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Title: Kimiko, and Other Japanese Sketches

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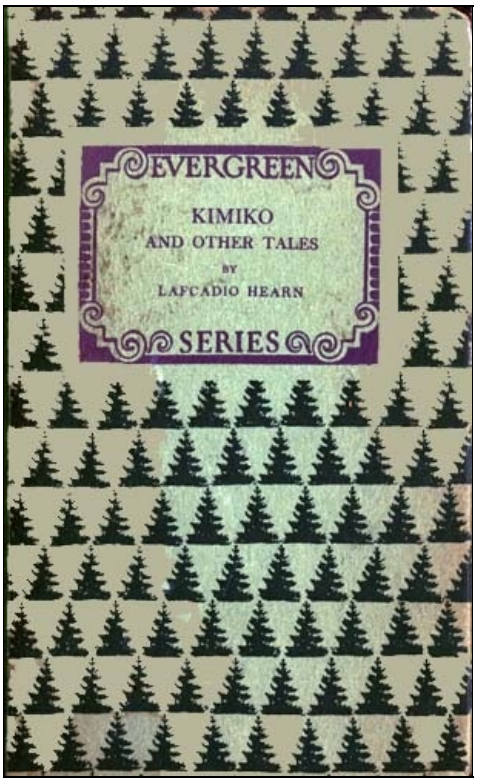
Release date: December 7, 2012 [EBook #41579]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Juliet Sutherland and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net



The Evergreen Series

KIMIKO

AND OTHER

JAPANESE SKETCHES

By LAFCADIO HEARN

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1923

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE · MASSACHUSETTS
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

KIMIKO

Wasuraruru
Mi naran to omō
Kokoro koso
Wasuré nu yori mo
Omoi nari-keré. [1]

I

The name is on a paper-lantern at the entrance of a house in the Street of the Geisha.

Seen at night the street is one of the queerest in the world. It is narrow as a gangway; and the dark shining wood-work of the house-fronts, all tightly closed,—each having a tiny sliding door with paper-panes that look just like frosted glass,—makes you think of first-class passenger-cabins. Really the buildings are several stories high; but you do not observe this at once—especially if there be no moon—because only the lower stories are illuminated up to their awnings, above which all is darkness. The illumination is made by lamps behind the narrow paper-paned doors, and by the paper-lanterns hanging outside—one at every door. You look down the street between two lines of these lanterns—lines converging far-off into one motionless bar of yellow light. Some of the lanterns are egg-shaped, some cylindrical; others four-sided or six-sided; and Japanese characters are beautifully written upon them. The street is very quiet—silent as a display of cabinet-work in some great exhibition after closing-time. This is because the inmates are mostly away—attending banquets and other festivities. Their life is of the night.

The legend upon the first lantern to the left as you go south is "Kinoya: uchi O-Kata"; and that means The House of Gold wherein O-Kata dwells. The lantern to the right tells of the House of Nishimura, and of a girl Miyotsuru—which name signifies The Stork Magnificently Existing. Next upon the left comes the House of Kajita;—and in that house are Kohana, the Flower-Bud, and Hinako, whose face is pretty as the face of a doll. Opposite is the House Nagaye, wherein live Kimika and Kimiko…. And this luminous double litany of names is half-a-mile long.

The inscription on the lantern of the last-named house reveals the relationship between Kimika and Kimiko—and yet something more; for Kimiko is styled "Ni-dai-me," an honorary untranslatable title which signifies that she is only Kimiko No. 2. Kimika is the teacher and mistress: she has educated two geisha, both named, or rather renamed by her, Kimiko; and this use of the same name twice is proof positive that the first Kimiko—"Ichi-dai-me"—must have been celebrated. The professional appellation borne by an unlucky or unsuccessful geisha is never given to her successor.

If you should ever have good and sufficient reason to enter the house,—pushing open that lantern-slide of a door which sets a gong-bell ringing to announce visits,—you might be able to see Kimika, provided her little troupe be not engaged for the evening. You would find her a very intelligent person, and well worth talking to. She can tell, when she pleases, the most remarkable stories—real flesh-and-blood stories—true stories of human nature. For the Street of the Geisha is full of traditions—tragic, comic, melodramatic;—every house has its memories;—and Kimika knows them all. Some are very, very terrible; and some would make you laugh; and some would make you think. The story of the first Kimiko belongs to the last class. It is not one of the most extraordinary; but it is one of the least difficult for Western people to understand.

II

There is no more Ichi-dai-me Kimiko: she is only a remembrance. Kimika was quite young when she called that Kimiko her professional sister.

"An exceedingly wonderful girl," is what Kimika says of Kimiko. To win any renown in her profession, a geisha must be pretty or very clever; and the famous ones are usually both—having been selected at a very early age by their trainers according to the promise of such qualities. Even the commoner class of singing-girls must have some charm in their best years—if only that *beauté du diable* which inspired the Japanese proverb that even a devil is pretty at eighteen. [2] But Kimiko was much more than pretty. She was according to the Japanese ideal of beauty; and that standard is not reached by one woman in a hundred thousand. Also she was more than clever: she was accomplished. She composed very dainty poems—could arrange flowers exquisitely, perform tea-ceremonies faultlessly, embroider, make silk mosaic: in short, she was genteel. And her first public appearance made a flutter in the fast world of Kyōto. It was evident that she could make almost any conquest she pleased, and that fortune was before her.

But it soon became evident, also, that she had been perfectly trained for her profession. She had been taught how to conduct herself under almost any possible circumstances; for what she could

not have known Kimika knew everything about: the power of beauty, and the weakness of passion; the craft of promises and the worth of indifference; and all the folly and evil in the hearts of men. So Kimiko made few mistakes and shed few tears. By and by she proved to be, as Kimika wished—slightly dangerous. So a lamp is to night-fliers: otherwise some of them would put it out. The duty of the lamp is to make pleasant things visible: it has no malice. Kimiko had no malice, and was not too dangerous. Anxious parents discovered that she did not want to enter into respectable families, nor even to lend herself to any serious romances. But she was not particularly merciful to that class of youths who sign documents with their own blood, and ask a dancing-girl to cut off the extreme end of the little finger of her left hand as a pledge of eternal affection. She was mischievous enough with them to cure them of their folly. Some rich folks who offered her lands and houses on condition of owning her, body and soul, found her less merciful. One proved generous enough to purchase her freedom unconditionally, at a price which made Kimika a rich woman; and Kimiko was grateful—but she remained a geisha. She managed her rebuffs with too much tact to excite hate, and knew how to heal despairs in most cases. There were exceptions, of course. One old man, who thought life not worth living unless he could get Kimiko all to himself, invited her to a banquet one evening, and asked her to drink wine with him. But Kimika, accustomed to read faces, deftly substituted tea (which has precisely the same color) for Kimiko's wine, and so instinctively saved the girl's precious life—for only ten minutes later the soul of the silly host was on its way to the Meido alone, and doubtless greatly disappointed.... After that night Kimika watched over Kimiko as a wild cat guards her kitten.

The kitten became a fashionable mania, a craze—a delirium—one of the great sights and sensations of the period. There is a foreign prince who remembers her name: he sent her a gift of diamonds which she never wore. Other presents in multitude she received from all who could afford the luxury of pleasing her; and to be in her good graces, even for a day, was the ambition of the "gilded youth." Nevertheless she allowed no one to imagine himself a special favorite, and refused to make any contracts for perpetual affection. To any protests on the subject she answered that she knew her place. Even respectable women spoke not unkindly of her—because her name never figured in any story of family unhappiness. She really kept her place. Time seemed to make her more charming. Other geisha grew into fame, but no one was even classed with her. Some manufacturers secured the sole right to use her photograph for a label; and that label made a fortune for the firm.

But one day the startling news was abroad that Kimiko had at last shown a very soft heart. She had actually said good-bye to Kimika, and had gone away with somebody able to give her all the pretty dresses she could wish for—somebody eager to give her social position also, and to silence gossip about her naughty past—somebody willing to die for her ten times over, and already half-dead for love of her. Kimika said that a fool had tried to kill himself because of Kimiko, and that Kimiko had taken pity on him, and nursed him back to foolishness. Taiko Hideyoshi had said that there were only two things in this world which he feared—a fool and a dark night. Kimika had always been afraid of a fool; and a fool had taken Kimiko away. And she added, with not unselfish tears, that Kimiko would never come back to her: it was a case of love on both sides for the time of several existences.

Nevertheless, Kimika was only half right. She was very shrewd indeed; but she had never been able to see into certain private chambers in the soul of Kimiko. If she could have seen, she would have screamed for astonishment.

III

Between Kimiko and other geisha there was a difference of gentle blood. Before she took a professional name, her name was Ai, which, written with the proper character, means love. Written with another character the same word-sound signifies grief. The story of Ai was a story of both grief and love.

She had been nicely brought up. As a child she had been sent to a private school kept by an old samurai—where the little girls squatted on cushions before little writing-tables twelve inches high, and where the teachers taught without salary. In these days when teachers get better salaries than civil-service officials, the teaching is not nearly so honest or so pleasant as it used to be. A servant always accompanied the child to and from the school-house, carrying her books, her writing-box, her kneeling cushion, and her little table.

Afterwards she attended an elementary public school. The first "modern" textbooks had just been issued—containing Japanese translations of English, German, and French stories about honor and duty and heroism, excellently chosen, and illustrated with tiny innocent pictures of Western people in costumes never of this world. Those dear pathetic little textbooks are now curiosities: they have long been superseded by pretentious compilations much less lovingly and sensibly edited. Ai learned well. Once a year, at examination time, a great official would visit the school, and talk to the children as if they were all his own, and stroke each silky head as he distributed the prizes. He is now a retired statesman, and has doubtless forgotten Ai;—and in the schools of

today nobody caresses little girls, or gives them prizes.

Then came those reconstructive changes by which families of rank were reduced to obscurity and poverty; and Ai had to leave school. Many great sorrows followed, till there remained to her only her mother and an infant sister. The mother and Ai could do little but weave; and by weaving alone they could not earn enough to live. House and lands first—then, article by article, all things not necessary to existence—heirlooms, trinkets, costly robes, crested lacquer-ware—passed cheaply to those whom misery makes rich, and whose wealth is called by the people *Namida no kane*—"the Money of Tears." Help from the living was scanty—for most of the samurai-families of kin were in like distress. But when there was nothing left to sell—not even Ai's little school-books—help was sought from the dead.

For it was remembered that the father of Ai's father had been buried with his sword, the gift of a daimyō; and that the mountings of the weapon were of gold. So the grave was opened, and the grand hilt of curious workmanship exchanged for a common one, and the ornaments of the lacquered sheath removed. But the good blade was not taken, because the warrior might need it. Ai saw his face as he sat erect in the great red-clay urn which served in lieu of coffin to the samurai of high rank when buried by the ancient rite. His features were still recognizable after all those years of sepulture; and he seemed to nod a grim assent to what had been done as his sword was given back to him.

At last the mother of Ai became too weak and ill to work at the loom; and the gold of the dead had been spent. Ai said: "Mother, I know there is but one thing now to do. Let me be sold to the dancing-girls." The mother wept, and made no reply. Ai did not weep, but went out alone.

She remembered that in other days, when banquets were given in her father's house, and dancers served the wine, a free geisha named Kimika had often caressed her. She went straight to the house of Kimika. "I want you to buy me," said Ai;—"and I want a great deal of money." Kimika laughed, and petted her, and made her eat, and heard her story—which was bravely told, without one tear. "My child," said Kimika, "I cannot give you a great deal of money; for I have very little. But this I can do:—I can promise to support your mother. That will be better than to give her much money for you—because your mother, my child, has been a great lady, and therefore cannot know how to use money cunningly. Ask your honored mother to sign the bond—promising that you will stay with me till you are twenty-four years old, or until such time as you can pay me back. And what money I can now spare, take home with you as a free gift."

Thus Ai became a geisha; and Kimika renamed her Kimiko, and kept the pledge to maintain the mother and the child-sister. The mother died before Kimiko became famous; the little sister was put to school. Afterwards those things already told came to pass.

The young man who had wanted to die for love of a dancing-girl was worthy of better things. He was an only son; and his parents, wealthy and titled people, were willing to make any sacrifice for him—even that of accepting a geisha for daughter-in-law. Moreover, they were not altogether displeased with Kimiko, because of her sympathy for their boy.

Before going away, Kimiko attended the wedding of her young sister, Umé, who had just finished school. She was good and pretty. Kimiko had made the match, and used her wicked knowledge of men in making it. She chose a very plain, honest, old-fashioned merchant—a man who could not have been bad, even if he tried. Umé did not question the wisdom of her sister's choice, which time proved fortunate.

IV

It was in the period of the fourth moon that Kimiko was carried away to the home prepared for her—a place in which to forget all the unpleasant realities of life—a sort of fairy-palace lost in the charmed repose of great shadowy silent high-walled gardens. Therein she might have felt as one reborn, by reason of good deeds, into the realm of Hōrai. But the spring passed, and the summer came—and Kimiko remained simply Kimiko. Three times she had contrived, for reasons unspoken, to put off the wedding-day.

In the period of the eighth moon, Kimiko ceased to be playful, and told her reasons very gently but very firmly: "It is time that I should say what I have long delayed saying. For the sake of the mother who gave me life, and for the sake of my little sister, I have lived in hell. All that is past; but the scorch of the fire is upon me, and there is no power that can take it away. It is not for such as I to enter into an honored family—nor to bear you a son—nor to build up your house.... Suffer me to speak; for in the knowing of wrong I am very, very much wiser than you.... Never shall I be your wife to become your shame. I am your companion only, your play-fellow, your guest of an hour—and this not for any gifts. When I shall be no longer with you—nay! certainly that day must come!—you will have clearer sight. I shall still be dear to you, but not in the same way as now—which is foolishness. You will remember these words out of my heart. Some true

sweet lady will be chosen for you, to become the mother of your children. I shall see them; but the place of a wife I shall never take, and the joy of a mother I must never know. I am only your folly, my beloved—an illusion, a dream, a shadow flitting across your life. Somewhat more in later time I may become, but a wife to you never—neither in this existence nor in the next. Ask me again—and I go."

In the period of the tenth moon, and without any reason imaginable, Kimiko disappeared—vanished—utterly ceased to exist.

V

Nobody knew when or how or whither she had gone. Even in the neighborhood of the home she had left, none had seen her pass. At first it seemed that she must soon return. Of all her beautiful and precious things—her robes, her ornaments, her presents: a fortune in themselves—she had taken nothing. But weeks passed without word or sign; and it was feared that something terrible had befallen her. Rivers were dragged, and wells were searched. Inquiries were made by telegraph and by letter. Trusted servants were sent to look for her. Rewards were offered for any news—especially a reward to Kimika, who was really attached to the girl, and would have been only too happy to find her without any reward at all. But the mystery remained a mystery. Application to the authorities would have been useless: the fugitive had done no wrong, broken no law; and the vast machinery of the imperial police-system was not to be set in motion by the passionate whim of a boy. Months grew into years; but neither Kimika, nor the little sister in Kyōto, nor any one of the thousands who had known and admired the beautiful dancer, ever saw Kimiko again.

But what she had foretold came true;—for time dries all tears and quiets all longing; and even in Japan one does not really try to die twice for the same despair. The lover of Kimiko became wiser; and there was found for him a very sweet person for wife, who gave him a son. And other years passed; and there was happiness in the fairy-home where Kimiko had once been.

There came to that home one morning, as if seeking alms, a traveling nun; and the child, hearing her Buddhist cry of "Ha—ï! ha—ï!" ran to the gate. And presently a house-servant, bringing out the customary gift of rice, wondered to see the nun caressing the child, and whispering to him. Then the little one cried to the servant, "Let me give!"—and the nun pleaded from under the veiling shadow of her great straw hat: "Honorably allow the child to give me." So the boy put the rice into the mendicant's bowl. Then she thanked him, and asked: "Now will you say again for me the little word which I prayed you to tell your honored father?" And the child lisped: "*Father, one whom you will never see again in this world, says that her heart is glad because she has seen your son.*"

The nun laughed softly, and caressed him again, and passed away swiftly; and the servant wondered more than ever, while the child ran to tell his father the words of the mendicant.

But the father's eyes dimmed as he heard the words, and he wept over his boy. For he, and only he, knew who had been at the gate—and the sacrificial meaning of all that had been hidden.

Now he thinks much, but tells his thought to no one.

He knows that the space between sun and sun is less than the space between himself and the woman who loved him.

He knows it were vain to ask in what remote city, in what fantastic riddle of narrow nameless streets, in what obscure little temple known only to the poorest poor, she waits for the darkness before the Dawn of the Immeasurable Light—when the Face of the Teacher will smile upon her—when the Voice of the Teacher will say to her, in tones of sweetness deeper than ever came from human lover's lips: "*O my daughter in the Law, thou hast practiced the perfect way; thou hast believed and understood the highest truth;—therefore come I now to meet and to welcome thee!*"

THE NUN OF THE TEMPLE OF AMIDA

I

When O-Toyo's husband—a distant cousin, adopted into her family for love's sake—had been summoned by his lord to the capital, she did not feel anxious about the future. She felt sad only. It was the first time since their bridal that they had ever been separated. But she had her father and mother to keep her company, and, dearer than either,—though she would never have confessed it even to herself,—her little son. Besides, she always had plenty to do. There were many household duties to perform, and there was much clothing to be woven—both silk and cotton.

Once daily at a fixed hour, she would set for the absent husband, in his favorite room, little repasts faultlessly served on dainty lacquered trays—miniature meals such as are offered to the ghosts of the ancestors, and to the gods. [3] These repasts were served at the east side of the room, and his kneeling-cushion placed before them. The reason they were served at the east side was because he had gone east. Before removing the food, she always lifted the cover of the little soup-bowl to see if there was vapor upon its lacquered inside surface. For it is said that if there be vapor on the inside of the lid covering food so offered, the absent beloved is well. But if there be none, he is dead—because that is a sign that his soul has returned by itself to seek nourishment. O-Toyo found the lacquer thickly beaded with vapor day by day.

The child was her constant delight. He was three years old, and fond of asking questions to which none but the gods knew the real answers. When he wanted to play, she laid aside her work to play with him. When he wanted to rest, she told him wonderful stories, or gave pretty pious answers to his questions about those things which no man can ever understand. At evening, when the little lamps had been lighted before the holy tablets and the images, she taught his lips to shape the words of filial prayer. When he had been laid to sleep, she brought her work near him, and watched the still sweetness of his face. Sometimes he would smile in his dreams; and she knew that Kwannon the divine was playing shadowy play with him, and she would murmur the Buddhist invocation to that Maid "who looketh forever down above the sound of prayer."

Sometimes, in the season of very clear days, she would climb the mountain of Dakeyama, carrying her little boy on her back. Such a trip delighted him much, not only because of what his mother taught him to see, but also of what she taught him to hear. The sloping way was through groves and woods, and over grassed slopes, and around queer rocks; and there were flowers with stories in their hearts, and trees holding tree-spirits. Pigeons cried *korup-korup*; and doves sobbed *owaō*, *owaō*; and cicadæ wheezed and fluted and tinkled.

All those who wait for absent dear ones make, if they can, a pilgrimage to the peak called Dakeyama. It is visible from any part of the city; and from its summit several provinces can be seen. At the very top is a stone of almost human height and shape, perpendicularly set up; and little pebbles are heaped before it and upon it. And near by there is a small Shintō shrine erected to the spirit of a princess of other days. For she mourned the absence of one she loved, and used to watch from this mountain for his coming until she pined away and was changed into a stone. The people therefore built the shrine; and lovers of the absent still pray there for the return of those dear to them; and each, after so praying, takes home one of the little pebbles heaped there. And when the beloved one returns, the pebble must be taken back to the pebble-pile upon the mountain-top, and other pebbles with it, for a thank-offering and commemoration.

Always ere O-Toyo and her son could reach their home after such a day, the dusk would fall softly about them; for the way was long, and they had to both go and return by boat through the wilderness of rice-fields round the town—which is a slow manner of journeying. Sometimes stars and fireflies lighted them; sometimes also the moon—and O-Toyo would softly sing to her boy the Izumo child-song to the moon:

Nono-San,
Little Lady Moon,
How old are you?
"Thirteen days—
Thirteen and nine."
That is still young,
And the reason must be
For that bright red obi,
So nicely tied, [4]
And that nice white girdle

About your hips.
Will you give it to the horse?
"Oh, no, no!"
Will you give it to the cow?
"Oh, no, no!" [5]

And up to the blue night would rise from all those wet leagues of labored field that great soft bubbling chorus which seems the very voice of the soil itself—the chant of the frogs. And O-Toyo would interpret its syllables to the child: *Mé kayui! mé kayui!* "Mine eyes tickle; I want to sleep."

All those were happy hours.

II

Then twice, within the time of three days, those masters of life and death whose ways belong to the eternal mysteries struck at her heart. First she was taught that the gentle husband for whom she had so often prayed never could return to her—having been returned unto that dust out of which all forms are borrowed. And in another little while she knew her boy slept so deep a sleep that the Chinese physician could not waken him. These things she learned only as shapes are learned in lightning flashes. Between and beyond the flashes was that absolute darkness which is the pity of the gods.

It passed; and she rose to meet a foe whose name is Memory. Before all others she could keep her face, as in other days, sweet and smiling. But when alone with this visitant, she found herself less strong. She would arrange little toys and spread out little dresses on the matting, and look at them, and talk to them in whispers, and smile silently. But the smile would ever end in a burst of wild, loud weeping; and she would beat her head upon the floor, and ask foolish questions of the gods.

One day she thought of a weird consolation—that rite the people name "Toritsu-banashi"—the evocation of the dead. Could she not call back her boy for one brief minute only? It would trouble the little soul; but would he not gladly bear a moment's pain for her dear sake? Surely!

[To have the dead called back one must go to some priest—Buddhist or Shintō—who knows the rite of incantation. And the mortuary tablet, or ihai, of the dead must be brought to that priest.

Then ceremonies of purification are performed; candles are lighted and incense is kindled before the ihai; and prayers or parts of sutras are recited; and offerings of flowers and of rice are made. But, in this case, the rice must not be cooked.

And when everything has been made ready, the priest, taking in his left hand an instrument shaped like a bow, and striking it rapidly with his right, calls upon the name of the dead, and cries out the words, "Kitazo yo! kitazo yo! kitazo yo!" meaning, "I have come." [6] And, as he cries, the tone of his voice gradually changes until it becomes the very voice of the dead person—for the ghost enters into him.

Then the dead will answer questions quickly asked, but will cry continually: "Hasten, hasten! for this my coming back is painful, and I have but a little time to stay!" And having answered, the ghost passes; and the priest falls senseless upon his face.

Now to call back the dead is not good. For by calling them back their condition is made worse. Returning to the underworld, they must take a place lower than that which they held before.

To-day these rites are not allowed by law. They once consoled; but the law is a good law, and just—since there exist men willing to mock the divine which is in human hearts.]

So it came to pass that O-Toyo found herself one night in a lonely little temple at the verge of the city—kneeling before the ihai of her boy, and hearing the rite of incantation. And presently, out of the lips of the officiant there came a voice she thought she knew,—a voice loved above all others,—but faint and very thin, like a sobbing of wind.

And the thin voice cried to her:

"Ask quickly, quickly, mother! Dark is the way and long; and I may not linger."

Then tremblingly she questioned:

"Why must I sorrow for my child? What is the justice of the gods?"

And there was answer given:

"O mother, do not mourn me thus! That I died was only that you might not die. For the year was a year of sickness and of sorrow—and it was given me to know that you were to die; and I obtained by prayer that I should take your place. [7]

"O mother, never weep for me! It is not kindness to mourn for the dead. Over the River of Tears [8] their silent road is; and when mothers weep, the flood of that river rises, and the soul cannot pass, but must wander to and fro.

"Therefore, I pray you, do not grieve, O mother mine! Only give me a little water sometimes."

III

From that hour she was not seen to weep. She performed, lightly and silently, as in former days, the gentle duties of a daughter.

Seasons passed; and her father thought to find another husband for her. To the mother, he said:

"If our daughter again have a son, it will be great joy for her, and for all of us."

But the wiser mother made answer:

"Unhappy she is not. It is impossible that she marry again. She has become as a little child, knowing nothing of trouble or sin."

It was true that she had ceased to know real pain. She had begun to show a strange fondness for very small things. At first she had found her bed too large—perhaps through the sense of emptiness left by the loss of her child; then, day by day, other things seemed to grow too large—the dwelling itself, the familiar rooms, the alcove and its great flower-vases—even the household utensils. She wished to eat her rice with miniature chopsticks out of a very small bowl such as children use.

In these things she was lovingly humored; and in other matters she was not fantastic. The old people consulted together about her constantly. At last the father said:

"For our daughter to live with strangers might be painful. But as we are aged, we may soon have to leave her. Perhaps we could provide for her by making her a nun. We might build a little temple for her."

Next day the mother asked O-Toyo:

"Would you not like to become a holy nun, and to live in a very, very small temple, with a very small altar, and little images of the Buddhas? We should be always near you. If you wish this, we shall get a priest to teach you the sutras."

O-Toyo wished it, and asked that an extremely small nun's dress be got for her. But the mother said:

"Everything except the dress a good nun may have made small. But she must wear a large dress—that is the law of Buddha."

So she was persuaded to wear the same dress as other nuns.

IV

They built for her a small An-dera, or Nun's-Temple, in an empty court where another and larger temple, called Amida-ji, had once stood. The An-dera was also called Amida-ji, and was dedicated to Amida-Nyōrai and to other Buddhas. It was fitted up with a very small altar and with miniature altar furniture. There was a tiny copy of the sutras on a tiny reading-desk, and tiny screens and bells and kakemono. And she dwelt there long after her parents had passed away. People called her the Amida-ji no Bikuni—which means The Nun of the Temple of Amida.

A little outside the gate there was a statue of Jizō. This Jizō was a special Jizō—the friend of sick children. There were nearly always offerings of small rice-cakes to be seen before him. These signified that some sick child was being prayed for; and the number of the rice-cakes signified the number of the years of the child. Most often there were but two or three cakes; rarely there were seven or ten. The Amida-ji no Bikuni took care of the statue, and supplied it with incense-offerings, and flowers from the temple garden; for there was a small garden behind the An-dera.

After making her morning round with her alms-bowl, she would usually seat herself before a very small loom, to weave cloth much too narrow for serious use. But her webs were bought always by certain shopkeepers who knew her story; and they made her presents of very small cups, tiny flower-vases, and queer dwarf-trees for her garden.

Her greatest pleasure was the companionship of children; and this she never lacked. Japanese child-life is mostly passed in temple courts; and many happy childhoods were spent in the court

of the Amida-ji. All the mothers in that street liked to have their little ones play there, but cautioned them never to laugh at the Bikuni-San. "Sometimes her ways are strange," they would say; "but that is because she once had a little son, who died, and the pain became too great for her mother's heart. So you must be very good and respectful to her."

Good they were, but not quite respectful in the reverential sense. They knew better than to be that. They called her "Bikuni-San" always, and saluted her nicely; but otherwise they treated her like one of themselves. They played games with her; and she gave them tea in extremely small cups, and made for them heaps of rice-cakes not much bigger than peas, and wove upon her loom cloth of cotton and cloth of silk for the robes of their dolls. So she became to them as a blood-sister.

They played with her daily till they grew too big to play, and left the court of the temple of Amida to begin the bitter work of life, and to become the fathers and mothers of children whom they sent to play in their stead. These learned to love the Bikuni-San like their parents had done. And the Bikuni-San lived to play with the children of the children of the children of those who remembered when her temple was built.

The people took good heed that she should not know want. There was always given to her more than she needed for herself. So she was able to be nearly as kind to the children as she wished, and to feed extravagantly certain small animals. Birds nested in her temple, and ate from her hand, and learned not to perch upon the heads of the Buddhas.

Some days after her funeral, a crowd of children visited my house. A little girl of nine years spoke for them all:

"Sir, we are asking for the sake of the Bikuni-San who is dead. A very large *haka* [9] has been set up for her. It is a nice haka. But we want to give her also a very, very small haka, because in the time she was with us she often said that she would like a very little haka. And the stone-cutter has promised to cut it for us, and to make it very pretty, if we can bring the money. Therefore perhaps you will honorably give something."

"Assuredly," I said. "But now you will have nowhere to play."

She answered, smiling:

"We shall still play in the court of the temple of Amida. She is buried there. She will hear our playing, and be glad."

HARU

Haru was brought up, chiefly at home, in that old-fashioned way which produced one of the sweetest types of woman the world has ever seen. This domestic education cultivated simplicity of heart, natural grace of manner, obedience, and love of duty as they were never cultivated but in Japan. Its moral product was something too gentle and beautiful for any other than the old Japanese society: it was not the most judicious preparation for the much harsher life of the new—in which it still survives. The refined girl was trained for the condition of being theoretically at the mercy of her husband. She was taught never to show jealousy, or grief, or anger—even under circumstances compelling all three; she was expected to conquer the faults of her lord by pure sweetness. In short, she was required to be almost superhuman—to realize, at least in outward seeming, the ideal of perfect unselfishness. And this she could do with a husband of her own rank, delicate in discernment—able to divine her feelings, and never to wound them.

Haru came of a much better family than her husband; and she was a little too good for him, because he could not really understand her. They had been married very young, had been poor at first, and then had gradually become well-off, because Haru's husband was a clever man of business. Sometimes she thought he had loved her most when they were less well-off; and a woman is seldom mistaken about such matters.

She still made all his clothes; and he commended her needle-work. She waited upon his wants; aided him to dress and undress; made everything comfortable for him in their pretty home, bade him a charming farewell as he went to business in the morning, and welcomed him upon his return; received his friends exquisitely; managed his household matters with wonderful economy; and seldom asked any favors that cost money. Indeed she scarcely needed such favors; for he was never ungenerous, and liked to see her daintily dressed—looking like some beautiful silver moth robed in the folding of its own wings—and to take her to theatres and other places of amusement. She accompanied him to pleasure-resorts famed for the blossoming of cherry-trees in spring, or the shimmering of fireflies on summer nights, or the crimsoning of maples in autumn. And sometimes they would pass a day together at Maiko, by the sea, where the pines seem to sway like dancing girls; or an afternoon at Kiyomidzu, in the old, old summer-house, where everything is like a dream of five hundred years ago—and where there is a great shadowing of high woods, and a song of water leaping cold and clear from caverns, and always the plaint of flutes unseen, blown softly in the antique way—a tone-caress of peace and sadness blending, just as the gold light glooms into blue over a dying sun.

Except for such small pleasures and excursions, Haru went out seldom. Her only living relatives, and also those of her husband, were far away in other provinces; and she had few visits to make. She liked to be at home, arranging flowers for the alcoves or for the gods, decorating the rooms, and feeding the tame gold-fish of the garden-pond, which would lift up their heads when they saw her coming.

No child had yet brought new joy or sorrow into her life. She looked, in spite of her wife's coiffure, like a very young girl; and she was still simple as a child—notwithstanding that business capacity in small things which her husband so admired that he often condescended to ask her counsel in big things. Perhaps the heart then judged for him better than the pretty head; but, whether intuitive or not, her advice never proved wrong. She was happy enough with him for five years—during which time he showed himself as considerate as any young Japanese merchant could well be towards a wife of finer character than his own.

Then his manner suddenly became cold—so suddenly that she felt assured the reason was not that which a childless wife might have reason to fear. Unable to discover the real cause, she tried to persuade herself that she had been remiss in her duties; examined her innocent conscience to no purpose; and tried very, very hard to please. But he remained unmoved. He spoke no unkind words—though she felt behind his silence the repressed tendency to utter them. A Japanese of the better class is not very apt to be unkind to his wife in words. It is thought to be vulgar and brutal. The educated man of normal disposition will even answer a wife's reproaches with gentle phrases. Common politeness, by the Japanese code, exacts this attitude from every manly man; moreover, it is the only safe one. A refined and sensitive woman will not long submit to coarse treatment; a spirited one may even kill herself because of something said in a moment of passion, and such a suicide disgraces the husband for the rest of his life. But there are slow cruelties worse than words, and safer—neglect or indifference, for example, of a sort to arouse jealousy. A Japanese wife has indeed been trained never to show jealousy; but the feeling is older than all training—old as love, and likely to live as long. Beneath her passionless mask the Japanese wife feels like her Western sister—just like that sister who prays and prays, even while delighting some evening assembly of beauty and fashion, for the coming of the hour which will set her free to relieve her pain alone.

Haru had cause for jealousy; but she was too much of a child to guess the cause at once; and her servants too fond of her to suggest it. Her husband had been accustomed to pass his evenings in

her company, either at home or elsewhere. But now, evening after evening, he went out by himself. The first time he had given her some business pretexts; afterwards he gave none, and did not even tell her when he expected to return. Latterly, also, he had been treating her with silent rudeness. He had become changed—"as if there was a goblin in his heart"—the servants said. As a matter of fact he had been deftly caught in a snare set for him. One whisper from a geisha had numbed his will; one smile blinded his eyes. She was far less pretty than his wife; but she was very skillful in the craft of spinning webs—webs of sensual delusion which entangle weak men, and always tighten more and more about them until the final hour of mockery and ruin. Haru did not know. She suspected no wrong till after her husband's strange conduct had become habitual—and even then only because she found that his money was passing into unknown hands. He had never told her where he passed his evenings. And she was afraid to ask, lest he should think her jealous. Instead of exposing her feelings in words, she treated him with such sweetness that a more intelligent husband would have divined all. But, except in business, he was dull. He continued to pass his evenings away; and as his conscience grew feebler, his absences lengthened. Haru had been taught that a good wife should always sit up and wait for her lord's return at night; and by so doing she suffered from nervousness, and from the feverish conditions that follow sleeplessness, and from the lonesomeness of her waiting after the servants, kindly dismissed at the usual hour, had left her with her thoughts. Once only, returning very late, her husband said to her: "I am sorry you should have sat up so late for me; do not wait like that again!" Then, fearing he might really have been pained on her account, she laughed pleasantly, and said: "I was not sleepy, and I am not tired; honorably please not to think about me." So he ceased to think about her—glad to take her at her word; and not long after that he stayed away for one whole night. The next night he did likewise, and a third night. After that third night's absence he failed even to return for the morning meal; and Haru knew the time had come when her duty as a wife obliged her to speak.

She waited through all the morning hours, fearing for him, fearing for herself also; conscious at last of the wrong by which a woman's heart can be most deeply wounded. Her faithful servants had told her something; the rest she could guess. She was very ill, and did not know it. She knew only that she was angry—selfishly angry, because of the pain given her—cruel, probing, sickening pain. Midday came as she sat thinking how she could say least selfishly what it was now her duty to say,—the first words of reproach that would ever have passed her lips. Then her heart leaped with a shock that made everything blur and swim before her sight in a whirl of dizziness—because there was a sound of kuruma-wheels and the voice of a servant calling: "Honorable-return-is!"

She struggled to the entrance to meet him, all her slender body a-tremble with fever and pain, and terror of betraying that pain. And the man was startled, because instead of greeting him with the accustomed smile, she caught the bosom of his silk robe in one quivering little hand—and looked into his face with eyes that seemed to search for some shred of a soul—and tried to speak, but could utter only the single word, "Anata?" [10] Almost in the same moment her weak grasp loosened, her eyes closed with a strange smile; and even before he could put out his arms to support her, she fell. He sought to lift her. But something in the delicate life had snapped. She was dead.

There were astonishments, of course, and tears, and useless callings of her name, and much running for doctors. But she lay white and still and beautiful, all the pain and anger gone out of her face, and smiling as on her bridal day.

Two physicians came from the public hospital—Japanese military surgeons. They asked straight, hard questions—questions that cut open the self of the man down to the core. Then they told him truth cold and sharp as edged steel—and left him with his dead.

The people wondered he did not become a priest—fair evidence that his conscience had been awakened. By day he sits among his bales of Kyōto silks and Ōsaka figured goods—earnest and silent. His clerks think him a good master; he never speaks harshly. Often he works far into the night; and he has changed his dwelling-place. There are strangers in the pretty house where Haru lived; and the owner never visits it. Perhaps because he might see there one slender shadow, still arranging flowers, or bending with iris-grace above the goldfish in his pond. But wherever he rest, sometime in the silent hours he must see the same soundless presence near his pillow—sewing, smoothing, softly seeming to make beautiful the robes he once put on only to betray. And at other times—in the busiest moments of his busy life—the clamor of the great shop dies; the ideographs of his ledger dim and vanish; and a plaintive little voice, which the gods refuse to silence, utters into the solitude of his heart, like a question, the single word—"Anata?"

THE END

[1]
"To wish to be forgotten by the beloved is a soul-task harder far than trying not to forget."—*Poem by* KIMIKO.

[2]
Oni mo jiuhachi, azami no hana. There is a similar saying of a dragon: *ja mo hatachi* ("even a dragon at twenty").

[3]
Such a repast, offered to the spirit of the absent one loved, is called a *Kagé-zen*; lit., "Shadow-tray." The word *zen* is also used to signify the meal served on the lacquered tray—which has feet, like a miniature table. So that the term "Shadow-feast" would be a better translation of *Kagé-zen*.

[4]
Because an obi or girdle of very bright color can be worn only by children.

[5]

Nono-San,
or
O-Tsuki-San
Ikutsu?
"Jiu-san—
Kokonotsu."
Sore wa mada
Wakai yo,
Wakai ye mo
Dōri
Akai iro no
Obi to,
Shiro iro no
Obi to
Koshi ni shanto
Musun de.
Uma ni yaru?
"Iyaiya!"
Ushi ni yaru?
"Iyaiya!"

[6]
Whence the Izumo saying about one who too often announces his coming: "Thy talk is like the talk of necromancy!"—*Toritsubanashi no yona.*

[7]
Migawari, "substitute," is the religious term.

[8]
"Namida-no-Kawa."

[9]
Tombstone.

[10]
"Thou?"

Transcriber's Note: Dialect spellings, contractions and inconsistencies have been retained as printed.

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