "it is hurtful to the body when once it has custom to be married. I think that is reason why so many widow women are unfortunate and become mad."

Every day he would spend an hour or so in conversation with Asako. She thought that this was a sign of friendliness and sympathy. As a matter of fact, his object at first was to improve his English. Later on more ambitious projects developed in his fertile brain.

He would talk about New York and London in his queer stilted way. He had been a fireman on board ship, a teacher of jiujitsu, a juggler, a quack dentist, Heaven knows what else. Driven by the conscientious inquisitiveness of his race, he had endured hardships, contempt and rough treatment with the smiling patience inculcated in the Japanese people by their education. "We must chew our gall, and bide our time," they say, when the too powerful foreigner insults or abuses them.

He had seen the magnificence of our cities, the vastness of our undertakings and had returned to Japan with great relief to find that life among his own people was less strenuous and fierce, that it was ordered by circumstances and the family system, that less was left to individual courage and enterprise, that things happened more often than things were done. The impersonality of Japan was as restful to him as it is aggravating to a European.

But it must not be imagined that Ito was an idle man. On the contrary, he was exceedingly hard working and ambitious. His dream was to become a statesman, to enjoy unlimited patronage, to make men and to break men, and to die a peer. When he returned to Japan from his wanderings with exactly two shillings in his pocket, this was his programme. Like Cecil Rhodes, his hero among white men, he made a will distributing millions. Then he attached himself to his rich cousins, the Fujinami; and very soon he became indispensable to them. Fujinami Gentaro, an indolent man, gave him more and more authority over the family fortune. It was dirty business, this buying of girls and hiring of pimps, but it was immensely profitable; and more and more of the profits found their way into Ito's private account. Fujinami Gentaro did not seem to care. Takeshi, the son and heir, was a nonentity. Ito's intention was to continue to serve his cousins until he had amassed a working capital of a hundred thousand pounds. Then he would go into politics.

But the advent of Asako suggested a short cut to his hopes. If he married her he would gain immediate control of a large interest in the Fujinami estate. Besides she had all the qualifications for the wife of a Cabinet Minister, knowledge of foreign languages, ease in foreign society, experience of foreign dress and customs. Moreover, passion was stirring in his heart, the swift stormy passion of the Japanese male, which, when thwarted, drives him towards murder and suicide.

Like many Japanese, he had felt the attractiveness of foreign women when he was traveling abroad. Their independence stimulated him, their savagery and their masterful ways. Ito had found in Asako the physical beauty of his own race together with the character and energy which had pleased him so much in white women. Everything seemed to favor

his suit. Asako clearly seemed to prefer his company to that of other members of the family. He had a hold over the Fujinami which would compel them to assent to anything he might require. True, he had a wife already; but she could easily be divorced.

Asako tolerated him, *_faute de mieux_*. Cousin Sadako was becoming tired of their system of mutual instruction, as she tired sooner or later of everything.

She had developed a romantic interest in one of the pet students, whom the Fujinami kept as an advertisement and a bodyguard. He was a pale youth with long greasy hair, spectacles and more gold in his teeth than he had ever placed in his waist-band. Popriety forbade any actual conversation with Sadako; but there was an interchange of letters almost every day, long subjective letters describing states of mind and high ideals, punctuated with shadowy Japanese poems and with quotations from the Bible, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Bergson, Eucken, Oscar Wilde and Samuel Smiles.

Sadako told her cousin that the young man was a genius, and would one day be Professor of Literature at the Imperial University.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE REAL SHINTO

*_Yo no naka wo
Nani ni tatoyemu?
Asa-borake
Kogi-yuku fune no
Ato no shira-nami_.*

To what shall I compare
This world?
To the white wake behind
A ship that has rowed away
At dawn!

When the autumn came and the maple trees turned scarlet, the men returned from their long summer holidays. After that Asako's lot became heavier than ever.

"What is this talk of tall beds and special cooking?" said Mr. Fujinami Gentaro. "The girl is a Japanese. She must live like a Japanese and be proud of it."

So Asako had to sleep on the floor alongside her cousin Sadako in one of the downstairs rooms. Her last possession, her privacy, was taken away from her. The soft mattresses which formed the native bed, were not uncomfortable; but Asako discarded at once the wooden pillow, which every Japanese woman fits into the nape of her neck, so as to prevent her elaborate *_coiffure_* becoming disarranged. As a result, her head was always untidy, a fact upon which her relatives commented.

"She does not look like a great foreign lady now," said Mrs. Shidzuye,

the mistress of the house. "She looks like _osandon_ (a rough kitchen maid) from a country inn."

The other women tittered.

One day the old woman of Akabo arrived. Her hair was quite white like spun glass, and her waxen face was wrinkled like a relief map. Her body was bent double like a lobster; and her eyes were dim with cataracts. Cousin Sadako said with awe that she was over a hundred years old.

Asako had to submit to the indignity of allowing this dessicated hag to pass her fumbling hands all over her body, pinching her and prodding her. The old woman smelt horribly of _daikon_ (pickled horse-radish). Furthermore the terrified girl had to answer a battery of questions as to her personal habits and her former marital relations. In return, she learned a number of curious facts about herself, of which she had hitherto no inkling. The lucky coincidence of having been born in the hour of the Bird and the day of the Bird set her apart from the rest of womankind as an exceptionally fortunate individual. But, unhappily, the malignant influence of the Dog Year was against her nativity. When once this disaffected animal had been conquered and cast out, Asako's future should be a very bright one. The family witch agreed with the Fujinami that the Dog had in all probability departed with the foreign husband. Then the toothless crone breathed three times upon the mouth, breasts and thighs of Asako; and when this operation was concluded, she stated her opinion that there was no reason, obstetrical or esoteric, why the ransomed daughter of the house of Fujinami should not become the mother of many children.

But on the psychical condition of the family in general she was far from reassuring. Everything about the mansion, the growth of the garden, the flight of the birds, the noises of the night-time, foreboded dire disaster in the near future. The Fujinami were in the grip of a most alarming _inge_ (chain of cause and effect). Several "rough ghosts" were abroad; and were almost certain to do damage before their wrath could be appeased. What was the remedy? It was indeed difficult to prescribe for such complicated cases. Temple charms, however, were always efficacious. The old woman gave the names of some of the shrines which specialized in exorcism.

Some days later the charms were obtained, strips of rice paper with sacred writings and symbols upon them, and were pasted upon posts and lintels all over the house. This was done in Mr. Fujinami's absence. When he returned, he commented most unfavourably on this act of faith. The prayer tickets disfigured his house. They looked like luggage labels. They injured his reputation as an _esprit fort_. He ordered the students to remove them.

After this sacrilegious act, the old woman, who had lingered on in the family mansion for several weeks, returned again to Akabo, shaking her white locks and prophesying dark things to come.

* * * * *

For some reason or other, the witch's visit did not improve Asako's position. She was expected to perform little menial services, to bring in food at meal-times and to serve the gentlemen on bended knee,

to clap her hands in summons to the servant girls, to massage Mrs. Fujinami, who suffered from rheumatism in the shoulder, and to scrub her back in the bath.

Her wishes were usually ignored; and she was not encouraged to leave the house and grounds. Sadako no longer took her cousin with her to the theatre or to choose kimono patterns at the Mitsukoshi store. She was irritated at Asako's failure to learn Japanese. It bored her to have to explain everything. She found this girl from Europe silly and undutiful.

Only at night they would chatter as girls will, even if they are enemies; and it was then that Sadako narrated the history of her romance with the young student.

One night, Asako awoke to find that the bed beside her was empty, and that the paper _shoji_ was pushed aside. Nervous and anxious, she rose and stood in the dark veranda outside the room. A cold wind was blowing in from some aperture in the _amado_. This was unusual, for a Japanese house in its night attire is hermetically sealed.

Suddenly Sadako appeared from the direction of the wind. Her hair was disheveled. She wore a dark cloak over her parti-coloured night kimono. By the dim light of the _andon_ (a rushlight in a square paper box), Asako could see that the cloak was spotted with rain.

"I have been to _benjo_," said Sadako nervously.

"You have been out in the rain," contradicted her cousin. "You are wet through. You will catch cold."

"_Sa! Damare!_ (Be quiet!)" whispered Sadako, as she threw her cloak aside, "do not talk so loud. See!" She drew from her breast a short sword in a sheath of shagreen. "If you speak one word, I kill you with this."

"What have you done?" asked Asako, trembling.

"What I wished to do," was the sullen answer.

"You have been with Sekine?" Asako mentioned the student's name.

Sadako nodded in assent. Then she began to cry, hiding her face in her kimono sleeve.

"Do you love him?" Asako could not help asking.

"Of course, I love him," cried Sadako, starting up from her sorrow. "You see me. I am no more virgin. He is my life to me. Why cannot I love him? Why cannot I be free like men are free to love as they wish? I am new woman. I read Bernard Shaw. I find one law for men in Japan, and another law for women. But I will break that law. I have made Sekine my lover, because I am free."

Asako could never have imagined her proud, inhuman cousin reduced to this state of quivering emotion. Never before had she seen a Japanese soul laid bare.

"But you will marry Sekine, Sada dear; and then you will be happy."

"Marry Sekine!" the girl hissed, "marry a boy with no money and leave you to be the Fujinami heiress, when I am promised to the Governor of Osaka, who will be home Minister when the next Governor comes!"

"Oh, don't do that," urged Asako, her English sentimentalism flooding back across her mind. "Don't marry a man whom you don't love. You say you are a new woman. Marry Sekine. Marry the man whom you love. Then you will be happy."

"Japanese girls are never happy," groaned her cousin.

Asako gasped. This morality confused her.

"But that would be a mortal sin," she said. "Then you could never be happy."

"We cannot be happy. We are Fujinami," said Sadako gravely. "We are cursed. The old woman of Akabo said that it is a very bad curse. I do not believe superstition. But I believe there is a curse. You also, you have been unhappy, and your father and mother. We are cursed because of the women. We have made so much money from poor women. They are sold to men, and they suffer in pain and die so that we become rich. It is a very bad *unge*. So they say in Akabo, that we Fujinami have a fox in our family. It brings us money; but it makes us unhappy. In Akabo, even poor people will not marry with the Fujinami, because we have the fox."

It is a popular belief, still widely held in Japan, that certain families own spirit foxes, a kind of family banshee who render them service, but mark them with a curse.

"I do not understand," said Asako, afraid of this wild talk.

"Do you know why the Englishman went away?" said her cousin brutally.

It was Asako's turn to cry.

"Oh, I wish I had gone with him. He was so good to me, always so kind and so gentle!"

"When he married you," said Sadako, "he did not know that you had the curse. He ought not to have come to Japan with you. Now he knows you have the curse. So he went away. He was wise."

"What do you mean by the curse?" asked Asako.

"You do not know how the Fujinami have made so much money?"

"No," said Asako. "It used to come for me from Mr. Ito. He had shares or something."

"Yes. But a share that means a share of a business. Do you not know what is our business?"

"No," said Asako again.

"You have seen the Yoshiwara, where girls are sold to men. That is our business. Do you understand now?"

"No."

"Then I will tell you the whole story of the Fujinami. About one hundred and twenty years ago our great-great-grandfather came to Yedo, as Tokyo was then called. He was a poor boy from the country. He had no friends. He became clerk in a dry goods store. One day a woman, rather old, asked him: 'How much pay you get?' He said, 'No pay, only food and clothes.' The woman said, 'Come with me; I will give you food and clothes and pay also,' He went with her to the Yoshiwara where she had a small house with five or six girls. Every night he must stand in front of the house, calling. Then the drunken workmen, and the gamblers, and the bad samurai would come and pay their money. And they pay their money to him, our great-great-grandfather. When the girls were sick, or would not receive guests, he would beat them, and starve them, and burn o kyu (a medical plant called moxa, used for cauterization) on their backs. One day he said to the woman who was mistress of the house, 'Your girls are too old. The rich friends do not come any more. Let us sell these girls. I will go into the country and get new girls, and then you will marry me and make me your partner.' The woman said, 'If we have good luck with the girls and make money, then I marry you.' So our great-great-grandfather went back to his own country, to Akabo; and his old friends in the country were astonished, seeing how much money he had to spend. He said 'Yes. I have many rich friends in Yedo. They want pretty country girls to be their wives. See, I pay you in advance five pieces of gold. After the marriage more money will be given. Let me take your prettiest girls to Yedo with me. And they will all get rich husbands.' They were simple country people, and they believed him because he was a man of their village, of Akabo. He went back to Yedo with about twenty girls, fifteen or sixteen years old. He and the other clerks of the Yoshiwara first made them jor[=o]. From those twenty girls he made very much money. So he married the woman who kept the house. Then he hired a big house called Tomonji. He furnished it very richly; and he would only receive guests of the high-class people. Five of his girls became very famous oiran. Even their pictures, drawn by Utamaro, are worth now hundreds of yen. When our great-great-grandfather died he was a very rich man. His son was the second Fujinami. He bought more houses in the Yoshiwara and more girls. He was our great-grandfather. He had two sons. One was your father's father, who bought this land and first built a house here. The other was my grandfather, Fujinami Gennosuke, who still lives in the inkyu. They have all made much money from girls; but the curse was hurting them all, especially their wives and daughters."

"And my father?" asked Asako.

"Your father wrote a book to say how bad a thing it is that money is made from men's lust and the pain of Women. He told in the book how girls are tricked to come to Tokyo, how their parents sell them because they are poor or because there is famine, how the girls are brought to Tokyo ten and twenty at a time, and are put to auction sale in the Yoshiwara, how they are shut up like prisoner, how very rough men are sent to them to break their spirit and to compel them to be jor[=o]. There is a trial to see how strong they are. Then, when the spirit is broken, they are shown in the window as 'new girls' with beautiful kimono and with wreath of flowers on their head. If they are lucky they escape disease for a few years, but it comes soon or late-- rinbyo, baidoku and raibyō. They are sent to the hospital

for treatment; or else they are told to hide the disease and to get more men. So the men take the disease and bring it to their wives and children, who have done no wrong. But the girls of the Yoshiwara have to work all the time, when they are only half cured. So they become old and ugly and rotten very quickly. Then, if they take consumption or some such thing, they die and the master says, 'It is well. She was already too old. She was wasting our money.' And they are buried quickly in the burial place of the yor[=o] outside the city boundary, the burial place of the dead who are forgotten. Or some, who are very strong, live until their contract is finished. Then they go back to the country, and marry there and spread disease. But they all die cursing the Fujinami, who have made money out of their sorrow and pain. I think this garden is full of their ghosts, and their curses beat upon the house, like the wind when it makes the shutters rattle!"

"How do you know all these terrible things?" asked Asako.

"It is written in your father's book. I will read it to you. If you do not believe, ask Ito San. He will tell you it is true."

So for several evenings Sadako read to this stranger Fujinami her own father's words, the words of a forerunner.

Japan is still a savage country, wrote Fujinami Katsundo, the Japanese are still barbarians. To compare the conventional codes, which they have mistaken for civilization, with the depth and the height of Occidental idealism, as Christ perceived it and Dante and St. Francis of Assisi and Tolstoy, is "to compare the tortoise with the moon." Japan is imitating from the West its worst propensities--hard materialism, vulgarity and money-worship. The Japanese must be humble, and must admit that the most difficult part of their lesson has yet to be learned. Cut and dried systems are useless. Prussian constitution, technical education, military efficiency and bravado--such things are not progress. Japan must denounce the slavery of ancestor-worship, and escape from the rule of the dead. She must chase away the bogeys of superstition, and enjoy life as a lovely thing, and love as the vision of a life still more beautiful. She must cleanse her land of all its filth, and make it what it still might be--the Country of the Rising Sun.

Such was the message of Asako's father in his book, The Real Shinto.

"We are not allowed to read this book," Sadako explained; "the police have forbidden it. But I found a secret copy. It was undutiful of your father to write such things. He went away from Japan; and everyone said, 'It is a good thing he has gone; he was a bad man; he shamed his country and his family.'"

There was much in the book which Asako could not follow. Her cousin tried to explain it to her; and many nights passed, thus, the two girls sitting up and reading by the pale light of the andon. It was like a renewal of the old friendship. Sometimes a low whistle sounded from outside the house. Sadako would lay aside the book, would slip on her cloak and go out into the garden, where Sekine was waiting for her.

When she was left to herself Asako began to think for the first time in her life. Hitherto her thoughts had been concerned merely with her own pleasures and pains, with the smiles and frowns of those around

her, with petty events and trifling projects. Perhaps, because some of her father's blood was alive in her veins, she could understand certain aspects of his book more clearly than her interpreter, Sadako. She knew now why Geoffrey would not touch her money. It was filthy, it was diseased, like the poor women who had earned it. Of course, her Geoffrey preferred poverty to wealth like that. Could she face poverty with him? Why, she was poor already, here in her cousins' house. Where was the luxury which her money used to buy? She was living the life of a servant and a prisoner.

What would be the end of it? Surely Geoffrey would come back to her, and take her away! But he had no money now, and it would cost much money to travel to Japan. And then, this terrible war! Geoffrey was a soldier. He would be sure to be there, leading his men. Supposing he were killed?

One night in a dream she saw his body carried past her, limp and bleeding. She screamed in her sleep. Sadako awoke, terrified.

"What is the matter?"

"I dreamed of Geoffrey, my husband. Perhaps he is killed in the war."

"Do not say that," said Sadako. "It is unlucky to speak of death. It troubles the ghosts. I have told you this house is haunted."

Certainly for Asako the Fujinami mansion had lost its charm. Even the beautiful landscape was besieged by horrible thoughts. Every day two or three of the Yoshiwara women died of disease and neglect, so Sadako said and therefore every day the invisible population of the Fujinami garden must be increasing, and the volume of their curses must be gathering in intensity. The ghosts hissed like snakes in the bamboo grove. They sighed in the pine branches. They nourished the dwarf shrubs with their pollution. Beneath the waters of the lake the corpses--women's corpses--were laid out in rows. Their thin hands shook the reeds. Their pale faces rose at night to the surface, and stared at the moon. The autumn maples smeared the scene with infected blood; and the stone foxes in front of the shrine of Inari sneered and grinned at the devil world which their foul influence had called into being through the black witchcraft of lechery, avarice and disease.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE AUTUMN FESTIVAL

_Yo no naka ni
Ushi no Kuruma no
Nakari-seba,
Omoi no iye wo
Ikade ide-mashi?_

In this world
If there were no
Ox-cart (_i.e._ Buddhist religion),
How should we escape
From the (burning) mansion of our thought?

During October, the whole family of the Fujinami removed from Tokyo for a few days in order to perform their religious duties at the temple of Ikegami. Even grandfather Gennosuke emerged from his dower-house, bringing his wife, O Tsugi. Mr. Fujinami Gentaro was in charge of his own wife, Shidzuye San, of Sadako and of Asako. Only Fujinami Takeshi, the son and heir, with his wife Matsuko, was absent.

There had been some further trouble in the family which had not been confided to Asako, but which necessitated urgent steps for the propitiation of religious influences. The Fujinami were followers of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism. Their conspicuous devotion and their large gifts to the priests of the temple were held to be causes of their ever-increasing prosperity. The dead Fujinami, down from that great-great-grandfather who had first come to seek his fortune in Yedo, were buried at Ikegami. Here the priests gave to each _hotoke_ (Buddha or dead person) his new name, which was inscribed on small black tablets, the _ihai_. One of these tablets for each dead person was kept in the household shrine at Tokyo, and one in the temple at Ikegami.

Asako was taken to the October festival, because her father too was buried in the temple grounds--one small bone of him, that is to say, an _ikotsu_ or legacy bone, posted home from Paris before the rest of his mortality found alien sepulture at Pere Lachaise. Masses were said for the dead; and Asako was introduced to the tablet. But she did not feel the same emotion as when she first visited the Fujinami house. Now, she had heard her father's authentic voice. She knew his scorn for pretentiousness of all kinds, for false conventions, for false emotions, his hatred of priestcraft, his condemnation of the family wealth, and his contempt for the little respectabilities of Japanese life.

* * * * *

A temple in Japan is not merely a building; it is a site. These sites were most carefully chosen with the same genius which guided our Benedictines and Carthusians. The site of Ikegami is a long-abrupt hill, half-way between Tokyo and Yokohama. It is clothed with _cryptomeria_ trees. These dark conifers, like immense cypresses, give to the spot that grave, silent, irrevocable atmosphere, with which Boecklin has invested his picture of the Island of the Dead. These majestic trees are essentially a part of the temple. They correspond to the pillars of our Gothic cathedrals. The roof is the blue vault of heaven; and the actual buildings are but altars, chantries and monuments.

A steep flight of steps is suspended like a cascade from the crest of the hill. Up and down these steps, the wooden clogs of the Japanese people patter incessantly like water-drops. At the top of the steps stands the towered gateway, painted with red ochre, which leads to the precincts. The guardians of the gate, _Ni-O_, the two gigantic Deva kings, who have passed from India into Japanese mythology, are engaged in the gateway building. Their cage and their persons are littered with nasty morsels of chewed paper, wherever their worshippers have literally spat their prayers at them.

Within the enclosure are the various temple buildings, the bell-tower,

the library, the washing-trough, the hall of votive offerings, the sacred bath-house, the stone lanterns and the lodgings for the pilgrims; also the two main halls for the temple services, which are raised on low piles and are linked together by a covered bridge, so that they look like twin arks of safety, floating just five feet above the troubles of this life. These buildings are most of them painted red; and there is fine carving on panels, friezes and pediments, and also much tawdry gaudiness. Behind these two sanctuaries is the mortuary chapel where repose the memories of many of the greatest in the land. Behind this again are the priests' dormitories, with a lovely hidden garden hanging on the slopes of a sudden ravine; its presiding genius is an old pine-tree, beneath which Nichiren himself, a contemporary and a counterpart of Saint Dominic, used to meditate on his project for a Universal Church, founded on the life of Buddha, and led by the apostolate of Japan.

* * * * *

For the inside of a week the Fujinami dwelt in one of a row of stalls, like loose-boxes, within the temple precincts. The festival might have some affinity with the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, when the devout left their city dwellings to live in booths outside the walls.

Namu my[=o]h[=o] rengo ky[=o].

(Adoration to the Wonderful Law of the Lotus Scriptures!)

The famous formula of the priests of the Nichiren sect was being repeated over and over again to the accompaniment of drums; for in the sacred text itself lies the only authentic Way of Salvation. With exemplary insistence Mr. Fujinami Gennosuke was beating out the rhythm of the prayer with a wooden clapper on the mokugy[=o], a wooden drum, shaped like a fish's head.

Namu my[=o]h[=o] rengo ky[=o].

From every corner of the temple enclave the invocation was droning like a threshing machine. Asako's Catholic conscience, now awakening from the spell which Japan had cast upon it, became uneasy about its share in these pagan rites. In order to drive the echo of the litany out of her ears, she tried to concentrate her attention upon watching the crowd.

Namu my[=o]h[=o] rengo ky[=o].

Around her was a dense multitude of pilgrims, in their hundreds of thousands, shuffling, chaffering and staring. Some, like the Fujinami, had hired temporary lodgings, and had cooks and servants in attendance. Some were camping in the open. Others were merely visiting the temple for the inside of the day. The crowds kept on shifting and mingling like ants on an ant-hill.

Enjoyment, rather than piety, was the prevailing spirit; for this was one of the few annual holidays of the industrious Tokyo artisan.

In the central buildings, five feet above this noisy confluence of people, where the golden images of the Buddhas are enthroned, the mitred priests with their copes of gold-embroidered brown were performing the rituals of their order. To right and left of the high

altar, the canons squatting at their red-lacquered praying-desks, were reciting the _sutras_ in strophe and antistrophe. Clouds of incense rose.

In the adjoining building an earnest young preacher was exhorting a congregation of elderly and somnolent ladies to eschew the lusts of the flesh and to renounce the world and its gauds, marking each point in his discourse with raps of his fan. Foxy-faced satellites of the abbey were doing a roaring trade in charms against various accidents, and in sacred scrolls printed with prayers or figures of Nichiren.

The temple-yard was an immense fancy fair. The temple pigeons wheeled disconsolately in the air or perched upon the roofs, unable to find one square foot of the familiar flagstones, where they were used to strut and peck. Stalls lined the stone pathways and choked the spaces between the buildings. Merchants were peddling objects of piety, sacred images, charms and rosaries; and there were flowers for the women's hair, and toys for the children, and cakes and biscuits, _biiru_ (beer) and _ramune_ (lemonade) and a distressing sickly drink called "champagne cider" and all manner of vanities. In one corner of the square a theatre was in full swing, the actors making up in public on a balcony above the crowd, so as to whet their curiosity and attract their custom. Beyond was a cinematograph, advertised by lurid paintings of murders and apparitions; and farther on there was a circus with a mangy zoo.

The crowd was astonishingly mixed. There were prosperous merchants of Tokyo with their wives, children, servants and apprentices. There were students with their blue and white spotted cloaks, their _kepis_ with the school badge, and their ungainly stride. There were modern young men in _y[=o]fuku_ (European dress), with panama hats, swagger canes and side-spring shoes, supercilious in attitude and proud of their unbelief. There were troops of variegated children, dragging at their elders' hands or kimonos, or getting lost among the legs of the multitude like little leaves in an eddy. There were excursion parties from the country, with their kimonos caught up to the knees, and with baked earthen faces stupidly staring, sporting each a red flower or a coloured towel for identification purposes. There were labourers in tight trousers and tabard jackets, inscribed with the name and profession of their employer. There were _geisha_ girls on their best behaviour, in charge of a professional auntie, and recognizable only by the smart cut of their cloaks and the deep space between the collar and the nape of the neck, where the black _chignon_ lay.

Close to the tomb of Nichiren stood a Japanese Salvationist, a zealous pimply young man, wearing the red and blue uniform of General Booth with _kaiseigun_ (World-saving Army) in Japanese letters round his staff cap. He stood in front of a screen, on which the first verse of "Onward, Christian Soldiers," was written in a Japanese translation. An assistant officiated at a wheezy harmonium. The tune was vaguely akin to its Western prototype; and the two evangelists were trying to induce a tolerant but uninterested crowd to join in the chorus.

Everywhere beggars were crawling over the compound in various states of filth. Some, however, were so ghastly that they were excluded from the temple enclosure. They had lined up among the trunks of the cryptomeria trees, among the little grey tombs with their fading inscriptions and the moss-covered statues of kindly Buddhas.

Asako gave a penny into the crooked hand of one poor sightless wretch.

"Oh, no!" cried cousin Sadako; "do not go near to them. Do not touch them. They are lepers."

Some of them had no arms, or had mere stumps ending abruptly in a red and sickening object like a bone which a dog has been chewing. Some had no legs, and were pulled along on little wheeled trolleys by their less dilapidated companions in misfortune. Some had no features. Their faces were mere glabrous disks, from which eyes and nose had completely vanished; only the mouth remained, a toothless gap fringed with straggling hairs. Some had faces abnormally bloated, with powerful foreheads and heavy jowls, which gave them an expression of stony immobility like Byzantine lions. All were fearfully dirty and covered with sores and lice.

The people passing by smiled at their grim unsightliness, and threw pennies to them, for which they scrambled and scratched like beasts.

Namu my[=o]h[=o] renga ky[=o].

Asako's relatives spent the day in eating, drinking and gossiping to the rhythm of the interminable prayer.

It was a perfect day of autumn, which is the sweetest season in Japan. A warm bright sun had been shining on the sumptuous colours of the waning year, on the brilliant reds and yellows which clothed the neighbouring hills, on the broad brown plain with its tessellated design of bare rice-fields, on the brown villas and cottages huddled in their fences of evergreen like birds in their nests, on the red trunks of the cryptomeria trees, on the brown carpet of matted pine-needles, on the grey crumbling stones of the old graveyard, on the high-pitched temple roofs, and on the inconsequential swarms of humanity drifting to their devotions, casting their pennies into the great alms-trough in front of the shrine, clanging the brass bell with a prayer for good luck, and drifting home again with their bewildered, happy children.

Asako no longer felt like a Japanese. The sight of her countrymen in their drab monotonous thousands sickened her. The hiss and cackle of their incomprehensible tongue beat upon her brain with a deadly incessant sound, like raindrops to one who is impatiently awaiting the return of fine weather.

Here at Ikegami, the distant view of the sea and the Yokohama shipping invited Asako to escape. But where could she escape to? To England. She was an Englishwoman no longer. She had cast her husband off for insufficient reasons. She had been cold, loveless, narrow-minded and silly. She had acted, as she now recognised, largely on the suggestion of others. Like a fool she had believed what had been told. She had not trusted her love for her husband. As usual, her thoughts returned to Geoffrey, and to the constant danger which threatened him. Lately, she had started to write a letter to him several times, but had never got further than "Dearest Geoffrey."

She was glad when the irritating day was over, when the rosy sunset clouds showed through the trunks of the cryptomerias, when the night fell and the great stars like lamps hung in the branches. But the night brought no silence. Paper lanterns were lighted round the

temple; and rough acetylene flares lit up the tawdry fairings. The chattering, the bargaining, the clatter of the _geta_ became more terrifying even than in daytime. It was like being in the darkness in a cage of wild beasts, heard, felt, but unseen.

The evening breeze was cold. In spite of the big wooden fireboxes strewn over their stall, the Fujinami were shivering.

"Let us go for a walk," suggested cousin Sadako.

The two girls strolled along the ridge of the hill as far as the five-storied pagoda. They passed the tea-house, so famous for its plum-blossoms in early March. It was brightly lighted. The paper rectangles of the _shoji_ were aglow like an illuminated honeycomb. The wooden walls resounded with the jangle of the _samisen_, the high screaming _geisha_ voices, and the rough laughter of the guests. From one room the _shoji_ were pushed open; and drunken men could be seen with kimonos thrown back from their shoulders showing a body reddened with _sake_. They had taken the _geishas_' instruments from them, and were performing an impromptu song and dance, while the girls clapped their hands and writhed with laughter. Beyond the tea-house, the din of the festival was hushed. Only from the distance came the echo of the song, the rasp of the forced merriment, the clatter of the _geta_, and the hum of the crowd.

Starlight revealed the landscape. The moon was rising through a cloud's liquescence. Soon the hundreds of rice-plots would catch her full reflection. The outline of the coast of Tokyo Bay was visible as far as Yokohama; so were the broad pool of Ikegami and the lumpy masses of the hills inland.

The landscape was alive with lights, lights dim, lights bright, lights stationary, lights in swaying movement round each centre of population. It looked as if the stars had fallen from heaven, and were being shifted and sorted by careful gleaners. As each nebula of white illumination assembled itself, it began to move across the vast plain, drawn inwards towards Ikegami from every point of the compass as though by a magnetic force. These were the lantern processions of pilgrims. They looked like the souls of the righteous rising from earth to heaven in a canto from Dante.

The clusters of lights started, moved onwards, paused, re-grouped themselves, and struggled forward, until in the narrow street of the village under the hill Asako could distinguish the shapes of the lantern-bearers and their strange antics, and the sacred palanquin, a kind of enormous wooden bee-hive, which was the centre of each procession, borne on the sturdy shoulders of a swarm of young men to the beat of drums and the inevitable chant.

Namu my[=o]h[=o] rengo ky[=o].

Slowly the procession jolted up the steep stairway, and came to rest with their heavy burdens in front of the temple of Nichiren.

"It is very silly," said cousin Sadako, "to be so superstitious, I think."

"Then why are we here?" asked Asako.

"My grandfather is very superstitious; and my father is afraid to say 'No' to him. My father does not believe in any gods or Buddhas; but he says it does no harm, and it may do good. All our family is _gohei-katsugi_ (brandishers of sacred symbols). We think that with all this prayer we can turn away the trouble of Takeshi."

"Why, what is the matter with Mr. Takeshi? Why is he not here? and Matsuko San and the children?"

"It is a great secret," said the Fujinami cousin, "you will tell no one. You will pretend also even with me that you do not know. Takeshi San is very sick. The doctor says that he is a leper."

Asako stared, uncomprehending. Sadako went on,--

"You saw this morning those ugly beggars. They were all so terrible to see, and their bodies were so rotten. My brother is becoming like that. It is a sickness. It cannot be cured. It will kill him very slowly. Perhaps his wife Matsu and his children also have the sickness. Perhaps we too are sick. No one can tell, not for many years."

Ugly wings seemed to cover the night. The world beneath the hill had become the Pit of Hell, and the points of light were devils' spears. Asako trembled.

"What does it mean?" she asked. "How did Takeshi San become sick?"

"It was a _tenbatsu_ (judgment of heaven)," answered her cousin. "Takeshi San was a bad man. He was rude to his father, and he was cruel to his wife. He thought only of _geisha_ and bad women. No doubt, he became sick from touching a woman who was sick. Besides, it is the bad _inge_ of the Fujinami family. Did not the old woman of Akabo say so? It is the curse of the Yoshiwara women. It will be our turn next, yours and mine."

No wonder that poor Asako could not sleep that night in the cramped promiscuity of the family dead.

Fujinami Takeshi had been sickly for some time; but then his course of life could hardly be called a healthy one. On his return from his summer holiday, red patches had appeared on the palms of his hands, and afterwards on his forehead. He had complained of the irritation caused by this "rash." Professor Kashio had been called in to prescribe. A blood test was taken. The doctor then pronounced that the son and heir was suffering from leprosy, and for that there was no cure.

The disease is accompanied by irritation, but by little actual pain. Constant application of compresses can allay the itching, and can often save the patient from the more ghastly ravages of disfigurement. But, slowly, the limbs lose their force, the fingers and toes drop away, the hair falls, and merciful blindness comes to hide from the sufferer the living corpse to which his spirit is bound. More merciful yet, the slow decay attacks the organs of the body. Often consumption intervenes. Often just a simple cold suffices to snuff out the flickering life.

In the village of Kusatsu, beyond the Karuizawa mountains, there is a

natural hot spring, whose waters are beneficial for the alleviation of the disease. In this place there is a settlement of well-to-do lepers. Thither it was decided to banish poor Takeshi. His wife, Matsuko, naturally was expected to accompany him, to nurse him and to make life as comfortable for him as she could. Her eventual doom was almost certain. But there was no question, no choice, no hesitation and no praise. Every Japanese wife is obliged to become an Alcestis, if her husband's well-being demand it. The children were sent to the ancestral village of Akabo.

CHAPTER XXV

JAPANESE COURTSHIP

_O-bune no
Hatsuru-tomari no
Tayutai ni
Mono-omoi-yase-nu
Hito no ko yuye ni_.

With a rocking
(As) of great ships
Riding at anchor
I have at last become worn out with love,
Because of a child of a man.

When the Fujinami returned to Tokyo, the wing of the house in which the unfortunate son had lived, had been demolished. An ugly scar remained, a slab of charred concrete strewn with ashes and burned beams. Saddest sight of all was the twisted iron work of Takeshi's foreign bedstead, once the symbol of progress and of the _haikara_ spirit. The fire was supposed to have been accidental; but the ravages had been carefully limited to the offending wing.

Mr. Fujinami Gentaro, disgusted at this unsightly wreckage wished to rebuild at once. But the old grandfather had objected that this spot of misfortune was situated in the northeast corner of the mansion, a quarter notoriously exposed to the attacks of _oni_ (evil spirits). He was in favor of total demolition.

This was only one of the differences of opinion between the two seniors of the house of Fujinami, which became more frequent as the clouds of disaster gathered over the home in Akasaka. A far more thorny problem was the question of the succession.

With the living death of Takeshi, there was no male heir. Several family councils were held in the presence of the two Mr. Fujinami generally in the lower-house, at which six or seven members of the collateral branches were also present. Grandfather Gennosuke, who despised Takeshi as a waster, would not listen to any plea on behalf of his children.

"To a bad father a bad child," he enunciated, his restless jaw masticating more ferociously than ever.

He was strongly of opinion that it was the curse of Asako's father which had brought this sorrow upon his family. Katsundo and Asako were representatives of the elder branch. Himself, Gentaro and Takeshi were mere usurpers. Restore the elder branch to its rights, and the indignant ghost would cease to plague them all.

Such was the argument of grandfather Gennosuke.

Fujinami Gentaro naturally supported the claims of his own progeny. If Takeshi's children must be disinherited because of the leprous strain, then, at least, Sadako remained. She was a well-educated and serious girl. She knew foreign languages. She could make a brilliant marriage. Her husband would be adopted as heir. Perhaps the Governor of Osaka?

The other members of the council shook their heads, and breathed deeply. Were there no Fujinami left of the collateral branches? Why adopt a tanin (outside person)? So spoke the M.P., the man with a wen, who had an axe of his own to grind.

It was decided to choose the son-in-law candidate first of all; and, afterwards, to decide which of the girls he was to marry. Perhaps it would be as well to consult the fortune tellers. At any rate, a list of suitable applicants would be prepared for the next meeting.

"When men speak of the future," said grandfather Gennosuke, "the rats in the ceiling laugh."

So the conference broke up.

Mr. Fujinami Gentaro had no sooner returned to the academic calm of his chaste reading room, than Mr. Ito appeared on the threshold.

The oily face was more moist than usual, the buffalo-horn moustache more truculent; and though the autumn day was cool, Ito was agitating a fan. He was evidently nervous. Before approaching the sanctum, he had blown his nose into a small square piece of soft paper, which is the Japanese apology for a handkerchief. He had looked around for some place where to cast the offence; but finding none along the trim garden border, he had slipped it into his wide kimono sleeve.

Mr. Fujinami frowned. He was tired of business matters, and the worry of other people's affairs. He longed for peace.

"Indeed, the weather becomes perceptibly cooler," said Mr. Ito, with a low prostration.

"If there is business," his patron replied crisply, "please step up into the room."

Mr. Ito slipped off his geta, and ascended from the garden path. When he had settled himself in the correct attitude with legs crossed and folded, Mr. Fujinami pushed over towards him a packet of cigarettes, adding;

"Please, without embarrassment, speak quickly what you have to say."

Mr. Ito chose a cigarette, and slowly pinched together the cardboard holder, which formed its lower half.

"Indeed, sensei, it is a difficult matter," he began. "It is a matter which should be handled by an intermediary. If I speak face to face like a foreigner the master will excuse my rudeness."

"Please, speak clearly."

"I owe my advancement in life entirely to the master. I was the son of poor parents. I was an emigrant and a vagabond over three thousand worlds. The master gave me a home and lucrative employment. I have served the master for many years; with my poor effort the fortunes of the family have perhaps increased. I have become as it were a son to the Fujinami."

He paused at the word "son." His employer had caught his meaning, and was frowning more than ever. At last he answered:

"To expect too much is a dangerous thing. To choose a yoshi (adopted son) is a difficult question. I myself cannot decide such grave matters. There must be consultation with the rest of the Fujinami family. You yourself have suggested that Governor Sugiwarara might perhaps be a suitable person."

"At that time the talk was of Sada San; this time the talk is of Asa San."

A flash of inspiration struck Mr. Fujinami Gentaro, and a gush of relief. By giving her to Ito, he might be able to side-track Asako, and leave the highway to inheritance free for his own daughter. But Ito had grown too powerful to be altogether trusted.

"It must be clearly understood," said the master, "that it is the husband of our Sada who will be the Fujinami yoshi."

Ito bowed.

"Thanks to the master," he said, "there is money in plenty. There is no desire to speak of such matters. The request is for Asa San only. Truly, the heart is speaking. That girl is a beautiful child, and altogether a haikara person. My wife is old and barren and of low class. I wish to have a wife who is worthy of my position in the house of Fujinami San."

The head of the family cackled with sudden laughter; he was much relieved.

"Ha! Ha! Ito Kun! So it is love, is it? You are in love like a school student. Well, indeed, love is a good thing. What you have said shall be well considered."

So the lawyer was dismissed.

Accordingly, at the next family council Mr. Fujinami put forward the proposal that Asako should be married forthwith to the family factotum, who should be given a lump sum down in consideration for a surrender of all further claim in his own name or his wife's to any share in the family capital.

"Ito Kun," he concluded, "is the brain of our business. He is the family karo (prime minister). I think it would be well to give this

Asa to him."

To his surprise, the proposal met with unanimous opposition. The rest of the family envied and disliked Ito, who was regarded as Mr. Fujinami's pampered favourite.

Grandfather Gennosuke was especially indignant.

"What?" he exploded in one of those fits of rage common to old men in Japan; "give the daughter of the elder branch to a butler, to a man whose father ran between rickshaw shafts. If the spirit of Katsundo has not heard this foolish talk it would be a good thing for us. Already there is a bad _inge_. By doing such a thing it will become worse and worse, until the whole house of Fujinami is ruined. This Ito is a rascal, a thief, a good-for-nothing, a----"

The old gentleman collapsed.

Again the council separated, still undecided except for one thing that the claim of Mr. Ito to the hand of Asako was quite inadmissible.

When the "family prime minister" next pressed his master on the subject, Mr. Fujinami had to confess that the proposal had been rejected.

Then Ito unmasked his batteries, and his patron had to realize that the servant was a servant no longer.

Ito said that it was necessary for him to have Asa San and that before the end of the year. He was in love with this girl. Passion was an overwhelming thing.

"Two things have ever been the same
Since the Age of the Gods--
The flowing of water,
And the way of Love."

This old Japanese poem he quoted as his excuse for what would otherwise be an inexcusable impertinence. The master was aware that politics in Japan were in an unsettled state, and that the new Cabinet was scarcely established; that a storm would overthrow it, and that the Opposition were already looking about for a suitable scandal to use for their revenge. He, Ito, held the evidence which they desired--the full story of the Tobita concession, with the names and details of the enormous bribes distributed by the Fujinami. If these things were published, the Government would certainly fall; also the Tobita concession would be lost and the whole of that great outlay; also the Fujinami's leading political friends would be discredited and ruined. There would be a big trial, and exposure, and outcry, and judgment, and prison. The master must excuse his servant for speaking so rudely to his benefactor. But in love there are no scruples; and he must have Asa San. After all, after his long service, was his request so unreasonable?

Mr. Fujinami Gentaro, thoroughly scared, protested that he himself was in favour of the match. He begged for time so as to be able to convert the other members of the family council.

"Perhaps," suggested Ito, "if Asa San were sent away from Akasaka,

perhaps if she were living alone, it would be more easy to manage. What is absent is soon forgotten. Mr. Fujinami Gennosuke is a very old gentleman; he would soon forget. Sada San could then take her proper position as the only daughter of the Fujinami. Was there not a small house by the river side at Mukojima, which had been rented for Asa San? Perhaps she would like to live there--quite alone."

"Perhaps Ito Kun would visit her from time to time," said Mr. Fujinami, pleased with the idea; "she will be so lonely; there is no knowing."

The one person who was never consulted, and who had not the remotest notion of what was going on, was Asako herself.

* * * * *

Asako was most unhappy. The disappearance of Fujinami Takeshi exasperated the competition between herself and her cousin. Just as formerly all Sadako's intelligence and charm had been exerted to attract her English relative to the house in Akasaka, so now she applied all her force to drive her cousin out of the family circle. For many weeks now Asako had been ignored; but after the return from Ikegami a positive persecution commenced. Although the nights were growing chilly, she was given no extra bedding. Her meals were no longer served to her; she had to get what she could from the kitchen. The servants, imitating their mistress's attitude were deliberately disoblising and rude to the little foreigner.

Sadako and her mother would sneer at her awkwardness and at her ignorance of Japanese customs. Her obi was tied anyhow; for she had no maid. Her hair was untidy; for she was not allowed a hairdresser.

They nicknamed her rashamen (goat face), using an ugly slang word for a foreigner's Japanese mistress; and they would pretend that she smelt like a European.

"Kusai! Kusai! (Stink! Stink!)" they would say.

The war even was used to bait Asako. Every German success was greeted with acclamation. The exploits of the Emden were loudly praised; and the tragedy of Coronel was gloated over with satisfaction.

"The Germans will win because they are brave," said Sadako.

"The English lose too many prisoners; Japanese soldiers are never taken prisoner."

"When the Japanese general ordered the attack on Tsingtao, the English regiment ran away!"

Cousin Sadako announced her intention of studying German.

"Nobody will speak English now," she said. "The English are disgraced. They cannot fight."

"I wish Japan would make war on the English," Asako answered bitterly, "you would get such a beating that you would never boast again. Look at my husband," she added proudly; "he is so big and strong and brave. He could pick up two or three Japanese generals like toys and knock

their heads together."

Even Mr. Fujinami Gentaro joined once or twice in these debates, and announced sententiously:

"Twenty years ago Japan defeated China and took Korea. Ten years ago we defeated Russia and took Manchuria. This year we defeat Germany and take Tsingtao. In ten years we shall defeat America and take Hawaii and the Philippines. In twenty years we shall defeat England and take India and Australia. Then we Japanese shall be the most powerful nation in the world. This is our divine mission."

It was characteristic of the loyalty of Asako's nature, that, although very ignorant of the war, of its causes and its vicissitudes, yet she remained fiercely true to England and the Allies, and could never accept the Japanese detachment. Above all, the thought of her husband's danger haunted her. Waking and sleeping she could see him, sword in hand, leading his men to desperate hand-to-hand struggles, like those portrayed in the crude Japanese chromographs, which Sadako showed her to play upon her fears. Poor Asako! How she hated Japan now! How she loathed the cramped, draughty, uncomfortable life! How she feared the smiling faces and the watchful eyes, from which it seemed she never could escape!

Christmas was at hand, the season of pretty presents and good things to eat. Her last Christmas she had spent with Geoffrey on the Riviera. Lady Everington had been there. They had watched the pigeon shooting in the warm sunlight. They had gone to the opera in the evening--_Madame Butterfly!_ Asako had imagined herself in the role of the heroine, so gentle, so faithful, waiting and waiting in her little wooden house for the big white husband--who never came. What was that? She heard the guns of his ship saluting the harbour. He was coming back to her at last--but not alone! A woman was with him, a white woman!

Alone, in her bare room--her only companion a flaky yellow chrysanthemum nodding in the draught--Asako sobbed and sobbed as though her heart were breaking. Somebody tapped at the sliding shutter. Asako could not answer. The _shoji_ was pushed open, and Tanaka entered.

Asako was glad to see him. Alone of the household Tanaka was still deferential in his attitude towards his late mistress. He was always ready to talk about the old times which gave her a bitter pleasure.

"If Ladyship is so sad," he began, as he had been coached in his part beforehand by the Fujinami, "why Ladyship stay in this house? Change house, change trouble, we say."

"But where can I go?" Asako asked helplessly.

"Ladyship has pretty house by river brink," suggested Tanaka. "Ladyship can stay two month, three month. Then the springtime come and Ladyship feel quite happy again. Even I, in the winter season, I find the mind very distress. It is often so."

To be alone, to be free from the daily insults and cruelty; this in itself would be happiness to Asako.

"But will Mr. Fujinami allow me to go?" she asked, timorously.

"Ladyship must be brave," said the counselor. "Ladyship is not prisoner. Ladyship must say, I go. But perhaps I can arrange matter for Ladyship."

"Oh, Tanaka, please, please do. I'm so unhappy here."

"I will hire cook and maid for Ladyship. I myself will be seneschal!"

Mr. Fujinami Gentaro and his family were delighted to hear that their plan was working so smoothly, and that they could so easily get rid of their embarrassing cousin. The "seneschal" was instructed at once to see about arrangements for the house, which had not been lived in since its new tenancy.

Next evening, when Asako had spread the two quilts on the golden matting, when she had lit the rushlight in the square andon, when the two girls were lying side by side under the heavy wadded bedclothes, Sadako said to her cousin:

"Asa Chan, I do not think you like me now as much as you used to like me."

"I always like people when I have once liked them," said Asako; "but everything is different now."

"I see, your heart changes quickly," said her cousin bitterly.

"No, I have tried to change, but I cannot change. I have tried to become Japanese, but I cannot even learn the Japanese language. I do not like the Japanese way of living. In France and in England I was always happy. I don't think I shall ever be happy again."

"You ought to be more grateful," said Sadako severely. "We have saved you from your husband, who was cruel and deceitful--"

"No, I don't believe that now. My husband and I loved each other always. You people came between us with wicked lies and separated us."

"Anyhow, you have made the choice. You have chosen to be Japanese. You can never be English again."

The Fujinami had hypnotized Asako with this phrase, as a hen can be hypnotized with a chalk line. Day after day it was dinned into her ears, cutting off all hope of escape from the country or of appeal to her English friends.

"You had better marry a Japanese," said Sadako, "or you will become old maid. Why not marry Ito San? He says he likes you. He is a clever man. He has plenty of money. He is used to foreign ways."

"Marry Mr. Ito!" Asako exclaimed, aghast; "but he has a wife already."

"They will divorce. It is no trouble. There are not even children."

"I would rather die than marry any Japanese," said Asako with conviction.

Sadako Fujinami turned her back and pretended to sleep; but long through the dark cold night Asako could feel her turning restlessly to and fro.

Some time about midnight Asako heard her name called:

"Asa Chan, are you awake?"

"Yes; is anything the matter?"

"Asa Chan, in your house by the river you will be lonely. You will not be afraid?"

"I am not afraid to be lonely," Asako answered; "I am afraid of people."

"Look!" said her cousin; "I give you this."

She drew from the bosom of her kimono the short sword in its sheath of shagreen, which Asako had seen once or twice before.

"It is very old," she continued; "it belonged to my mother's people. They were samurai of the Sendai clan. In old Japan every noble girl carried such a short sword; for she said, 'Better death than dishonour.' When the time came to die she would strike--here, in the throat, not too hard, but pushing strongly. But first she would tie her feet together with the obidome, the silk string which you have to hold your obi straight. That was in case the legs open too much; she must not die in immodest attitude. So when General Nogi did harakiri at Emperor Meiji's funeral, his wife, Countess Nogi, killed herself also with such a sword. I give you my sword because in the house by the river you will be lonely--and things might happen. I can never use the sword myself now. It was the sword of my ancestors. I am not pure now. I cannot use the sword. If I kill myself I throw myself into the river like a common geisha. I think it is best you marry Ito. In Japan it is bad to have a husband; but to have no husband, it is worse."

CHAPTER XXVI

ALONE IN TOKYO

Kuraki yori
Kuraki michi ni zo
Iri-nu-beki:
Haruka ni terase
Yuma no ha no tsuki!_

Out of the dark
Into a dark path
I now must enter:
Shine (on me) from afar,
Moon of the mountain fringe!

Some days before Christmas Asako had moved into her own little home.

To be free, to have escaped from the watchful eyes and the whispering tongues to be at liberty to walk about the streets and to visit the shops, as an independent lady of Japan--these were such unfamiliar joys to her that for a time she forgot how unhappy she really was, and how she longed for Geoffrey's company as of old. Only in the evenings a sense of insecurity rose with the river mists, and a memory of Sadako's warning shivered through the lonely room with the bitter cold of the winter air. It was then that Asako felt for the little dagger resting hidden in her bosom just as Sadako had shown her how to wear it. It was then that she did not like to be alone, and that she summoned Tanaka to keep her company and to while away the time with his quaint loquacity.

Considering that he had been largely instrumental in breaking up her happy life, considering that every day he stole from her and lied to her, it was wonderful that his mistress was still so attached to him, that, in fact, she regarded him as her only friend. He was like a bad habit or an old disease, which we almost come to cherish since we cannot be delivered from it.

But, when Tanaka protested his devotion, did he mean what he said? There is a bedrock of loyalty in the Japanese nature. Half-way down the road to shame, it will halt of a sudden, and bungle back its way to honour. Then there is the love of the *_beau geste_* which is an even stronger motive very often than the love of right-doing for its own sake. The favorite character of the Japanese drama is the *_otokodate_*, the chivalrous champion of the common people who rescues beauty in distress from the lawless, bullying, two-sworded men. It tickled Tanaka's remarkable vanity to regard himself as the protector of this lonely and unfortunate lady. It might be said of him as of Lancelot, that--

"His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true."

Asako was glad on the whole that she had no visitors. The Fujinami were busy with their New Year preparations. Christmas Day passed by, unheeded by the Japanese, though the personality and appearance of Santa Claus are not unknown to them. He stands in the big shop windows in Tokyo as in London, with his red cloak, his long white beard and his sack full of toys. Sometimes he is to be seen chatting with Buddhist deities, with the hammer-bearing Daikoku, with Ebisu the fisherman, with fat naked Hotei, and with Benten, the fair but frail. In fact, with the American Billiken, Santa Claus may be considered as the latest addition to the tolerant theocracy of Japan.

Asako attended High Mass at the Catholic Cathedral in Tsukiji, the old foreign settlement. The music was crude; and there was a long sermon in Japanese. The magnificent bearded bishop, who officiated, was flanked by two native priests. But the familiar sounds and movements of the office soothed her, and the fragrance of the incense. The centre of the aisle was covered with straw mats where the Japanese congregation was squatting. Chairs for the foreigners were placed in the side aisles. These were mostly members of the various Embassy and Legation staffs. For a moment Asako feared recognition. Then she remembered how entirely Japanese she had become--in appearance.

Mr. Ito called during the afternoon to wish a Merry Christmas. Asako

regaled him with thin green tea and little square cakes of ground rice, filled with a kind of bean paste called "_an_." She kept Tanaka in the room all the time; for Sadako's remarks about marriage with Ito had alarmed her. He was most agreeable, however, and most courteous. He amused Asako with stories of his experiences abroad. He admired the pretty little house and its position on the river bank; and, when he bowed his thanks for Asako's hospitality, he expressed a wish that he might come again many times in future.

"I am afraid of him," Asako had confided to Tanaka, when the guest had departed, "because Sada San said that he wants to divorce his wife and marry me. You are to stop here with me in the room whenever he comes. Do not leave me alone, please."

"Ladyship is _daimyo_," the round face answered; "Tanaka is faithful _samurai_. Tanaka gives life for Ladyship!"

* * * * *

It was the week before New Year. All along the Ginza, which is the main thoroughfare of Tokyo, along the avenue of slender willow trees which do their gallant utmost to break the monotony of the wide ramshackle street, were spread every evening the stock-in-trade of the _yomise_, the night shops, which cater their most diverse wares for the aimless multitudes sauntering up and down the sidewalks. There are quack medicines and stylograph pens, clean wooden altar cabinets for the kitchen gods, and images of Daikoku and Ebisu; there are cheap underclothing and old hats, food of various kinds, boots and books and toys. But most fascinating of all are the antiquities. Strwn over a square six feet of ground are curios, most attractive to the unwary, especially by the deceptive light of kerosene lamps. One in a thousand perhaps may be a piece of real value; but almost every object has a character and a charm of its own. There are old gold screens, lacquer tables and cabinets, bronze vases, gilded Buddhas, fans, woodcuts, porcelains, _kakemono_ (hanging pictures), _makimono_ (illustrated scrolls), _inro_ (lacquer medicine boxes for the pocket), _netsuke_ (ivory or bone buttons, through which the cords of the tobacco pouch are slung), _tsuba_ (sword hilts of iron ornamented with delightful landscapes of gold and silver inlay). The Ginza at night-time is a paradise for the minor collector.

"_Kore wa ikura_? (How much is this?)" asked Asako, picking up a tiny silver box, which could slip into a waistcoat pocket. Inside were enshrined three gentle Buddhas of old creamy ivory, perfectly carved to the minutest petal of the full-blown lotus upon which each reposed.

"Indeed, it is the end of the year. We must sell all things cheaply," answered the merchant. "It is asked sixty _yen_ for true ancient artistic object."

"Such a thing is not said," replied Asako, her Japanese becoming quite fluent with the return of her light-heartedness. "Perhaps a joke is being made. It would be possible to give ten _yen_."

The old curio vender, with the face and spare figure of Julius Caesar, turned aside from such idle talk with a shrug of hopelessness. He affected to be more interested in lighting his slender pipe over the chimney of the lamp which hung suspended over his wares.

"Ten _yen_! Please see!" said Asako, showing a banknote. The merchant shook his head and puffed. Asako turned away into the stream of passers-by. She had not gone, ten yards, however, before she felt a touch on her kimono sleeve. It was Julius Caesar with his curio.

"Indeed, _okusan_, there must be reduction. Thirty _yen_; take it, please."

He pressed the little box into Asako's hand.

"Twenty _yen_," she bargained, holding out two notes.

"It is loss! It is loss!" he murmured; but he shuffled back to his stall again, very well content.

"I shall send it to Geoffrey," thought Asako; "it will bring him good luck. Perhaps he will write to me and thank me. Then I can write to him."

The New Year is the greatest of Japanese festivals. Japanese of the middle and lower classes live all the year round in a thickening web of debt. But during the last days of the year these complications are supposed to be unraveled and the defaulting debtor must sell some of his family goods, and start the New Year with a clean slate. These operations swell the stock-in-trade of the _yomise_.

On New Year's Day the wife prepares the _mochi_ cakes of ground rice, which are the specialities of the season; and the husband sees to the erection of his door posts of the two _kadomatsu_ (corner pine trees), little Christmas trees planted in a coil of rope. Then, attired in his frock-coat and top hat, if he be a _haikara_ gentleman, or in his best kimono and _haori_, if he be an old-fashioned Japanese, he goes round in a rickshaw to pay his complimentary calls, and to exchange _o medet[=o]_ (respectfully lucky!), the New Year wish. He has presents for his important patrons, and cards for his less influential acquaintances. For, as the Japanese proverb says, "Gifts preserve friendship." At each house, which he visits, he sips a cup of _sake_, so that his return home is often due to the rickshaw man's assistance, rather than to his own powers of self-direction. In fact, as Asako's maid confided to her mistress, "Japanese wife very happy when New Year time all finish."

* * * * *

On the night following New Year, snow fell. It continued to fall all the next morning until Asako's little garden was as white as a bride-cake. The irregularities of her river-side lawn were smoothed out under the white carpet. The straw coverings, which a gardener's foresight had wrapped round the azalea shrubs and the dwarf conifers, were enfolded in a thick white shroud. Like tufts of foam on a wave, the snow was tossed on the plumes of the bamboo clump, which hid the neighbour's dwelling, and made a bird's nest of Asako's tiny domain.

Beyond the brown sluggish river, the roofs and pinnacles of Asakusa were more fairy-like than a theatre scene. Asako was thinking of that first snow-white day, which introduced Geoffrey and her to the Embassy and to Yae Smith.

She shivered. Darkness was falling. A Japanese house is a frail

protection in winter time; and a charcoal fire in a wooden box is poor company. The maid came in to close the shutters for the night. Where was Tanaka? He had gone out to a New Year party with relatives. Asako felt her loneliness all of a sudden; and she was grateful for the moral comfort of cousin Sadako's sword. She drew it from its sheath and examined the blade, and the fine work on the hilt, with care and alarm, like a man fingering a serpent.

No sooner was the house silenced than the wind arose. It smote the wooden framework with an unexpected buffet almost like an earthquake. The bamboo grove began to rattle like bones; and the snow slid and fell from the roof in dull thuds.

There was a sharp rap at the front door. Asako started and thrust the dagger into the breast of her kimono. She had been lying full length on a long deckchair. Now she put her feet to the ground. O Hana, the maid, came in and announced that Ito San had called. Asako, half-pleased and half-apprehensive, gave instructions for him to be shown in. She heard a stumbling on the steps of her house; then Ito lurched into the room. His face was very red, and his voice thick. He had been paying many New Year calls.

"Happy New Year, Asa San, Happy New Year!" he hiccupped, grasping her hand and working it up and down like a pump-handle. "New Year in Japan very lucky time. All Japanese people say New Year time very lucky. This New Year very lucky for Ito. No more dirty business, no more Yoshiwara, no more pimp. I am millionaire, madame. I have made one hundred thousand pounds, five hundred thousand dollars gold. I now become _giin giin_ (Member of Parliament). I become great party organizer, great party boss, then _daijin_ (Minister of State), then _taishi_ (Ambassador), then _soridaijin_ (Prime Minister). I shall be greatest man in Japan. Japan greatest country in the world. Ito greatest man in the world. And I marry Asa San to-morrow, next day, any day."

Ito was sprawling in the deck chair, which divided the little sitting-room into two parts and cut off Asako's retreat. She was trembling on a bamboo stool near the shuttered window. She was terribly frightened. Why did not Tanaka come?

"Speak to me, Asa San," shouted the visitor; "say to me very glad, very, very glad, will be very nice wife of Ito. Fujinami give you to me. I have all Fujinami's secrets in my safe box. Ito greatest man in Japan. Fujinami very fear of me. He give me anything I want. I say, give me Asa San. Very, very love."

Asako remaining without speech, the Japanese frowned at her.

"Why so silence, little girl? Say, I love you, I love you like all foreign girls say. I am husband now. I never go away from this house until you kiss me. You understand?"

Asako gasped.

"Mr. Ito, it is very late. Please, come some other day. I must go to bed now."

"Very good, very good. I come to bed with you," said Ito, rolling out of his chair and putting one heavy leg to the ground. He was earing a

kimono none too well adjusted, and Asako could see his hairy limb high up the thigh. Her face must have reflected her displeasure.

"What?" the Japanese shouted; "you don't like me. Too very proud! No dirty Jap, no yellow man, what? So you think, Madame Lord Princess Barrington. In the East, it may be, ugly foreign women despise Japs. But New York, London, Paris--very different, ha! ha! New York girl say, Hello, Jap! come here! London girl say, Jap man very nice, very sweet manner, very soft eyes. When I was in London I have five or six girls, English girls, white girls, very beauty girls, all together, all very love! London time was great fine time!"

Asako felt helpless. Her hand was on the hilt of her dagger, but she still hoped that Ito might come to his senses and go away.

"There!" he cried, "I know foreign custom. I know everything. Mistletoe! Mistletoe! A kiss for the mistletoe, Asa San!"

He staggered out of his chair and came towards her, like a great black bird. She dodged him, and tried to escape round the deck chair. But he caught hold of her kimono. She drew her sword.

"Help! Help!" she cried. "Tanaka!"

Something wrenched at her wrist, and the blade fell. At the same moment the inner _shoji_ flew open like the shutter of a camera. Tanaka rushed into the room.

Asako did not turn to look again until she was outside the room with her maid and her cook trembling beside her. Then she saw Tanaka and Ito locked in a wrestler's embrace, puffing and grunting at each other, while their feet were fumbling for the sword which lay between them. Suddenly both figures relaxed. Two foreheads came together with a wooden concussion. Hands were groping where the feet had been. One set of fingers, hovering over the sword, grasped the hilt. It was Tanaka; but his foot slipped. He tottered and fell backward. Ito was on the top of him. Asako closed her eyes. She heard a hoarse roar like a lion. When she dared to look again, she saw Tanaka kneeling over Ito's body. With a wrench he pulled Sadako's dagger out of the prostrate mass. It was followed by a jet of blood, and then by a steady trickle from body, mouth and nostrils, which spread over the matting. Slowly and deliberately, Tanaka wiped first the knife and then his hands on the clothes of his victim. Then he felt his mouth and throat.

"_Sa! Shimatta_! (There, finished!)" he said. He turned towards the garden side, threw open the _shoji_ and the _amado_. He ran across the snow-covered lawn; and from beyond the unearthly silence which followed his departure, came the distant sound of a splash in the river.

At last, Asako said helplessly: "Is he dead?"

The cook, a man, was glad of the opportunity to escape.

"I go and call doctor," he said.

"No, stay with me," said Asako; "I am afraid. O Hana can go for the doctor."

Asako and the cook waited by the open _shoji_, staring blankly at the body of Ito. Presently the cook said that he must go and get something. He did not return. Asako called to him to come. There was no answer. She went to look for him in his little three-mat room near the kitchen. It was empty. He had packed his few chattels in his wicker basket and had decamped.

Asako resumed her watch at the sitting-room door, an unwilling Rizpah. It was as though she feared that, if she left her post, somebody might come in and steal Ito. But she could have hardly approached the corpse even under compulsion. Sometimes it seemed to move, to try to rise; but it was stuck fast to the matting by the resinous flow of purple blood. Sometimes it seemed to speak:

"Mistletoe! Mistletoe! Kiss me, Asa San!"

Gusts of cold wind came in from the open windows, touching the dead man curiously, turning over his kimono sleeves. Outside, the bamboo grove was rattling like bones; and the caked snow fell from the roof in heavy thuds.

* * * * *

O Hana returned with a doctor and a policeman. The doctor loosened Ito's kimono, and at once shook his head.

The policeman wore a blue uniform and cape; and a sword dragged at his side. He had produced a notebook and a pencil from a breast pocket.

"What is your name?" he asked Asako; "what is your age? your father's and mother's name? What is your address? Are you married? Where is your husband? How long have you known this man? Were you on familiar terms? Did you kill him? How did you kill him? Why did you kill him?"

The questions buzzed round Asako's head like a swarm of hornets. It had never occurred to the unfortunate girl that any suspicion could fall upon her. Three more policemen had arrived.

"Every one in this house is arrested," announced the first policeman.

"Put out your hands," he ordered Asako. Rusty handcuffs were slipped over her delicate wrists. One of the policemen had produced a coil of rope, which he proceeded to tie round her waist and then round the waist of O Hana.

"But what have I done?" asked Asako plaintively.

The policeman took no notice. She could hear two of them upstairs in her bedroom, talking and laughing, knocking open her boxes and throwing things about.

Asako and her maid were led out of the house like two performing animals. It was bitterly cold, and Asako had no cloak. The road was already full of loafers. They stared angrily at Asako. Some laughed. Some pulled at her kimono as she passed. She heard one say:

"It is a _geisha_; she has murdered her sweetheart."

At the police station, Asako had to undergo the same confusing interrogatory before the chief inspector.

"What is your name? What is your age? Where do you live? What are your father's and mother's names?"

"Lies are no good," said the inspector, a burly unshaven man; "confess that you have killed this man."

"But I did not kill him," protested Asako.

"Who killed him then? You must know that," said the inspector triumphantly.

"It was Tanaka," said Asako.

"Who is this Tanaka?" the inspector asked the policeman.

"I do not know; perhaps it is lies," he answered sulkily.

"But it is not lies," expostulated Asako, "he ran away through the window. You can see his footmarks in the snow."

"Did you see the marks?" the policeman was asked.

"No; perhaps there were no marks."

"Did you look?"

"I did not look actually, but--"

"You're a fool!" said the inspector.

The weary questioning continued for quite two hours, until Asako had told her story of the murder at least three times. The unfamiliar language confused her, and the reiterated refrain:

"You, now confess; you killed the man!"

Asako was chilled to the bone. Her head was aching; her eyes were aching; her legs were aching with the ordeal of standing. She felt that they must soon give way altogether.

At last, the inspector closed his questionnaire.

"Sa!" he ejaculated, "it is past midnight. Even I must sleep sometimes. Take her away to the court, and lock her in the 'sty,' To-morrow the procurator will examine at nine o'clock. She is pretending to be silly and not understanding; so she is probably guilty."

Again the handcuffs and the degrading rope were fastened upon her. She felt that she had already been condemned.

"May I send word to my friends?" she asked. Surely even the Fujinami would not abandon her to her fate.

"No. The procurator's examination has not yet taken place. After that, sometimes permission can be granted. That is the law."

She was left waiting in a stone-flagged guard-room, where eight or nine policemen stared at her impertinently.

"A pretty face, eh?" they said, "it looks like a _geisha_! Who is taking her to the court? It is Ishibashi. Oh, so! He is always the lucky chap!"

A rough fellow thrust his hand up her kimono sleeve, and caught hold of her bare arm near the shoulder.

"Here, Ishibashi," he cried; "you have caught a fine bird this time."

The policeman Ishibashi picked up the loose end of the rope, and drove Asako before him into a closed van, which was soon rumbling along the deserted streets.

She was made to alight at a tall stone building, where they passed down several echoing corridors, until, at the end of a little passage a warder pushed open a door. This was the "sty," where prisoners are kept pending examination in the procurator's court. The floor and walls were of stone. It was bitterly cold. There was no window, no light, no firebox, and no chair. Alone, in the petrifying darkness, her teeth chattering, her limbs trembling, poor Asako huddled her misery into a corner of the dirty cell, to await the further tender mercies of the Japanese criminal code. She could hear the scuttering of rats. Had she been ten times guilty, she felt that she could not have suffered more!

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Daylight began to show under the crack of the door. Later on a warder came and beckoned to Asako to follow him. She had not touched food for twenty hours, but nothing was offered to her. She was led into a room with benches like a schoolroom. At the master's desk sat a small spotted man with a cloak like a scholar's gown, and a black cap with ribbons like a Highlander's bonnet. This was the procurator. At his side, sat his clerk, similarly but less sprucely garbed.

Asako, utterly weary, was preparing to sit down on one of the benches. The warder pulled her up by the nape of her kimono. She had to stand during her examination.

"What is your name? What is your age? What are your father's and mother's names?"

The monotonous questions were repeated all over again; and then,--

"To confess were better. When you confess, we shall let you go. If you do not confess, we keep you here for days and days."

"I am feeling sick," pleaded Asako; "may I eat something?"

The warder brought a cup of tea and some salt biscuit.

"Now, confess," bullied the procurator; "if you do not confess, you will get no more to eat."

Asako told her story of the murder. She then told it again. Her

Japanese words were slipping from the clutch of her worn brain. She was saying things she did not mean. How could she defend herself in a language which was strange to her mind? How could she make this judge, who seemed so pitiless and so hostile to her, understand and believe her broken sentences? She was beating with a paper sword against an armed enemy.

An interpreter was sent for; and the questions were all repeated in English. The procurator was annoyed at Asako's refusal to speak in Japanese. He thought that it was obstinacy, or that she was trying to fool him. He seemed quite convinced that she was guilty.

"I can't answer any more questions. I really can't. I am sick," said Asako, in tears.

"Take her back to the 'sty,' while we have lunch," ordered the procurator. "I think this afternoon she will confess."

Asako was taken away, and thrust into the horrible cell again. She collapsed on the hard floor in a state which was partly a fainting-fit, and partly the sleep of exhaustion. Dreams and images swept over her brain like low-flying clouds. It seemed to her distracted fancy that only one person could save her--Geoffrey, her husband! He must be coming soon. She thought that she could hear his step in the corridor.

"Geoffrey! Geoffrey!" she cried.

It was the warder. He stirred her with his foot. She was hauled back to the procurator's court.

"So! Have you considered well?" said the little spotted man. "Will you now confess?"

"How can I confess what I have not done?" protested Asako.

The remorseless inquisition proceeded. Asako's replies became more and more confused. The procurator frowned at her contradictions. She must assuredly be guilty.

"How many times do you say that you have met this Ito?" he asked.

Asako was at the end of her strength. She reeled and would have fallen; but the warder jerked her straight again.

"Confess, then," shouted the procurator, "confess and you will be liberated."

"I will confess," Asako gasped, "anything you like."

"Confess that you killed this Ito!"

"Yes, I confess."

"Then, sign the confession."

With the triumphant air of a sportsman who has landed his fish after a long and bitter struggle, the procurator held out a sheet of paper prepared beforehand, on which something was written in Japanese

characters.

Asako tried to move towards the desk that she might write her name; but this time, her legs gave way altogether. The warder caught her by the neck of her kimono, and shook her as a terrier shakes a rat. But the body remained limp. He twisted her arm behind her with a savage wrench. His victim groaned with pain, but spoke no distinguishable word. Then he laid her out on the benches, and felt her chest.

"The body is very hot," he said; "perhaps she is indeed sick."

"Obstinate," grunted the procurator; "I am certain that she is guilty. Are you not?" he added, addressing the clerk.

The clerk was busy filling up some of the blanks in the back evidence, extemporising where he could not remember.

"Assuredly," he said, "the opinion of the procurator is always correct."

However, the doctor was summoned. He pronounced that the patient was in a high fever, and must at once be removed to the infirmary.

So the preliminary examination of Asako Fujinami came to an abrupt end.

CHAPTER XXVII

LADY BRANDAN

_Haru no hi no
Nagaki omoi wa
Wasureji wo,
Hito no kokoro ni
Aki ya tatsuramu._

The long thoughts
Of the spring days
Will never be forgotten
Even when autumn comes
To the hearts of the people.

The low-flying clouds of hallucination had fallen so close to Asako's brain, that her thoughts seemed to be caught up into the dizzy whirlwind and to be skimming around and round the world at the speed of an express aeroplane. Like a clock whose regulation is out of order, the hour-hand of her life seemed to be racing the minute-hand, and the minute-hand to be covering the face of the dial in sixty seconds or less, returning incessantly to the same well-known figures, pausing awhile, then jerking away again at an insane rate. From time to time the haze over the mind began to clear; and Asako seemed to look down upon the scene around her from a great height. There was a long room, so long that she could not see the end of it, and rows of narrow beds, and nurses, dressed in white with high caps like bishops' mitres, who appeared and disappeared. Sometimes they would speak to

her and she would answer. But she did not know what they said, nor what she said to them.

A gentle Japanese lady with a very long, pock-marked face, sat on her bed and talked to her in English. Asako noticed that the nurses and doctors were most deferential to this lady; and that, after her departure, she was treated much more kindly than before. A name kept peeping out of her memory, like a shy lizard out of its hole; but the moment her brain tried to grab at it, it slipped back again into oblivion.

Two English ladies called together, one older and one younger. They talked about Geoffrey. Geoffrey was one of the roman figures on the clock dial of her mind. They said good things about Geoffrey; but she could not remember what they were.

One day, the Japanese lady with the marked face and one of the nurses helped her to get out of bed. Her legs were trembling, and her feet were sorely plagued by pins and needles; but she held together somehow. Together they dressed her. The lady wrapped a big fur cloak round her; and with a supporter on either side she was led into the open air, where a beautiful motor-car was waiting. There was a crowd gathered round it. But the police kept them back. As Asako stepped in, she heard the click of cameras.

"Asa Chan," said the lady, "don't you remember me? I am Countess Saito."

Of course, Asako remembered now--a spring morning with Geoffrey and the little dwarf trees.

The notoriety of the Ito murder case did Asako a good turn. Her friends in Japan had forgotten her. They had imagined that she had returned to England with Geoffrey. Reggie Forsyth, who alone knew the details of her position, had thrown up his secretaryship the day that war was declared, and had gone home to join the army.

The morning papers of January 3rd, with their high-flown account of the mysterious house by the river-side and the Japanese lady who could talk no Japanese, brought an unexpected shock to acquaintances of the Barringtons, and especially to Lady Cynthia Cairns and to Countess Saito. These ladies both made inquiries, and learned that Asako was lying dangerously ill in the prison infirmary. A few days later, when Tanaka was arrested and had made a full confession of the crime, Count Saito, who knew how suspects fare at the hands of a zealous procurator, called in person on the Minister of Justice, and secured Asako's speedy liberation.

"This girl is a valuable asset to our country," he had explained to the Minister. "She is married to an Englishman, who will one day be a peer in England. This was a marriage of political importance. It was a proof of the equal civilisation of our Japan with the great countries of Europe. It is most important that this Asako should be sent back to England as soon as possible, and that she should speak good things about Japan."

So Asako was released from the procurator's clutches; and she was given a charming little bedroom of her own in the European wing of the Saito mansion. The house stood on a high hill; and Asako, seated at

the window, could watch the multiplex activity of the streets below, the jolting tramcars, the wagons, the barrows and the rickshaws. To the left was a labyrinth of little houses of clean white wood, bright and new, like toys, with toy evergreens and pine-trees bursting out of their narrow gardens. This was a *_geisha_* quarter, whence the sound of *_samisen_* music and quavering songs resounded all day long. To the right was a big grey-boarded primary school, which, with the regular movement of tides, sucked in and belched out its flood of blue-cloaked boys and magenta-skirted maidens.

Count and Countess Saito, despite their immense wealth and their political importance, were simple, unostentatious people, who seemed to devote most of their thoughts to their children, their garden, their dwarf trees, and their breed of cocker spaniels. They took their social duties lightly, though their home was a Mecca for needy relatives on the search for jobs. They gave generously; they entertained hospitably. Good-humour ruled the household; for husband and wife were old partners and devoted friends.

Count Saito brought his nephew and secretary, a most agreeable young man, to see Asako. The Count said,--

"Asa Chan, I want you to tell Mr. Sakabe all about the Fujinami house and the way of life there."

So Asako told her story to this interested listener. Fortunately, perhaps, she could not read the Japanese newspapers; for most of her adventures reappeared in the daily issues almost word for word. From behind the scenes, Count Saito was directing the course of the famous trial which had come to be known as the Fujinami Affair. For the Count had certain political scores of his own to pay off; and Asako proved to be a godsend.

Tanaka was tried for murder; but it was established that he had killed Ito in defending his mistress's honour; and the court let him off with a year's hard labour. But the great Fujinami bribery case which developed out of the murder trial, ruined a Cabinet Minister, a local governor, and a host of minor officials. It reacted on the Yoshiwara regulations. The notoriety of the case has gone far towards putting an end to public processions of *_oiran_*, and to the display of prostitutes in the windows of their houses. Indeed, it is probably only a question of time for the great pleasure quarters to be closed down, and for vice to be driven into secrecy. Mr. Fujinami Gentaro was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for causing bribes to be distributed.

Meanwhile Countess Saito had been in correspondence with Lady Everington in England. On one bright March morning, she came into Asako's room with a small flowerpot in her hands.

"See, Asa Chan," she said in her strange hoarse voice, "the first flower of the New Year, the plum-blossom. It is the flower of hope and patience. It blooms when the snow is still on the ground, and before it has any green leaves to protect it."

"It smells sweet," said Asako.

Her hostess quoted the famous poem of the exiled Japanese statesman, Sukawara no Michizane,--

"When the East wind blows,
Send your perfume to me,
Flower of the plum;
Even if your master is absent,
Do not forget the spring."

"Asako dear," Countess Saito continued, "would you like to go to England?"

Asako's heart leaped.

"Oh yes!" she answered gladly.

Her hostess sighed reproachfully. She had tried to make life so agreeable for her little visitor; yet from the tone of her voice it was clear that Japan would never be home for her.

"Marchioness Samejima and I," continued the Japanese lady, "have been arranging for a party of about twenty-five Red Cross nurses to visit England and France. They are all very good, clever girls from noble families. We wish to show sympathy of Japan for the poor soldiers who are suffering so much; and we wish to teach our girls true facts about war and how to manage a hospital in war-time. We thought you might like to go as guide and interpreter."

It needed no words to show how joyfully Asako accepted this proposal. Besides, she had heard from Geoffrey. A letter had arrived thanking her for her Christmas gift.

"Little darling Asako," her husband had written, "It was so sweet of you and so like you to think of me at Christmas time. I hope that you are very happy and having a jolly good time. It is very rotten in England just now with the war going on. It had broken out before I reached home; and I joined up at once with my old regiment. We have had a very lively time. About half of my brother officers have been killed; and I am a colonel now. Also, incidentally, I have become Lord Brandan. My father died at the end of last year. Poor old father! This war is a ghastly business; but we have got them beat now. I shall be sorry in a way when it is over; for it gives me plenty to do and to think about. Reggie Forsyth is with his regiment in Egypt. Lady Everington is writing to you. I am in the north of France, and doing quite a lot of _parley-voov_. Is there any chance of your coming to England? God bless you, Asako darling. Write to me soon.

"Your loving Geoffrey."

With this letter folded near her heart, Asako was hardly in a mood to admire plum-blossoms. It was with difficulty that she could summon sufficient attention for give the little Saito children their daily lessons in English and French.

Long rides in the motor-car through the reviving country-side to the splendid gorge of Miyanoshta or to the beaches of Oiso, where Count Saito had his summer villa, long days of play with the children in the hanging garden, the fascinating companionship of the dwarf trees and the black spaniels, and the welcome absence of espionage and innuendo, had soon restored Asako to health again.

"Little Asa Chan," Count Saito said one day, beckoning his guest to sit down beside him in the sunlight on the terrace, "you will be happy to go back to England?"

"Oh yes," said the girl.

"It is a fine country, a noble country; and you will be happy to see your husband again?"

Asako blushed and held down her head.

"I don't think he is still my husband," she said, "but oh! I do want to see him so."

"I think he wants to see you," said the Count; "My wife has received a letter from Lady Everington which says that he would like you very much to come back to him."

The Count waited for this joyful news to produce its effect, and then he added,--

"Asa Chan, you are going to be a great English lady; but you will always remain a Japanese. In England, you will be a kind of ambassador for Japan. So you must never forget your father's country, and you must never say bad things about Japan, even if you have suffered here. Then the English people will like you; and for that reason, they will like Japan too; and the two countries will stand side by side, as they ought to, like good friends. The English are a very great people, the greatest of all; but they know very little about us in the East. They think that because we are yellow people, therefore we are inferior to them. Perhaps, when they see a Japanese lady as one of their peers' wives and a leader in society, they will understand that the Japanese also are not so inferior; for the English people have a great respect for peers. Japan is proud to be England's younger brother; but the elder brother must not take all the inheritance. He must be content to share. For perhaps he will not always be the strong one. This war will make England weak and it will make Japan strong. It will make a great change in the world, and in Asia most of all. Already the people of Asia are saying, Why should these white men rule over us? They cannot rule themselves; they fight among themselves like drunkards; their time is over and past. Then, when the white rulers are pushed out of Asia, Japan will become very strong indeed. It will be said then that England, the elder brother, is become *_inkyō_* (retired from active life), and that Japan, the younger brother, is manager of the family. I think you will live to see these things, Asa Chan. Certainly your children will see them."

"I could never like Japan," Asako said honestly.

The old diplomat shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, Asa Chan. Just enjoy life, and be happy That will be the best propaganda."

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