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Title: The Breath of the Gods

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Release date: March 18, 2013 [EBook #42365]

Language: English

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THE BREATH OF THE GODS

**THE BREATH OF
THE GODS**

BY
SIDNEY McCALL
AUTHOR OF "TRUTH DEXTER"

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1905

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Published May, 1905

BECAUSE OF FAITH AND REVERENCE,
AND IN SPITE OF ERRORS WHICH I KNOW TO BE
INEVITABLE,
I DARE INSCRIBE THIS BOOK TO
YAMATO DAMASHII

PREFATORY NOTE

No character in this book, belonging either to public or private life, is taken as a whole or in part from any person. The characters are wholly imaginary, and no incident is based on any real incident known to the writer. Even in the descriptions of official buildings, memory is laxly used. In the genre studies alone is realism attempted. Most, if not all, of the questions, remarks, and speculations put into the mouths of peasants and servants have been overheard by the writer.

THE BREATH OF THE GODS

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CHAPTER ONE

THE stone dwelling of Senator Cyrus C. Todd, usually as indistinguishable from its neighbors as is one piano key from another, presented at nine o'clock on this night of November third, nineteen hundred and three, a claim to individuality in the excess of light pouring from every window, from the perpendicular wink of every opening door (opened but to close again as quickly); oozing, it would seem, from the very pores of the pale façade, thereby giving to the great flat rectangle of the house a phosphorescent value that set it six feet out into the night.

The upper windows shone more brilliantly than those below. A roller shade had been carelessly left high. Through the film of chamber curtains heads could be seen passing. Once, there was the outflung gesture of a slim, bare arm. Everything bespoke approaching festivity. At this brightest window a silhouette suddenly appeared, sharp, dark, complete. It was that of a Japanese girl with wonderfully looped and curved coiffure, shoulders that sloped tenderly, and a small, straight throat.

Just at this moment, on the shadowed entrance-steps below, answering silhouettes began noiselessly to climb. These were men with thin black legs, and strange burdens, black like themselves. They showed angles as of gnarled roots; one, the great curved body of a gigantic spider. The front door, opening instantly to a ring, disclosed them merely as musicians,—Signor Marcellini of Milan and his colleagues,—bearing basso, cello, and flutes, secure in swart cases.

The lower rooms of the house were slightly chill. Though flooded with soft light, they were not yet fully illuminated. All doors within stood open. It looked almost as if walls had been taken down, so long and mysterious had grown the vistas. Through all tingled an aromatic smell, something a little alien, like crushed herbs,—pungent, and full of vague suggestion. Mrs. Cyrus C. Todd, flowing now down the palm-set stairway in a purple tide of skirts, frothed with dim lace, stopped at a switchboard half concealed in vines, sent forth a gloved, determined hand, and in an instant the secret of the odor was revealed. The rooms, to their farthest angles, literally exuded chrysanthemums. Senator Todd was said to have expended five thousand dollars for these flowers alone. Perhaps he wished to stamp in gold upon the memory of Washington this coming-out party of his idolized, only child. The conceit was fair enough, for Gwendolen was bright, and blonde, and

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golden in herself. Statesmen and the wives of statesmen did not fail to observe that chrysanthemums were the insignia of official Japan, and that November third happened,—they emphasized "happened,"—to be the birthday of Japan's beloved Emperor. These two facts, joined with the third, that Senator Todd even now had aspirations to the Tokio mission, made a trio of keen angles to be used as wedges for further speculation.

The walls of the lower story had been spread for the occasion with yellow satin, upon which alternated delicate upright strokes of silver and of white. Around, under the ceiling, grew a frieze of living flowers. The great, coarse, woody stems crossed in a lattice-work, with clusters of huge blossoms and green leaves breaking the angles at points of decision possible only to a trained artist, or to a Japanese. The white duck floor-covering spread to a border hand-painted, to match the frieze. Where wall and canvas met, the real flowers again arose,—thick parallel stalks of differing heights, upholding a wainscot border of shaggy gold. Mantles were heaped with them. Japanese pots of them in bloom alternated with conventional ferns and palms. Each electric bulb jutted from the heart of a living flower. The very air had an amber tone.

Overhead, invisible footsteps scurried in short flights. They sounded feminine, young, full of excitement. "Heavens!" Miss Gwendolen de Lancy Todd was crying, "where on earth *is* my other glove? I am sure I just laid it here! And my orchids! Has anybody sat on my orchids? I think I'll have to marry the young person who sent them, though I forget now who it was!"

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"A person of the name Dodge, n'est-ce-pas?" ventured the little French dressmaker, on her knees beside the fair white vision. Pins, retained at the corners of her mouth, added a crushed softness to the pronunciation. She rhymed it with "targe."

"Yes, a name like that, I believe," said Gwendolen, indifferently, and craned her long neck over. "Mother called him some sort of a snip. Are you certain that my dress hangs right now, Madame?"

"Oui, oui. It is perfection," declared Madame, sticking the remaining pins into the black front of her dress.

"Then at last I am actually ready. I believe there's mother calling now. Where did Yuki go? Oh, I see, over there by the window, as calm and cool as if we were going to church instead of to our first ball!"

"Then all my coolness is stopping on my outsides," said the Japanese girl, with a little incipient shrug and giggle, breaking at once into the merriest of low laughs. She crossed the room swiftly, with an unusual, swaying rhythm of movement. "Ah, Gwendolen, my heart it go like yellow butterflies to be downstairs."

Gwendolen turned a radiant face to greet her. "Now isn't she a vision!" cried the girl aloud, in fresh access of admiration for her friend. "Madame, what do you think those French painters of yours would say to her—Chavannes, De Monvel, Besnard,—who owe so much to Yuki's art?"

"You omit Monsieur Le Beau, who is a painter," said the little woman, shyly. She was on good terms with the girls, and had made Yuki, as well as Gwendolen, chic gowns with the breath of Paris upon them. "I knew well the family of Monsieur Le Beau in France," she hurried on, seeing the distressed flush in Yuki's face. "Non, non, Mamselles. I am a chattering old femme. Let me look at you together before you descend the stair." She sat back upon her heels to enjoy the picture.

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"Yes," cried Gwendolen, "that's right. Take us both in." Laughingly she drew Yuki's arm, with its long, trailing sleeve of gray, tightly within her own. They rested together, swaying,—smiling,—Yuki's cheek still warm with the name of Pierre Le Beau, two types as far apart as the two sides of earth which had given them race.

Gwendolen was fair almost to the extreme of golden blondness. Her features were small and perfectly related; her nose deliciously interrogative at the tip. Her brows and lashes, drawn in a darker hue, gave touches of character and distinction. She was very slender, erect, and was poised as though she grew in the wind. The long tulle draperies shook and stirred as if vitalized by her energy. She was all white and gold. Her heaped-up skeins of hair, amber necklace, gloves, slippers, and stockings gleamed with a primrose hue, and the freckles on her orchids (poor flowers, just caught up hastily from an ignominious corner) repeated the yellow note.

Beside her, Yuki Onda, a few inches lacking in height, impressive, nevertheless, and held with a striking yet indefinable difference of line, smiled out like a frail Astarte. Her pallor had an undernote of ivory, where Gwendolen's was of pearl. Her head, with its pointed chin, bore, like a diadem of jet,—balanced, like a regal burden,—the spread wings of her hair. Beneath a white, low brow her eyes made almost a continuous, gleaming line. The little nose came down, straight and firm, with a single brush stroke. All the humanity, the tenderness, the womanhood of her face lay in the red mouth and the small, round chin. Her smile was startling, even pathetic, in beauty. Gwendolen had once said, "There is sometimes something in Yuki's smile that makes me want to fight God for her."

Yuki's robe, in deference to hours of pleading from Gwendolen and Pierre Le Beau, was Japanese to the least detail. Mrs. Todd had protested in vain for the "civilized" coming-out gown of white. The robe hung about the girl in long, loose folds of crêpe, mist-gray, rising in soft transitions from the dark band of the hem to pearl tones at the throat. Under it were garments of heavier silk, dawn-colored, showing like morning through thin clouds. Into the curdled substance of the crêpe, cherry-flowers were dyed, or rather, breathed in, by a smiling, wrinkled brown magician at the rim of Yuzen Creek,—pale shapes which glimmered and were gone, rose to the surface and sank again, as though borne in moving water. Besides the black note of her hair there was one strong crash of contrast in the obi, or sash, a broad and dominating zone, black, too, with fire-flies of gold upon it. For hair-ornaments she wore a cluster of small pink flowers that had the look of cherry-blossoms, and a great carved ivory pin, pronged like a tuning-fork, an heirloom in her father's family.

"Gwendo—*Ien!* Yu-*kee!* Come down instantly!" rose the voice of Mrs. Todd. "You should have been down ten minutes ago."

"Ah, Madame Todd calls," exclaimed the dressmaker, scrambling to her feet.

"But you are sure you really admire us, Madame?" challenged Gwendolen, before she would stir.

"Oui, charmante, charmante, both are perfection apart—and a vision of paradise together. But go, young ladies, the good mother calls again."

The spoiled child stopped for another instant, this time in the doorway. "All right, mother. Coming this instant!" she hurled downstairs; then to the little Frenchwoman she said, "Do not attempt to sit up, Madame. Yuki is to stay all night, and will help me with the pins. After a glimpse at the reception and some of the goodies below, you must hurry home to your little Jeanne. Take plenty of bonbons with you, and I wish to send that great bunch of daisies, with my love. All children love daisies, n'est-ce-pas?"

At last they were off. Madame could hear Mrs. Todd, relieved, yet petulant, scolding them the whole descending scale of the stairs. Moving through the perfumed disorder of the room, Madame sought out the daisies, and, with filling eyes, whispered aloud in French, "Now may the good God be kind to that loving heart, and send to it only blessing."

Stockings, scarfs, fans, underwear,—a thousand dainty trifles must be gathered up before the little Frenchwoman could give herself consent to go. Madame and Miss Todd had been kind friends to the widowed exile.

Far over to one side of the room she stumbled upon a dark heap that showed gleams of a cherry-colored lining. It emitted, as if consciously, an aroma, subtle, faint, unforgettable, strange scented echoes of a distant land. It was Yuki's long black "adzuma-coat," worn from the Japanese Legation, where Baroness Kanrio and the maids had assisted her to dress, and which, in this bright room, she had slipped laughingly to the floor and forgotten. Madame held it out for a moment. Then she folded and laid it softly on the foot of the bed. Her expression had changed slightly. As if with relief, she snatched up a dressing-gown of blue flannel, that cried "Gwendolen" from every turquoise fold.

"Gwendolen, where is your father hiding?" demanded Mrs. Todd, severely, as the two girls reached the hall.

"Why, how should I know? Dad hasn't worried my mind. Isn't Yuki simply a dream of spring?"

"You forget that I have admired Yuki upstairs," said the harassed matron, and turned her back. "There's another carriage sounding as if it wanted to stop! Every wheel goes over my nerve-centre. Cy, Cy—rus! Where *is* that wretched man? The musicians should be playing now. The guests will pour in any instant. There is a carriage stopping! It *has* stopped! Heavens, I shall go mad!"

"Shall Yuki and I run for the drawing-room, mother?"

"Yes, yes, dear. Right under that tallest palm. Be sure to stand ahead of Yuki. Cyrus! Cy—rus! Oh, he is never anywhere when I want him." Her wails preceded her down the hall.

"Are you looking for me, dear?" asked the senator, innocently, strolling out in a leisurely manner from his study, where, against orders, he had been smoking a cigar.

"*Am I!*" panted his wife. "And you've been smoking!" But indignation must be swept aside. "The carriages are stopping, man! Don't you hear them? I'll be in bed for a month if I live through this night! Start up the musicians, and join us immediately in the front drawing-room."

"Musicians,—musicians?" murmured Cyrus, looking about, "where are the musicians?"

"Not under the hatrack, nor yet in my china-closet," cried his lady, with angry vehemence. "Over there! Yes, there—where you saw the piano wheeled this afternoon; behind that hedge of chrysanthemums!"

"Oh, yes, there in the duck-shooters' lodge. All right, old lady. I'll start 'em. Don't get excited!"

Guests now streamed upstairs toward the dressing-rooms. Signor Marcellini began his most seductive waltz; and the senator stood beside his heaving spouse just as the first smiling acquaintance crossed the door-sill.

"Ah, Governor! Ah, my *dear* Mrs. Jink!" chortled Mrs. Todd. "This is surely a good omen,—my daughter's first official congratulations to come from you. Gwendolen, let me present Governor Jink and Mrs. Jink, fresh from our own dear Western state. Miss Yuki Onda of Tokio, Mrs. Jink,—Gwendolen's most intimate school-friend, and my Oriental daughter, as I call her. Ah, Sir George! Punctuality is one of the British virtues. Mrs. Blachouse, my daughter, Miss Todd."

The reception swung now, full and free, into the sparkling waters of felicity. Laughter, lights, and the rustling of silken skirts on inner mysteries of silk; music held back by the multitudinous small sounds of human intercourse, with now and then a protesting wail from violins and the guttural short snore of a cello! Laughter, and the clink of glasses on metal trays, the scraping of spoons against porcelain, tinkling of ice in fragile vessels, and incessantly the shuffle of footsteps on soundless, unseen floors! Perfumes of dying flowers and foliage, odors of essences, fumes of fresh-cut lemons, and of wine!

Outside, at the curbing, a continuous roar and rattling of carriages went on. The covered entrance-way, like an elastic tent drawn out, sheltered a thin moving stream of faces. Behind them the scrape of wheels, stamping of horses, and vociferous bawling of drivers sent a premonitory tingling through the blood. At intervals there came the snort and hiss of that modern Fafnir, the automobile, followed by the nauseating taint of gasoline.

To Gwendolen and Yuki it seemed as if the line of visitors would never end. "Yuki, Yuki," whispered the former, "if they keep popping by like this, each with that wooden grin, I shall certainly go into hysterics! Did you see how nearly I broke down in the face of that last fat lady in tight gray sleeves? She looked like a young rhinoceros in its little sister's skin."

"I no longer perceive anybody at all," said Yuki, tranquilly. "I only see the small duck called 'oshi-dori' bobbing down, then up, on the Sumida River."

"Hush!" whispered Mrs. Todd, in evident excitement. "Here comes the Russian ambassador with his entire suite. I was wondering whether he would snub us because of the war-talk, and Yuki, and the chrysanthemums, and the Mikado's birthday! Now, girls, smile your sweetest!"

But the good lady was given a surprise. Yuki leaned back to touch her arm. At the look of irritated inquiry the Japanese girl said clearly, "You must excuse me from this, dear Mrs. Todd; I cannot shake hands with that person. If I shook, I would be the hypocrite." Without waiting for permission or remonstrance, she turned and hurried from the direction in which the Muscovites now approached. Mr. Todd, with hand already extended in welcome, saw nothing of the little by-play. Gwendolen heard, sympathized entirely with Yuki, but wisely held her peace. Mrs. Todd, after a gasp of outraged dignity, recalled herself, perforce, for the new greetings.

Yuki had slipped from the line quietly enough. She walked away now quite slowly and with apparent calm. Within, she was turmoil and distress. Had she done right? Had she offended, beyond forgiveness, her kind friends, the Todds? But, looking from the opposite point, how could she touch, even in social insincerity, the hand of a man whom she felt by instinct to be a subtle enemy of her native land? This very minister was suspected by many to be one of the strongest who urged the weak Czar into insult and hostility. Would Mrs. Todd reprove her publicly? Would Baron Kanrio, when he heard, defend the childish impulse?

A greater one than Kanrio would soon be here. In the agitation of the moment she had forgotten that tremendous fact. Prince Haganè, her father's feudal lord, or daimyo, often called the "Living War-God of Japan," was to come, for a few moments, to this reception, and partly because of her. A Japanese, no matter how great, seldom neglects the privileges of humanity. Yuki's parents had written that the Prince was to see her, and deliver news. What would he say now,—what would her father say,—if told of this rude and un-Japanese yielding to a personal distaste? "Yet," muttered Yuki to herself, through small clenched teeth, "even should Lord Haganè himself command me, I think I would not touch that Russian's hand."

Moving forward slowly, but always in a straight line, she came full against a small white surface on a level with her face, a thing shield-shaped, and framed in black. It did not move aside for her, as similar white patches, vaguely seen, had done. Brought up suddenly, she realized it to be a shirt-front, and presumably behind the shirt-front there must be a living man.

"Oh, beg pardon!" she faltered, shrinking back. "I begs much pardons, sir."

Two eager hands caught her own. A gay, low voice said, laughing, "I have watched your coming. I willed it. How straight you sped, you beautiful, strange bird!"

But Yuki, dazed for the moment, did not answer. She panted slightly, and tried to draw her hands away.

"I have waited here, by the conservatory door. You must be tired with standing. Come in with me, and rest."

Still unable to command herself, she let the speaker lead her into the warm shadows. She hoped he had not seen her rudeness to the Russian minister. Mrs. Todd swept round an angry glance just in time to see them disappear.

Pierre Le Beau found a sheltered seat, and gently, yet in a masterful way, forced her down beside him.

"Oh, Yuki, but you are beautiful to-night! Was I not mad enough with love without this new gray snare of mist, these blossoms drifting along an irresistible tide? It is a lifetime since I have seen you."

The beating of the girl's heart slowly slackened. "The lifetime of a flower, then," she said, smiling upward. "It was but last night, you know, when we all work so hard with the decorators and the chrysanthemums."

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"Last century!" he laughed. "I really exist only in the moments when I am with you. All else are dungeon hours, locked with your last 'Good-bye.' Do not shrink from me now, darling. Let me hold you in my arms once this wonderful night."

"My hair you will disarrange, and others notice," she pleaded, holding him back with one white hand. "And, dear Pierre, you rumples my mind more than my hair. I must be calm to-night, and cheerful with many. I am the *débutante*."

"You are hard to win," said Pierre, "but I believe I like it so. Your Japanese etiquette is a thorny hedge. More than once I've torn my soul upon it. Ah, but even that could not keep me quite away. You struggled hard, you elf of pearl and mist, but at last you said you loved me,—that you wished to be my wife."

He brushed away the hand and caught her. She gave a little shuddering movement in his arms. "That was a terrible, bold thing for a girl of the samurai class to say. My heart shake a finger at me yet, that I have confessed so immodest a thought. I should hereafter be very circumspect with you, to pay for that bad thing!"

"Circumspect!" laughed Pierre. "Yes, we shall both be circumspect like this,—and this!" She wrenched herself from his kisses, and stood upright in the narrow path. "No, Pierre; I mean it. Please do not do such things, or my frightened spirit never will return. I must go to Mrs. Todd; I fear she is angered."

"Angered,—with you?" asked Pierre, arrested by the sincerity of the girl's protest. Yuki turned her head away. Suddenly he recalled the Russian minister's approach, and connected it with Yuki's flight. He stared at her averted countenance. "Yuki, did you leave your friends,—would you offend them,—rather than greet the Russian ambassador?"

"Yes," whispered Yuki, trembling.

The radiance of Pierre's face went out, his head sank. "So that was the reason. You would not touch a Russian! As you know, my mother is a Russian."

"Oh, it is not *all* Russians! Do not think that I would wound you. Many are good. Mr. Tolstoi, Mr. Wittee, your honored mother, too, I am sure. They hate, as we, the tyrants that wish to crush the people, and to bring on this cruel, unjust war. I saw the petals of our Emperor's flowers shrivel as he passed them by! I, too, would have shrivelled,—my soul would have turned black,—at his breath."

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"No war will come!" cried Pierre, vehemently. "I have told you this before. I know it from the inside. There will be no war. Your country will not face Imperial Russia!"

"If those bad ones push us just too far,—if they delay replies, and provoke us just a little more,—Nippon will fight, and I think that God will let us win!"

"Your Christian God must side with Russia. He cannot aid a nation that does not believe in him!" Pierre's eyes held curiosity and a challenge.

Yuki turned slowly to him, answered the look with sombre brooding, and then stared upward to where close moisture of the high glass dome curved space into a frosted shell. "Perhaps, though," she said, pausing between each word, "the Christian God—believe—in—us!"

Before his surprise found vent her mood and tone had changed. "But, no, no, Pierre; we talk no more of tragic things this night, not of war, and hate, and destiny. It is our ball, Monsieur Pierre Marie Le Beau,—I begs you to remember that. And me and Gwendolen are now in society. I am in society,—is it not nice? Come, let us return to society at once." She caught his arm, laughing, and tried to urge him from the bench.

"You witch of moods!" said Pierre. "Are other Japanese girls like you? When I hold you closest, then do you seem most far away. I seize you in a thousand tantalizing forms, only to fear, each time, that never yet have I seen the real Yuki. Ah! take me to your land, my love, and make me one with it. What do I care for war, for Russia, even for France, if once I could believe you entirely my own? You know I am fighting hard to sail with you next spring. The French ambassador here gives me much hope, and in France my relatives are working."

"Yes, yes, we shall go together on that great ship," said Yuki, soothingly, "and together we shall seek my dear parents, and ask them for our happiness."

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Pierre's face lighted. "But you will be true to me no matter whether they give consent or not?" he cried. "Swear it, Yuki."

"I will be true to you, Pierre," said Yuki. "You wish to hear that many times, do you not? But I cannot say I will marry you without their consent. But they are kind—they must like you, Pierre." She flushed delicately. "We—we will make them to say 'yes,' Pierre."

Still the young man hesitated. "This condition that you hold so stubbornly is our menace," he began. "I don't urge you to marry me at once, without their good wishes, only to promise that, after trying in every way to gain them, you will take your life into your own hands and come to me."

"Why do we fret and worry about such things so far away? You will take from me all joy of our party. Will you not return to the room with me?"

"No," said Pierre, seizing a hand in his, "I shall hold you until this is a bit more clear. No, Yuki —"

"Yuki,—Yuki!" came a cautious voice, an echo, it seemed, to Pierre's last word. "Where are you? Mother has sent me here. Prince Haganè asked for you. She says to come at once."

"Let my hand go. I must hurry. It is Prince Haganè," whispered Yuki, and, slipping deftly from Pierre, she hurried to join her friend. He followed quickly, stopped in the doorway, and stood there, scowling.

The crowd had thinned. He could see the heads and shoulders of the two girls moving and whispering together as they sped. Beyond them, surrounded by his suite of glittering officials, Spanish-looking men in broadcloth and gold lace, rose the dark, impressive figure of Prince Haganè. He was in the dull silken robes of his own land, unornamented but for a single decoration,—the highest that a Japanese subject, not a prince of the blood, had ever received.

Pierre's first thought was an inconsequent one of childish irritation that the man bore no marks of age. On the other hand, no one could have thought him young. The massive features, bronze in tone, and set in a sort of aquiline rigidity, the conscious, kingly poise of head and throat rising from deep brawny shoulders, the stiff black hair, touched evenly throughout with gray, had none of them the color of youth. Yet beside him youth looked tame, and old age withered. This man was on the very summit of life, the central point of storms, rather than their object. His deep-set eyes gazed now far beyond to the future, then back into the past, with equal certainty of vision.

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Such was the great man Haganè—"Ko-shaku Haganè," feudal, not imperial, prince; a title signifying the highest rank attainable by a subject not descended from the gods. Native ballads called him the "Right Arm and the Left Ear" of the Emperor. Woodcuts of his splendid, ugly head, set by country farmers within household shrines, proclaimed him the Living War-God of Nippon. His victories and innovations at the time of the Chinese struggle had spread his fame through two worlds.

As Yuki and Gwendolen drew near, Mrs. Todd first perceived them. "Here they are. Present me first, Cyrus,—then Gwendolen, then Yuki," the matron gave whispered command. Haganè responded to the first two greetings with unsmiling courtesy, offering a perfunctory extension of his thick hand.

"Now, your Highness," said Todd, his thin, jovial voice carrying easily to where Pierre stood, "here's somebody that will look more natural. Step up, Yuki-ko. You aren't afraid!"

Haganè had already fixed keen eyes upon the girl. His hands fell to his sides. A faint smile, merely a gleam on metal, hurried across his face. Pierre saw his lips move. Yuki went closer, hesitated, gained courage, and looked up into the broad face. Pierre saw Mrs. Todd and Gwendolen exchange smiling glances. Todd threw back his head to laugh. The smile returned to Haganè, unexpected, intensified, brilliant, as if a new day had broken. Pierre winced. He saw Yuki sway again,—put forth two white hands, falter, then sink suddenly prone, her palms outspread, her white forehead on the floor, her whole slim, crouching body topped by the great black burden of the sash, instinct with reverence not far from adoration.

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Haganè lifted her immediately, his smile deepening. Mrs. Todd turned away, embarrassed. The small ripple of excitement in the onlookers died; but Pierre, with angry eyes, sought Yuki, and drew her slightly to one side.

"When you are my wife there will be no such ridiculous kow-towing," he said.

"Who is your friend, Yuki?" asked the great man, stepping condescendingly near.

She performed the introduction well, speaking in English without a tremor of the low voice.

"Ah," said Haganè, speaking also in English, "I am recently from the country of Monsieur, which, I do not mistake in conjecturing, is France? Perhaps you are a visitor here, like myself." He put out the great hand, and after an imperceptible hesitation Pierre thrust his own within it. The grasp turned him pale.

"Your Highness is correct in both surmises," he answered stiffly; "I am of France, and I am a visitor. At an early date I anticipate the pleasure of being in your Highness's country."

"Indeed? Pray remind me of this meeting when you arrive, Monsieur. Shall you sail soon?"

"Not for many months, I fear," said the Frenchman. "But I shall certainly avail myself of your kind suggestion."

Yuki's eyes were urging him to go. The girl herself could not have told why she felt apprehension in the proximity of these two men. Haganè had never been antagonistic to foreigners, and she knew that, in Japan, she and Pierre could not have another friend so powerful. Yet she was uneasy.

Pierre, with a last bow, went. The little episode stirred him. The thought rushed through him, too, that here was possibly an invincible friend. He would make the most of it. Even Yuki's abject obeisance, which before had stung him, shone now in the light of desirable dependence on the great man's word. Let him, Pierre, secure his appointment, and, with Haganè his friend, the old gods might shake their heads and growl in vain.

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He went into the street. The long rooms had suddenly grown too small for his aspirations. One friendly cigarette was smoked, and then another. Life seemed a jolly thing, that hour, to Pierre.

CHAPTER TWO

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HAGANÈ'S entrance had broken the receiving line. He became at once the personage, the dominating influence. Guests moved about now, or gathered into little social groups at will. The long apartment filled evenly, a third to the ceiling, with a shifting surface of triangles which were shoulders,—white shoulders, black shoulders, pink shoulders, sometimes a military pair of gold-lace shoulders, each pair surmounted by a head. The rooms, emptying ever, were ever filling, as in some well-constructed drinking-fountain,—the very walls soaked in the hum and timbre of human voices.

Gwendolen, freed from the thralls of official hostess-ship, gathered to herself young men in passage, as a spray of scented golden-rod gathers bees. She had a smile for all, a witty retort, or an insinuating whisper, followed by a provocative look. Old maids, and mothers with unattractive daughters, were wont to call Gwendolen a heartless coquette. As for the coquetry, it was indefensible; as to the heart, young men held varying opinions with regard to that coveted article.

The social atmosphere, charged with evanescent gayety, intoxicated her. She felt like a flower held under the surface of champagne. Through all the glamour spread a tincture of chrysanthemums. Ever after—sometimes in lands very far away from Washington—the odor of these blossoms had power to bring before her, as in an illuminated vision, the yellow walls, the moving heads, and, clearest of all, the slender, mist-gray figure of Yuki Onda; the delicate, happy face under the great loops of blue-black hair.

As Gwendolen talked and strolled, promising a dance to one, refusing it to another, with unreasoning caprice and the manner of a young empress, her hazel eyes, under their long lashes, shot more than once an undetected glance to a certain corner where, beside a pedestal of drooping fern, stood a lonely guest. This person was young, good to look at in a buoyant, breezy sort of way, and of the sex which (alas, yet beyond contesting!) most keenly interested the fair observer. After such glances she usually fell to fondling her sheaf of orchids, and once pressed it up against her face. At this the brown eyes in the corner gleamed, and took on the alertness of a terrier whose master snaps a playful finger.

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Mrs. Todd became solicitous that her guest of honor should be fed, but hesitated to ask him for fear that her "foreign food" might prove unpalatable. This apprehension was finally confided on tiptoe to her lord. "Heavens! Susan," said the unfeeling mate, with the twinkle which she dreaded, "do you suppose a Japanese commissary department has been trotting beside him through Asia, Europe, Boston, and New York? Set him before a mess of caviare, lobster à la Newburg, and extra dry, and see what he does to it. Where did Gwendolen go?"

"She's over there by the punch-bowl, I believe," responded Mrs. Todd, in absent-minded fashion. The good lady still hung, ponderously vague, between her husband's opinion of Haganè's gastronomic culture and her own half-solaced fears.

Todd craned his neck over the crowd. "Oh, there she is, just by the punch-table. The young men are thicker than fleas on a candy kitten. Wonder whether it's Gwennie or the punch."

"A little of both, I presume," said Mrs. Todd, austere. She often found her spouse unsympathetic.

"I don't blame 'em then,—dinged if I do," cried he, with a joyful, premonitory lurch. A firm hand clutched him.

"I'm going for the prince now. He is talking to Yuki. Shall I send her away? She looks as she did on confirmation day, the little idiot. The way these Japanese worship their country and each other is simply ridiculous. What do you think about keeping her with me and the prince, Cy?"

Todd glanced at Yuki. His face softened. She had indeed an upraised, glorified look, as if a beatified vision instead of a very solid living man leaned down to her words.

"Keep her, by all means. She'll know how to wait on her bronze idol," said he, lightly, and dived into the crowd.

Apart from Yuki, Mrs. Todd found unexpected solution in her task of feeding the lion. His private secretary, Mr. Hirai, was not merely an Oxford graduate, but an accomplished man of the world. He made everything easy. At the hostess's first hint of invitation the Japanese started in a solid body toward the supper-rooms. Several ladies who had met members of the party in Boston or New York adhered, smiling, to the moving group. Yuki fell back with the secretary, and began chattering to him in Japanese, her dark eyes slowly turning to stars, her pale cheeks kindling into rosy fire. All of the company centred about Haganè, as thoughts centre about a master will. The occasion which Mrs. Todd dreaded proved to her one of the pleasantest incidents of the whole successful affair. Haganè, in his enjoyment of the delicate fare, entirely justified his host's prophecy. The true hostess is never quite so happy as when she sees her guests enjoying the good things which she, through anxious hours, has been solicitous in providing.

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Meantime Mr. Todd had reached his daughter. The young men drew back a little in deference to the age and relationship of the intruder, but did not get beyond range of allurements.

"It's come, little girl," he whispered, with eyes as young and bright as hers. "It came by wire just a few minutes ago. It's here!" He tapped significantly at the left side of his coat.

"The appointment? Oh! does mother know?"

"Not yet," admitted the senator, with the look of an urchin caught stealing jam. "Perhaps we'd better—"

"You bet we'd better!" She threw back her head and laughed the merriest laugh in all the world. Then she ran her sparkling eyes about the circle of withdrawn, boyish faces. "You must excuse me; dad has a secret, and that means insanity for me if I can't hear it at once. You wouldn't

have me go mad—now, would you?—before the first waltz plays!"

"Certainly not!" laughed the chorus.

"But, Miss Gwendolen," ventured a bold swain, "how about that first waltz? For whom are you keeping it?"

"Well," said the girl, pausing, and letting shy archness possess her downcast lids, "I did not want to tell you, but since you force me to it,—I am keeping the first waltz for—mother!"

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With another laugh, full of bright mockery, she caught her father's arm, and hurried him away. The excitement of the past hour was nothing to what she now felt. Chattering, sparkling, laughing, tossing, gesticulating at times with her sheaf of flowers, she was a slim fountain of youth, with a noon-day sun above it. "You really have the appointment!" she cried to him, when they were well out of hearing. "I knew you must get it, though the President certainly took his time. And we shall sail next spring with Yuki! What! we go *before* next spring? Oh, how perfectly delicious! And mother doesn't know? Now, dad, I am surprised at you! You must be sure to let mother know first, or her feelings will be hurt. Oh, aren't we a pair of rascals, dad? Such nice rascals! I do like ourselves,—now don't you, dad?"

Pierre Le Beau had, a few moments before, abandoned his lonely sentinelship at the conservatory door; but, in the corner where the fern stood, the sturdier watcher, brown of face and square of shoulder, held a tenacious post. A deflection of visual lenses (though to outward appearance his eyes seemed clear enough) kept him from beholding more than one person in the crowded rooms. If she had been aware of the silent challenge, her knowledge was cleverly concealed. Yet now, on her father's arm, she drifted steadily, though with seeming unconsciousness, toward that special nook. The watcher put a hand on a Roman chair beside him, suggestively unoccupied.

Abreast of the little group,—the gold chair, great fern, and dim inhabitant—Gwendolen stopped. A smile went forth that lit the shadows, as she said quite clearly, "Thank you, I believe I will. I should like to get a bit of a rest before dancing."

Senator Cyrus C. Todd did not lack intuition. "Ah, there's Skimmer. Very chap I wanted to see!" he mumbled to himself, and hurried off in an opposite direction.

He of the brown eyes leaned confidently down. "You chose my flowers!" he vaunted.

Exultation was not the most desirable note to adopt with Gwendolen. She answered nothing for a moment. She was busy adjusting herself to an "unconscious" pose, as perfect as the bold lines of the chair and her own graceful figure could combine to produce. She looked down upon the orchids with a thoughtful, pensive gaze, then slowly upward to the speaker. "Ah, was it then—you—who sent them?"

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"Yes; didn't you know? Was it too cheeky, having met you but a glorious once?"

No reply. Gwendolen lifted the flowers and brushed her soft lips across them. Her companion drew himself erect among the drooping green shadows of the fern, swallowed hard, and asked, in a chastened voice, "Did that bloomin' blot of a florist forget to put my card in, after all I said?"

Gwendolen's upraised eyes were now those of a commiserating dove. "I'm sorry, but I did not see any card among the flowers."

The fern had a short ague and stood still. "I'll take a surgeon along when I go to see that florist."

"I wouldn't," said the girl, pityingly. "It was the loveliest sheaf I ever saw. He deserves something better than broken bones for arranging it."

"Yes, they were jolly. They must have pleased you," said the young man, with a wintry gleam of resignation. "I was bent on finding something that really looked like you. I went all over Washington, New York, and Philadelphia in person. But I was so careful of the card! I told the foo—the man, over and over again, to be sure and enclose it. It was printed out in full,—'T. Caraway Dodge, First Secretary of American Legation, Tokio, Japan.'"

"You think you have found something that looks just like me?" asked the girl, slowly, ignoring the latter half of his speech. Her face was full of deprecating interest. She daintily drew forth a single strange blossom, and held it, poised for contrast, against the dark leaves of the fern. Thus detached, it bore an unfortunate resemblance to a ghostly spider.

"Oh, not stuck off on a cork, like that!" cried the tortured donor. "All in a lump, don't you know,

—beaten up like the whites of eggs, with gold-dust sprinkled over, and parsley around the edges!"

"All in a lump—beaten up like eggs—parsley around the edges," began Gwendolen, gravely, when suddenly she tripped and fell against her own laughter. Her pretty shoulders quaked. She bent far over for control, and tried to hide the treacherous mirth.

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But Dodge had seen enough for him. "By Jiminy! you've been jollyng me all the time! And I swallowed it like a bloomin' oyster!" He came around to the front, drew up a stool, flung himself upon it, and looked up with grins that bespoke a renewed zest for life. "Now honest, Miss Todd, you owe me something for this. Didn't you know who sent them? Didn't you really find that card in the box?"

"No, I didn't—honest—but—m-mother did!" confessed Gwendolen, now half-stifled with laughter.

"And you didn't resent it? And you thought them pretty from the very first moment?" cried the youth, on a high note of satisfaction. He reached up now boldly, took the single flower from her hand, pinched off the end of a long fern-leaf to back it, and deliberately arranged himself a button-hole.

Gwendolen wiped the tears of merriment from her bright eyes. "Pretty?" she echoed. "It is too tame a word. I thought them a dream,—an inspiration,—a visual ecstasy!"

"Yes, I said they were like you," returned the impudent Dodge, as well as he could for the distorted countenance bent above the process of pinning in his flower. "There," he said, anent this finished operation, "it's in. I think it becomes me. I didn't run my finger to the bone but once. Now tell me what ma-*ma* thought of the flowers and the card?"

In spite of her usual self-possession, the girl was stricken dumb. To add to her confusion, a deep embarrassing blush rose relentlessly to her throat and face, and would not be banished.

"You won't repeat it!" cried the terrible youth. "You don't dare to,—but I will. Mama said,—lifting her lorgnettes (here he deliberately mimicked the air of a middle-aged grande dame),—'T. Caraway Dodge! Who is T. Caraway Dodge? Oh, I see,—a snip of an attaché!'"

A look into the stupefied face above him showed that his bold guess had been true. Intoxicated by success, he ventured another toss.

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"If you say the word, I come pretty near repeating your answer."

Behind the astonishment, then the consternation of the girl's face, a harder something flashed. She was not accustomed to have the lead so rudely taken. This young person must be disposed of on the instant. His impudence would have given points to Jonah's gourd. She now rose to her feet, held her chin unnecessarily high, and, with the air of a young Lady Macbeth, drawled out,—"I will spare you the trouble, Mr. T. Caraway Dodge. Much as I dislike to be rude, the words I said were these—" She paused. Dodge rose too. The brown eyes and the hazel were nearly on a level. He was laughing. "Well?" he reminded at length.

His unconsciousness of offence gave the last flare to her indignation.

"I said to those present, 'The sending of so costly a bouquet by Mr. Dodge is a little—er—pushing, and the sender must be told so; but since, by accident,—the flowers just happen to suit my gown—'"

"Nonsense!" laughed the rash Dodge, "you never talked that way in your life, unless you deliberately made it up. That's your stunt now, of course. Any one could see it. What is more likely, you said—what I planned for you to say was,—'Oh, here are the flowers I have been waiting for! I think I'll have to marry the person who sent me these!—There's the music of the first waltz! It's a peach! Come,—you haven't promised it, have you? Everybody is waiting for the hostess to begin. Let us start the ball rolling!'"

In sheer incapacity to resist, a weakness wrought of a benumbing conflict of anger, mirth, and amazement, Gwendolen leaned to him,—and her débutante ball opened with her, joyous, whirling in the arms of Mr. T. Caraway Dodge.

After this initial favor, he was rigidly, even scornfully, ignored; but little cared Dodge for that. He had had his day. The impetus given could carry him smiling on through hours of cold neglect. He was determined to be the gayest of that circling round of joy, and succeeded. Stout matrons, lean old maids, Chinese, Spanish, Russian, Dutch, Peruvian, Pole,—just so it wore skirts and could move its feet, all were food for his new mill of ecstasy.

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Gwendolen danced oftenest with Pierre. He was literally a perfect dancer, and to-night he said that the champagne all went to his heels. Yuki, in her decorous Japanese draperies, wound about by stiff brocades, did not attempt foreign dancing.

Haganè and the older members of the suite left early. Hirai, the secretary, remained, evidently charmed by the long eyes of his young countrywoman. During the time she was not talking to him or Pierre, Yuki remained near Mrs. Todd, delighting the soberer friends who came to speak with them by her beauty and intelligence. In the pleasure of seeing this enjoyment of her Oriental protégé, Mrs. Todd forgot to scold about the affair of the Russian minister, and made only one remark about Yuki's undignified and un-American "kow-tow" to the prince.

"I was just pushed down, Mrs. Todd," protested Yuki, earnestly. "Some hand from my own land pressed me before I knew. So was I taught to greet our feudal daimyo when I was the very little girl; so all in Nippon, of old customs, greet him now. I will try never again to do such a thing in America."

"Well, well, that's all right!" said the matron, patting her slim shoulder. "You are a good little girl, if you did kow-tow. There's Gwendolen with Pierre again! Doesn't she look well to-night?"

"Well!" echoed Yuki, as her eyes followed the flying shapes. "'Well' is so faint a little word. To me Gwendolen looks beautiful,—beautiful—like the Sun Goddess in our land. She is like a bush of yama-buki in the wind! I never saw nobody at all so beautiful as our Gwendolen!"

"And to think she must give up this brilliant social success, and go to a heathen country for four years!" mused Mrs. Todd, gloomily. She had, of course, been told the great news.

If Yuki heard the muttered words, she did not show resentment. The smile of intense affection had not left her face as she said aloud: "Anywhere that Gwendolen goes, I think she will find happiness. She has in her eyes the light of a happy karma. Evil and sorrow cannot stay with her long."

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"Well, and what of you, my little Japanese daughter?" asked Mrs. Todd, touched by the unselfish words.

"Oh, me!" said Yuki, becoming instantly grave. "I do not think about my karma,—each person cannot see his own, or know of it; it clings about him too close. But if I should think—No, I cannot! I am afraid! Ah, here comes back the sunshine. It is Gwendolen, fanning! Ah, so hot a little sunshine is Gwendolen! Sit here, and let me make the fan go fast for you, Gwendolen,—your wrists—your throat—that will make coolness quicker than just your face!"

Both girls laughed now, and talked together; Pierre joined them; Dodge ventured near; the senator came up. It was a sparkling group, with the centre always Gwendolen; yet even to Mrs. Todd's unimaginative eyes, the loneliness of the little gray figure, the strange blue-black hair, and pointed, faintly tinted face, struck a note of mystery,—of something very near to sadness.

CHAPTER THREE

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MR. CYRUS CARTON TODD, born in the farming district of Pennsylvania, of English and Scotch ancestry, had, as a mere boy, gone to seek his fortune in the West. This was not, of course, an original thing to do. Young men and old, families and whole communities were, at this time, streaming, like banners, out toward the alluring, unknown lands. Cyrus chose a broad, lonely stretch of moor in the very heart of a state sparsely settled, but not too far from the fertile Mississippi basin. Agriculture, rather than stock-raising, had from the first been his design. The small, hoarded patrimony went into fences, a horse, a plough, and a great lethargic sack of seed. Quick to recognize the advantages of new methods and new machinery, he became, before the age of thirty, one of the successful "large farmers" of his adopted state.

He loved, with a passionate, personal love, his broad black fields. He knew, before they ventured one slim, verdant herald to the air, the stirring of immortal essence in his buried grain. He thrilled, sometimes with the stinging of quick tears, when first the green prophecy ran, like an answering cry, from furrow to swart furrow. He moved, at harvest-time, among the hung, encrusted stalks with the deep joy of a creator who sees his work well done. Every process was vital,—the sowing, reaping, storing, and, last of all, the hissing of the great gold torrents as they plunged headlong into caverns of waiting cars. His acreage was wide, but not too wide for his heart. His great working force of men was organized and controlled with the tact and ease of a leader. Mrs. Todd, the daughter of an Illinois farmer, (of late she was successfully forgetting the

fact), came into his life when, as a girl of eighteen, she had "visited" a neighbor's home. Todd was then thirty-one. The difference in age seemed great to him, but apparently not to Susan. She arrived in mid-autumn, at the height of a golden yield. Cyrus loved the whole world then, and it was not difficult for the rosy girl to secure for herself a special niche.

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They were married in the following spring, when the planting was over, and Cyrus's fields ran with an emerald fire. The farmer turned, perforce, to contemplation of his house. Bare walls and rough pine floors were well enough for him, but better should be found for Susan. She assisted him in selecting the new furnishings, and then, with the self-possession known only to a woman and a hen, entered upon her kingdom.

Her presence, for a long while after, affected Todd as something in the nature of a miracle. Women had borne little part in his life. The dainty touches of ornament which his wife's quick fingers gave the little home, the good, unheard-of things she cooked for him, the demonstrative affection she was ever ready to bestow (for indeed she loved him dearly), kept him in a sort of daze of unbelieving bliss. He felt that he and life were even. Now he began to learn what money, hitherto a neglected factor in his success, had the power to grant.

The plain cottage grew into an attractive, vine-held home. Going to his fields each morning, after a perfect breakfast, he argued aloud to himself, and frequently pinched his own arm to prove the brightness true. Everything prospered. The men liked him, the dogs fawned upon him, the horses whinnied at his voice. And then, just as he told himself he couldn't possibly make room for another joy,—came Gwendolen.

Cyrus, when his eyes had cleared of the golden blur, drew a chair to the bed, put his two elbows on the rim, set his face upon his hands, and deliberately made acquaintance with his daughter. The miracle of his wife's love, the immortality of springing seed, the awe left over from his boyish dreams of heaven, all hid themselves in that small, pink frame, and looked out upon him through its feeble gaze.

He wished to name her "Susan," after his wife, and, as it happened, after his mother also. Mrs. Todd would not consider it. She desired her child to have a "pretty" name, something high-sounding, even sentimental, that would look well in a novel. Her thought whirred like a distracted magnet between three euphonious points,—"Gwendolen," "Guinevere," and "Theodora." At Guinevere Cyrus at once took an obstinate stand. It suggested to him guinea-hens.

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"Then 'Theodora,' Cy. What is the matter with 'Theodora'?"

"It sounds like the tin tail to a fancy windmill. I can just see it spin!" declared the anxious father.

"But the sentiment! It means 'gift of God,'" pleaded Mrs. Todd, in the voice she usually kept for church.

"Shucks! She don't need a label, 'made in heaven,'" said Cy. "Nobody 'd take her as coming up from the other place. Why, if she dropped there now, she'd put out flames like a hand extinguisher,—the blessed cheraphim!"

"Well, 'Gwendolen,' then. Surely you can't find any such ridiculous objections to 'Gwendolen.'" The young wife now was plainly on the verge of tears.

"It's fancy and high-falutin' for my taste," said honest Cyrus, "but it's not so bad as those others. If you want it, have it! I can't stand out against you, darling. I can call her 'daughter' when I'm tired."

So Gwendolen she was christened, and in time Cyrus became not only reconciled, but actually proud of the pretty name, saying that it sounded yellow, like her hair.

In earlier years of struggle,—pleasant stress it had always been—Cyrus Todd, in the wide, lonely life of the prairie, had become a reader of books. His pious English mother had not died before transmitting to her boy her veneration for the great souls of the past. Among his very few possessions, brought originally from Pennsylvania, were three books;—Shakespeare, the Bible, and, strangely enough, a copy of Marco Polo. During the days of poverty these three formed his sole, incessant reading. Afterward he bought more books, generally bound garbage-heaps of literature, perpetrated in rich boards, and disseminated by strenuous agents who urged to purchase with a glibness unknown to any since Beelzebub. A few good books came to him, generally by a fortuitous mischance. Imitating his neighbors, he sent in subscriptions to the "Western Farmer's Evangel" and "The Horn of Plenty." He read everything, bad or good, keeping new words and phrases strictly out of his daily vocabulary. His time had not yet come for mental segregation.

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Chiefly because of this modest simplicity of his speech, no one suspected him of the growing

passion. Never was a figure less scholarly to view. His keen eyes of bluish green, with their trick of closing slightly from underneath when interested, seemed to look out toward horizons of actual experience, rather than along those shadowy vistas down which the pilgrim band of thinkers moves. His limbs, loosely hung, were made for striding over furrows. His mouth, thin-lipped and straight, sensitive at the corners to any hint of humor or of pathos, showed early lines of shrewdness and self-restraint. Never a great talker, he was, as a listener, an inspiration. His silences in conversation were not of the brooding, introspective kind in which one seems to be planning his own next remark, but of deep and intelligent interest in what his companion was saying. He was alert, practical, interested in many things, sympathetic with many views.

Within the badly printed pages of the "Farmer's Evangel" he found his first clue to the outer world. This was an illustrated article on rice culture,—in Japan. Before he had turned the first column he felt the threads of destiny pull.

"Them little chaps is all right, I guess," he remarked aloud, at the top of the second column.

"No red rust on Johnny Jap!" he murmured admiringly, at the third.

With the fourth and last strip of reading, mated to a pictured group of Chinese coolies flailing rye, he let the paper fall and his soul go straying.

The descriptions of Japanese method and result were bald enough and full of error. Beneath them, as through a tangled undergrowth, he saw reality. Joining this new knowledge to remembered tales of Marco Polo, an electric spark flashed out. Old Marco was not a mere romancer, then, fellow of Sinbad and Munchausen, but a speaker of truths! There existed still, somewhere on earth, those marvellous countries with old, old cultures stored for us with prophecy, and a crowded generation through which must still run the living sap. If one went west, always west, to the edge of a great water, beyond that water he would reach Japan,—as once Columbus cut the sands of Hispaniola. At that first moment came into Todd's mind, half dreamily, though not the less imperishable because of shimmering mist, a determination to travel, some day, to that Far East, and see for himself what Marco Polo must have seen.

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Todd, after his marriage, continued to grow rich. The pretty cottage was abandoned for a great house near "town." It had hallways, a porte cochère, and a huge billiard-room which none but the cat ever visited. The town itself, in its spidery focus of busy railways, had not existed when Cyrus first came. He had often strolled, whistling, through future business blocks, and over smoking breweries.

The Todds "grew up," as they termed it, with the place, Cyrus specially clinging with tenacious loyalty to the state which had made the background of so much happiness. As Gwendolen passed from a golden childhood into a maidenhood no less bright, Mrs. Todd was heard to murmur reluctantly mild objurgations against the "rawness" of the West, its unconventionality, and lack of true culture.

At fourteen, Gwendolen was not only precocious in school-work and music, but her beauty promised to be of so unusual and unmistakable a type that Mrs. Todd took fond alarm, and declared that the child must go at once to New York, where she could be decently "finished." Gwendolen protested and wept. She had her father's happy heart, and thought that nothing could be quite so near perfection as their life at home. Mrs. Todd, secure in her conviction, proved inexorable. Cyrus was appealed to, and something in the dejected look of his face gave his wife a thrill of triumph. She soon prevailed, and Todd, in person, prepared to lead his one lamb to the sacrificial altar of "society."

He left her on the brown-stone doorstep in New York, his heart far heavier than her own. The gay metropolis had no attractions then. He took the next train home, tasting his first real sorrow since his mother's death. He felt cold and chill at the thought of the big home emptied now of his idol.

Mrs. Todd met him, not with the expected torrent of tears, but with a face red and twitching in excitement. The leading political party of his state had "split," and he, the farmer, Cyrus Todd, was to be run for United States senator. This strange news proved indeed an antidote for melancholy. In less than an hour he had been into town, and learned for himself how the "land lay." Two candidates, well matched, with equal backing, had just been declared by a great uprising of conservative voters utterly unsatisfactory. Todd was asked to be the dark horse. He would have turned from the proposition flattered and abashed, with the one remark that he "wasn't the cut of cloth for a politician," but ambition had begun to work like a fever in the veins of Mrs. Todd.

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Already the magnate of her small community, she wished to test her powers in the capital itself. She knew that Gwendolen was to be a beauty, and recognized the potency of an attractive débutante, allied to a rich father and an aspiring mama. The longest letter ever penned by her fat hand now sped to Gwendolen. Her arguments were good, though turgidly expressed. Gwendolen took fire. In a tumult of violet-tinted letters, chokingly perfumed, she assured her father that the school in which she now languished was a cheerless jail. She said that the plain fare, particularly

the raw beef, choked her, and that the rooms were kept so hot that soon she must go into consumption. Above all, she was dying by inches so far away from her "dear, precious, darling, angelic dad!" It was this last representation that won. Todd gave in his name, made a few public speeches that surprised him more than his friends by their humor, sparkle, and good sense, and with little further effort received the nomination.

For more than four years, now, the Todds had lived in Washington. Mrs. Todd's initial step had been to buy a good, substantial home in a fashionable neighborhood. She soon realized that she was not to dominate society; but, after a few months of sulking, she adjusted herself comfortably to the new conditions, and enjoyed her life thoroughly. Gwendolen was put to the best private school in the city. She could be at home now, in the evenings, to play her father "those tinkly, skee-daddy pieces" which he liked. No homely melodies for Senator Todd! His childhood was passed without them, and they bore no tender recollections. Chopin, and an occasional rag-time bit, stirred his veins. Gwendolen's music-master had kept to himself hopes that, in the girl, he might have a brilliant result;—her parents had neither the knowledge nor the insight to perceive it for themselves.

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Gwendolen was fashioned for brilliant playing. Elemental or sombre music baffled her. She played with laughter, sometimes with fire,—by preference in the full light of the sun. Through Tschaikowsky's broken rainbows she passed like a spirit. Beethoven, in his glad moods, seemed a mirror in which she saw herself. Chopin as a sentimentalist she despised, even while she thrilled to his unearthly delicacy of phrasing. She grew steadily, yet remained unconscious of the increasing power. She only knew that, in certain moods, it was almost a necessity to play, and that people liked to hear her.

As time went on, Mr. Todd's political estimate of himself began to be echoed jeeringly by his opponents, and sometimes reluctantly by his friends. He had realized early enough that official exigency in Washington was his cross, his penalty, the price he was doomed to pay. The intricacies of method surprised and repelled him; the insincerity met on all sides he designated despairingly as the "San José scale" of humanity. Graft, political jobbery, the oppressions of power, sickened him. "I don't like it, Susan. I wasn't made for this sort of a harness," he complained one day to his wife. "A fellow can't walk straight or talk straight in this life; and some of these old rum-soaked bosses have actually lost the power of saying what they mean. These female lobbyists, too, they make a man ashamed to look a good wife in the face. I wish we could quit. I like politeness and manners,—I've turned off the road for a sick lizard—but I'll be ding-danged if I can grin and scrape in the evening to a man who, in that same morning's newspaper, has called me a liar and a thief!"

Mrs. Todd joined him in a sigh. "I know it's hard, dear. I realize just what you mean. There is some of it in my own career, though of course I don't expect anybody to think of *me*! The airs put on by these mushroom aristocrats who have pulled themselves up by their own boot-straps are enough to make one ill. But we must not think of ourselves. It's Gwennie! Washington is better for her future prospects than our dear Western home. We must try to endure Washington a little longer for her sake." Mrs. Todd made strong effort to look and feel like an impersonal martyr. She did not succeed very well. Hypocrisy had a tendency to shrivel under the keen eyes that now twinkled appreciatively upon her.

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"Just so," drawled Cyrus. "For daughter's sake only we continue to sip the nauseating draught. I agree, then. I guess our inwards will not be seriously impaired." It was perhaps as near insincerity as Todd ever approached, this clinging, despite better knowledge, to uncultured forms of speech. Even in the senate he showed determination to remain a raw Westerner, rather than identify himself with that sandpapered and lacquered body of gentlemen.

His compensations for all discomfort were found in huddled, intoxicating rows on the shelves of the new Congressional Library. Here his interest in the Far East, first awakened by the garrulous Venetian, shone back from a thousand reflecting facets of new truths. He strengthened theory with fact. He knew how many car-loads of Northwestern grain, how many bales of Southern cotton were shipped annually to expanding Asiatic markets from our Pacific ports. He traced the colonial policies of Europe back to the days when adventurous Spaniards had won the timid Philippines, but, seeking further glory, had knocked in vain at the gates of Japan. China, too, the richest prize in the East, he knew to be stirring in her long sleep. He believed that her destiny, central in the future currents of trade, must become the key to the world's development. With keen eyes he watched the joints of the Siberian railway, like a giant centipede, reduplicating, joint by joint, always insidiously, toward the storm centre of the Yellow Sea.

The old Romans argued the future from the flight of a bird. It happened now to Todd that the love of one schoolgirl for another brought before him a clearer knowledge of baffling Eastern questions than had all his years of rapt apprenticeship.

Miss Onda of Tokio (Onda Yuki-ko, the full name had been registered) arrived, as boarding inmate of the fashionable Washington Academy, only a few weeks after Gwendolen. She was dainty, shrinking, friendless, and pathetically homesick. Gwendolen became her champion. With a great ruffling of wings she kept at bay the impertinent and the curious. Yuki, thankful from the first for the protection, responded more slowly to the love. The Japanese girl was by nature silent, meditative, reserved. Above all she was,—to use her schoolmates' expression—"different."

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It was fully three months after the initial friendship that the American succeeded in enticing her home. After this, the course of true love ran smooth. Each Friday night not passed with her Japanese friends, the Kanrios, was spent with Gwendolen. Yuki learned to giggle, and to have secrets, and dote on fudge like any American schoolgirl. She learned to dress, too, in the American way, and to heap her soft, dry, blue-black hair into a dusky "pompadour."

From the first she was a delight to Todd. He thought of her as a strange bird of Paradise rather than a dove, sent out from the ark of her country, that floated for him, somewhere, on waters of mystery. He encouraged hesitating confidences regarding her home life. Stoically he kept from laughter when her quaint grammatical errors convulsed Gwendolen and Mrs. Todd. Through Yuki he began to suspect the passionate, vital note of loyalty which is the keynote to Japanese character.

Memories of her happy childhood seemed never far away. Before the little feet touched earth, while still warm on her nurse's back, she had been taught to drink in visual beauty. Heroism was instilled in her through toys and story-books, and through temple feasts to gods who once were men. Old age was something to be revered, almost envied,—white hairs a benediction. The American levity and callousness shown by the young to the old appeared, from the first, in Yuki's mind, and remained ever after, the chief blot upon a country otherwise beloved. Todd saw that the girl in her own land must have moved as though consciously surrounded by spirit. She said to him that, in Nippon, the air was awake and vital; that there, ever went on about men the tangling and untangling of great forces, to which, the living are as but shadows on a moving stream.

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Through Yuki, too, he became a friend, even an intimate, of Baron Kanrio, the Japanese minister. To be intimate with any Japanese is a rare privilege, and Todd knew it. Many were the notable evenings spent in Kanrio's small private den, where the two men bent together over records and reports, and over maps whereon they traced with prophetic fingers the contour curves of overflowing races. The insight of the other fairly staggered Todd. Slowly the American breathed in, rather than acquired by grosser senses, something of the patient, confident loyalty to ideals,—the Japanese strength that comes with absolute spiritual unity, the power of race in the living, and, more potent still, in the dead.

Late in the afternoon of a bright March day, the fourth and last of Gwendolen's school years in Washington, Mrs. Todd sat alone at a front window of her handsome bedchamber, looking out dreamily into thickening dusk. The day was Friday. Yuki and Gwendolen giggled over a chafing-dish of fudge in a room across the hall. Merry laughter, more often from Gwendolen, rang through the house, trailing pleasant echoes.

Mrs. Todd seldom sat alone, and seldom indulged in reverie. Now, however, she consciously caressed the reflection that, apart from an obstinate increase of flesh, she had not a trouble in the world. She was proud of her husband, proud of her daughter, pleased with herself. Her mind held no regrets, her closet no skeletons. A familiar step on the sidewalk caused her to look down. The senator was returning early from the library. She smiled with wifely comprehension at the pose of the down-bent head, at the hands thrust, Western fashion, to the full depths of new, English trousers. "Cy has something on his mind," she murmured. "He's coming to hunt me up and get it off."

She heard him banging one downstairs door after the other, then running, with the lightness of a boy, up the stairway. His tone expressed relief at seeing her dark shadow-bulk against the window-frame. "Susan! That you?"

"Yes. You are early, dear. Shall I ring for lights?"

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"No—no," cried the other hastily. "I'm a little tired—that's all—and a little—excited. This warm dusk just suits me. It's fine to talk in."

After saying this, he remained so long wordless that Mrs. Todd's curiosity urged the question. "Was it anything definite that you had to say?"

"Definite! It's worse than definite. It's colossal!"

"Say it quick, then. I'll be on pins and needles till you do."

"Well, to put it briefly—our U. S. minister at Tokio, *Jap-an*,—Evans, you know,—Brunt Evans of Illinois,—well, Evans is on the point of resigning because of ill health,—and if I want the appointment—if I really try,—"

"Yes—yes—don't stop!"

"Mother, I *want* it!" cried the man, in a tone she had not heard him use for years. "You know how I've always felt about that country! I want the appointment as I have never wanted anything since I got you!" His thin hands twitched, his eyes pleaded. He might have been a schoolboy

begging for the treasure of a gun, a horse, a holiday.

"To give up—Washington, and live in that strange land!" whispered Mrs. Todd, as though fear touched her.

"It needn't be but for a matter of four years, mother."

"Is there not talk of war with Russia?"

"Yes, and that's my chief reason for wanting to go."

"Do you realize that Gwendolen, our only child, is to graduate this June, and formally come out next season?"

"Yes, and that's my chief reason for wanting to stay."

Mrs. Todd pressed her lips together. A suspicious gleam came to her pale eyes. "This is the work of Yuki Onda! You both are infatuated about that girl."

"My dear Susan, how utterly unjust! Yuki has no more political influence than our cook. She doesn't dream of this possibility, she or Gwendolen either. You are the only one besides myself to hear."

"The girls will be wild when they are told. Gwendolen will be mad to go! Society, flattery, success, a great catch,—all I have worked for—will be nothing!" Todd wisely kept silence. Mrs. Todd rose unsteadily to her feet. "There is no doubt that you all will be frantic to go—all three of you—without a thought for me." Seizing each side of the parted curtain, she stood, as at a tent door, staring out into a blackening sky.

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"You'll be a big gun out there, Mrs. Cyrus Carton Todd," wheedled a low voice. "Bigger, in some ways, than you'll ever get to be over here. Those foreign embassies are bargain-counters of dukes and princes. The American globe-trotters will be so many kneeling pilgrims at your shrine."

Mrs. Todd stared on. Slowly upon the night, as upon a transparency, luminous letters began to form. "Mrs. Todd, the stately and distinguished consort of Minister Cyrus Carton Todd, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from the United States to Japan. Miss Gwendolen de Lancy Todd, a famous Washington beauty, now in her first season." Beneath the words appeared, as in a phosphorescent mist, a long, long dining-table, rich with the beauty of lace, cut glass, silver, and flowers; while ringed about it leaned and laughed her guests,—famous men and women of two worlds, members of old nobilities, native princes, and, perhaps, even visitors of blood royal, for who, in these days, would slight an invitation from the representative of earth's greatest republic?

Senator Todd pensively regarded the scallops of his wife's uplifted profile. "You'd make a stunning figure in a court dress, mother."

She wheeled fiercely upon him. "You are sure Gwendolen suspects nothing?"

"Sure. And if you take it like this, dear, she need never know that the chance was offered."

His companion gave a small, irrepressible sob. In an instant the long arms were about her. "Now, Susie, don't you be losing any sleep over this. I won't take a step unless you give the word."

Dreading his tenderness more than any argument, she pushed him away half laughing, half crying, "No—no—go on with you! I won't be honey-fuddled! I know your ways. It has come upon me rather sudden, and I haven't caught my breath! But you might as well tell Gwennie and be done with it! I couldn't keep such a secret from her, even if you could. It's too b-big! And she'll be just wy-wy-wild to go!" The last sentence was a wail.

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"Forget it, mother! Drat the whole thing! Let it vanish!" urged Cyrus.

"No!" she cried instantly, and shook her head with vehemence. "I can't accept the sacrifice."

"Do you agree, then, for me to—to—try?" asked Todd, fighting down a desperate joy.

"No-o" she hesitated, "not exactly agree, either; only I'm not willing to take upon myself to stop the whole thing here at the beginning. I'm not the Lord! Maybe this is planned out by higher powers; and then, besides," she added with a gleam of hope, "maybe you won't get it, after all!"

Todd's face bore a curious expression. His under lids closed slightly. "No," he repeated slowly, "maybe I won't get it, after all. But it's only fair to tell you that, if I am turned loose to try, I'm

CHAPTER FOUR

THE Todd household slept until late the morning after the party. Next to the efficient hirelings, —those ball-bearing sockets of domestic ease,—the senator himself was first to awake.

He came slowly into the day, as though passing from a fair garden into one more fair. That sense of some great good, new-garnered, and in the warm sweet haze of sleep not quite recalled, caressed his smiling lips. In spite of dalliance, the shining consciousness drew near. His appointment had been given! Ah, that was the new glory! He was in effect, at that instant, "Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary" to a Wonderland! It was not the honor that thrilled him, but the opportunity. He would have a niche near the breathing heart of that strange country. Proving himself worthy, he might go deeper, drinking at that spiritual fountain of eternal youth.

Lying now on his rich, canopied bed, with all the luxury of modern Occidental life heaped close, Todd told himself that, because of the success, he was all the more a soul, an individual, with better things to seek. He scorned to be a pampered animal, possessed by its possessions. He envied anew the clean, sweet poverty of the samurai's code.

He was now at that elevation in life where past events take proper place, as in a landscape, and vistas begin. Yesterday was his fiftieth year. By another coincidence—those clashings of star-beams in his career—his birthday fell on that of the Japanese Emperor.

Looking back now, he could see where streams of tendency, taking rise in boyhood, had worked steadily, though through seeming deviations, towards this one great tide of purpose. His lonely interest in rice-culture had been a hidden spring; his coming to Washington, where Japan's development was a living topic instead of a solitary reader's dream, a winding stream of fate. Yuki herself was a deep well of inspiration. Now at last had come his opportunity to serve, in one life-giving effort, his own beloved country,—and Japan. The future widened for him into a deep harbor where great fleets of achievement might find safe anchorage.

Yuki entered for the ten o'clock breakfast in full street costume. At Mrs. Todd's lifted eyebrows of inquiry, Gwendolen, who was just behind her friend, explained.

"She has an appointment at eleven with her Hindoo idol. Baron Kanrio said last night that dad was to go too. Yuki thought she might be allowed to accompany him, if she were very good."

"Of course!" said the senator, heartily. "Glad to have her. Prince Haganè gave me the date, eleven, A. M., but he didn't mention Yuki."

"Oh, how could you think it?" drawled saucy Gwendolen. "She's only a girl. He wouldn't notice a girl."

"It rather looks as if he *had* noticed her," retorted Mr. Todd. "A definite appointment! They say his daily average of callers is about two hundred."

"It is only for my father's sake. He will give me a message," explained Yuki, hastily. "Gwendolen is right. So great a man do not think much of girls."

"Humph," said Gwendolen, "that doesn't go! He stared at you as if you were a candied cherry-petal, and he wanted to swallow you at a gulp. Pierre Le Beau saw it, too. Heavens, how he scowled! A regular Medusa! I expect all the chrysanthemums are turned to yellow onyx by his glare."

Yuki gave a start, and then flushed with painful intensity. "Please! Please!" she was beginning, when Mrs. Todd unconsciously interrupted with an exclamation of delight.

After her methodical pouring of the coffee, the good lady had plunged into the morning papers. "Ah, Gwendolen, these notices are splendid!—better than I could have hoped. Society reporters are usually so touchy and carping!"

"There was one youthful Mr. Dooley that I made sure of," said Gwendolen, calmly, as she cracked an egg. "I had the orchestra strike up 'Call me thine own!' while I took him to a corner and plied him with Louis Roederer, Carte Blanche!"

Little Yuki and the senator drove off together. Each had things to think of, though not much to say. The carriage bowled smoothly along asphalt thoroughfares. At close intervals small parks were passed, some round, some angular, but all like emeralds in a web of silver-tinted streets. Now and then the great meerschaum-colored dome of the Capitol came into sudden view, with its suggestion of purpose and of majesty.

The girl's neat fawn-tinted dress was now supplemented by furs, and a wide hat of brown velvet, with a silver chain about the crown, and nodding feathers. Her hair, puffed round her face in recent fashion, completed the Americanizing of her attire. From the dainty gloves, thrust deep into her muff, to the soft brown boots, she was modern, chic, Occidental.

At the Japanese Legation, both Baron Kanrio and the prince's secretary, Hirai, were awaiting them. The eyes of the latter shone with eagerness at sight of his young compatriot. Kanrio sent them, chattering already of Japan, into the drawing-room to await Yuki's summons. With a slight gesture he beckoned to Todd, and they went together along the hall to the well-known den.

Haganè sat in it, alone. The disposition of the few stiff chairs bespoke recent visitors. The library table, covered with green leather, had maps upon it, letters and papers, besides a Japanese smoking outfit and a tray with tea and some small cups.

As they entered, the great man slowly rose. He wore again his plain dark native robes. In the relentless daylight he appeared older, more sallow, and at the same time more impressive. His hand-grasp for the senator was cordiality itself. His deep eyes lighted pleasantly, as he said, "Welcome, your Excellency!"

Todd started, and then flushed like a boy, at the title. Kanrio grinned with delight.

"Oh—er—beg pardon; but it's the first time. Rather knocked me off my pins. Thanks, your Highness! I feel it a good omen to have it come from you."

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"Shall we be seated?" asked Haganè.

"Gomen—nasai," (excuse me) murmured Kanrio, with a gesture. He removed the soiled cups from the table to the top of a low bookcase, then rang for fresh cups and a new pot of tea. He and Haganè took a few sips, Japanese fashion; Todd declined.

"I understand, your Excellency, that your appointment as envoy to our small island has come the very recent time?"

"Only last night, your Highness." Todd's eyes met in unembarrassed candor those of Haganè. "Of course I've worked for it. My heart was set on it. The Baron here has been an inspiration!"

"My dear sir, don't trouble to recall my unimportant service," deprecated Kanrio.

"I understand," said Haganè, slowly, "that for some time you have honored our—country—with your studious—interest. If it is not impertinence, may I venture to inquire what—circumstances, what—a—unfamiliar categories—first stung your thought to the pursuit of Far Eastern knowledge?" He spoke very slowly, slurring neither vowel nor consonant, and choosing, it would seem, from a rich vocabulary. Nevertheless he pieced the words together with a slight effort.

Todd knitted his brows, not in lack of understanding, but from desire to answer definitely and concisely the comprehensive question.

Haganè may have mistaken the silence, for he added immediately, "My English is—stiff,—not well—manœuvred. My meanings perhaps become involved. Shall not Baron Kanrio stand as—interpreter—for my heavy thought?"

"No, no," said Todd, eagerly. "Do not think it, your Highness! I understand perfectly. Your very misuse of some of our slippery old timeworn words is illuminating. It was your question that made me pause, not your way of putting it."

"My dear sir," protested Haganè, "I desire you to feel no obligations to answer. I intended, perhaps, a thinner meaning than your own mind has seized. Was it Japanese Art, as with Frenchmen? Statistics, Sociology, Political Economy?" Todd noted the greater ease with which these abstract and philosophic terms were employed.

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"None of these, your Highness,—and yet all! My study—you will think me presumptuous, I fear,—might not be called less than—the ultimate destiny of your race!"

Haganè's smouldering eyes leaped into sudden fire. He looked down quickly, as if to deny the flame. Todd felt the air stir and tingle with a new vibration.

"Yes, your Excellency, we are attempting to employ valuable hints from various representative governments of your enlightened West," said he, conventionally.

"Hints!" echoed Todd; "that is just the wonder of you! They are hints in reality, thoughts to be absorbed only just so far as you need them, and the rest chucked. You don't stick them on like plaster to cover up a mediæval birthmark. You have quite as much to give as we, and you know it. Haven't I watched and studied, with Kanrio here to coach? You Japanese alone can combine the best of the two civilizations. You can best fuse the experience, character, insight, humanity—of both long-suffering hemispheres. We Americans are just ourselves; but you are we, and all the rest of it! That's why your old gods set you on the fighting line. You are a whole laboratory experiment in sociology, all to yourselves!"

"I perceive that you have been thinking carefully upon us," said Haganè, still conventional, contained; but his one upward look, instantly withdrawn, had the "swish" of a scythe.

"It isn't all admiration, you know!" exclaimed Todd, with an impulsiveness far more flattering than reserve. "You have made, it seems to me, some thundering bad mistakes,—like the dropping of Port Arthur at the first growl of that bear, Russia. But you've got your second wind all right. You Japanese know, better than any American or Englishman, that Russian preponderance in China means a walled continent of tyranny, the gates guarded by Greek fire. If you conquer, your best interests are at one with the progress of an enlightened twentieth-century world. Now, your Highness, deny it if you can!" He leaned back, his thin face aglow. Haganè apparently had difficulty in keeping eyes upon the table.

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"You—er—pass through the waving branches," said he, very slowly, "and cleave to the heart of the tree. So only are the rings of epochs counted. Do others of your countrymen think thus?"

"Well," said Todd, "to be honest, I judge that most of my countrymen would prefer sitting on the bough, stealing apples, rather than counting concentric rings. I guess love of the East must have been born with me."

"Interesting, interesting!" murmured Haganè. "And yet, your Excellency, though indigenou, something must have fed the growth. Every development possess, I think, allotted kind of nourishment."

"Oh, events contributed, I presume. Now and then things turned up just when they were wanted." Todd was surprised at his own ease in the great man's presence. He drew inspiration, not awe, from the intelligent eyes and slow, suggestive smile. "Yes, things *came!* I planted your Forty-Seven Ronin into my biggest field of wheat! And my old mule, Kuranosukè, did me better work than any span of horses. Then, your Highness, the baron here—oh, you needn't shake your finger, Baron!—pointed me to heavenly manna; and the child Yuki, my daughter's friend, led me into paths that adult eyes could never have seen."

Haganè crushed the red ash of his cigarette, and leaned farther back in his chair. The expression of his face altered slightly,—softened, one might say, were it not still so impressive. If waves of strength and influence had flowed from him before, they ebbed now, leaving consciousness a little thin and dry. Yet all three men smiled faintly, as at a pleasant thought.

"Ah, little Onda Yuki-ko, the child of my old kerai."

"It is a term meaning 'feudal retainer,'" put in Kanrio, amiably, to Mr. Todd.

"Yes," went on Haganè, "I was encouraged last night to see her so strong to look at, and so—pardon vulgarity, your Excellency,—so inoffensive to the eye in personal appearance."

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Todd flung back his head and laughed outright. "Inoffensive—that's a good one! Why, your Highness, Yuki is quoted as a beauty here in Washington. Artists beg to paint her, and swell photographers to pose. If she intended casting in her lot with us, she could have the pick and choice of half the young bloods here." He sent a merry glance to Kanrio, as for corroboration, but was met by a stare so blank, so baffling, that his smile faded.

The prince was carefully, very carefully, lighting a fresh cigarette. "Pardonnez moi!" he mumbled, between coaxing, initial puffs. "It is I who am the stupidity! 'Pick and choice,—young bloods'—I fear I do not quite—er—apprehend."

"Your Highness," Kanrio broke in, "Mr. Todd speaks in the idiomatic phrases of society. He desired to transmit the impression that Miss Onda is thought to be beautiful."

"Ah, is that it? And—young bloods?"

"Young men, I should have said. Pardon my slang. Merely young men, your Highness,"

explained Cyrus, feeling suddenly quite ill at ease.

"Ah, yes," muttered Haganè to himself. "I have a recollection. Last night—" he broke off. His voice was higher and a little careless, as he asked of Todd, directly, "Is Onda Yuki-ko to sail with your family?"

"Yes. She had not intended returning till next spring. She wanted to take an extra course in French or something. But she wouldn't stay behind, now that we are going. She and my daughter are like sisters." Todd rose, muttering words to the effect that he had trespassed too long. Haganè rose also. Todd felt resentful, though he could have assigned no definite cause. "Good-morning, your Highness, or, as Miss Yuki has taught me to say, 'Sayonara!' I thank you for the honor of this interview."

The word "Sayonara" brought Haganè sharply to himself. "The thanks belong not to me, Excellency," he smiled and stretched out a powerful hand. "Seldom do I so deeply enjoy a conversation with one met for the first time. I consider that Nippon, and our-Sacred Emperor"—(he paused, and the two Japanese bowed deeply,) "are to receive the congratulation."

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Power and purpose thrilled in his hand-clasp. Todd tingled anew with it. "What a man! What a bottled genius hauled up from a sea of fate!" he said to Kanrio, as they descended the stairs.

"Prince Sanètomo is one who does his duty," admitted Kanrio, in an impassive tone.

Hirai accompanied Yuki to the office door. They went a little slowly, considering the rank of the summoner, and talked hurriedly in the hall-ways, each reluctant to release a topic so dear. There had been not only Japan and childhood to gloat upon, but, already, reference could be made to a past,—twelve hours old. "Do you remember," and "As you were saying last evening," are potent introductory clauses. Both young people had been born in Tokio, and though unnamed to each other before, soon established unity of class, training, inherited ideals, and childish experiences. The secretary had often heard of Sir Onda Tetsujo, Yuki's father, a knight of the old school, famed for his stern rectitude and his loyalty to a vanished past. With some hesitation Hirai ventured to suggest that he should consider it a privilege to be allowed to call upon Sir Tetsujo and his lady, in their Tokio home. Yuki urged this eagerly. She could send by the younger man messages that seemed too trivial for transmission through Prince Haganè. "Yes, yes,—please call upon them—dō-zo! They will receive you so happily. Ah, and to think that you will see them long, long before I can come! You will reach Nippon before the maples have quite burned themselves away, or Fuji lowered upon her opal cone the full white robe of winter. How am I to endure the waiting? I wish I were to start with the suite of Prince Haganè to-morrow!"

Hirai's fine face echoed this sentiment vividly, but he refrained from speech. He was a correct young man, and had no intention of presuming on the young girl's veneer of Americanism. He left her at the door. It had to her fancy, now, the feeling of a shrine, a Shinto temple, approached through paths of childish memories. She lifted one gloved hand to knock, and her lips twitched at the clamorous instinct to raise both hands, rub the palms together, and clap thrice as before a deity. She controlled herself, however, shaking her head a little wistfully, and murmuring as to a voice, "No, though my soul still is Nipponese, I have become a Christian. I am half American, too. I must remember." She gave now a sharp, determined rap.

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"O-idè!" boomed a deep voice from within. Yuki's knees melted. Whatever the rest of her, they were evidently not American. She entered with downcast eyes.

Haganè did not seem to recognize her. He looked hard, and asked, "Is this Onda Yuki-ko?"

She lifted the brim of her hat, and let shy eyes rest upon him. "Your Highness, it is Yuki, a worthless young acquaintance with whom you spoke last night." She used the Japanese language, with the full complement of honorifics.

"An odd eventuation," said the other, dryly. "I thought to summon the child of my old kerai, the maiden of last evening,—and, behold, a small, pert shade from the Avenue de l'Opéra!"

"It does not augustly displease your Highness?" murmured the girl, not understanding his full meaning.

"Not at all. It may even prove valuable for Nippon, and Tetsujo could wish no more. But be seated, child. I have scanty moments to dole you, and there are messages."

"Lord," murmured Yuki, seating herself on the hard chair indicated, "it is too much for you to burden your exalted memory for my insignificant satisfaction."

Haganè ignored the deprecating whisper. Taking a seat deliberately, he began, "At the Shimbashi station of Yedo, where, since many notable officers were to accompany me, a great crowd of well-wishers thronged to say farewell, I soon discerned the dark face and the proud head

of your father, Onda Tetsujo."

He paused, smiling slightly. The girl said nothing, only bent forward a little, her face full of unconscious excitement.

"Close behind him, gentle, clinging, self-effacing, as a good wife should always be, I saw—"

Yuki, forgetting her breeding, fairly snatched the words from his mouth. "My mother,—I know, Lord, it was my dear mother! And the old nurse Suzumè, was she there?"

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"There was, indeed, a female something that incessantly bowed, and drew breath with a ferocity that drowned the hissing of the engine. Has that the air of Suzumè?"

"Yes, yes, her very self. Oh, how can I wait to get back home! Ten weeks, Lord, before I am to start!"

"The words uttered by your parents were these,—I may not recall the exact terms, but I have their purpose clear. First, Iriya said: 'Tell to our child that empty hearts and a cheerless home ache through this night of absence, for her coming.' Her soft eyes touched my heart, though men call me stern. Ere I could bow assent, your father Tetsujo—ah ha! that old kerai, the unreconstructed feudal knight!—pushed rudely past, and cried to me, 'Taint memory with no such puerile demand, my Lord! Say to the girl that hearts and aches are nothing. As long as I have yen to forward, let her remain until she is fitted, though a woman, to be of some slight service to her land. I pray you, Lord, to judge of her. Should she need to stay full ten years longer, I would not repine. I have no son. She is the substitute. Empty hearts, aching nights, bah! Crumbling barley sugar of a weak spirit! Midzu-amè in a human jar! Good Iriya, my wife, I advise you to cease your prayers before concessive deities, and learn to worship more sincerely our God of War. He is to be the flaming incarnation of this epoch!'"

"I can see—I hear them both," said Yuki. "My father is right,—though the tears that must have stung my mother's eyes do now sting mine. Lord, shall you think me fit to go to such a father? I have done what the Americans call—graduate. I have even received prizes for good study."

"Do they offer prizes here for doing duty? An immoral practice, especially for the young,—instilling envy, cupidity. But it concerns me not. Your question, Yuki,—are you fitted to return? I cannot give myself time to be satisfied entirely with the fitness; but, for other reasons, I am well aware that it is time for you to return. His Excellency, Mr. Todd, spoke of the first of the New Year. I wish it were to-morrow."

"Lord," faltered the girl, "are your august utterances heavy with reproof? Have you charges of misconduct against me?" Her guilty heart ran, as a thief for a hidden treasure, to the thought of Pierre Le Beau and the half-troth her weakness had allowed him to secure. The next words of the great man relieved her strangely.

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"Nay, nay, little one, I have heard of no wrong. Look not so fearful; one would think me Emma-O, the Lord of Hell, in the flesh. My thought was chiefly that, just now, even your present acquirements might serve Nippon."

"Ah, it is of war you hint! Here, many believe that it will not come. Is it to come, Lord?" She had drawn very close. Haganè perceived, as one looking at a picture, the exquisite balance of features in the pointed oval face, the pale width of brow under clouds of dusty hair, the refinement, the trembling sensitiveness of lips and chin. His eyes held a certain keen, inscrutable intentness of regard. The corners now wrinkled slightly with a smile.

"A nightingale studies not with a maker of swords," he said slowly. "Yet may the nightingale's note give warning where the sword could not avail. What one has not heard, cannot be told. It is a time when the whispering of leaves is to be shunned, and the fall of the petals counted."

Yuki caught her underlip between her teeth to steady its trembling. Again she felt reproved, though nothing could be kinder than the great man's voice.

"Four years," he mused aloud, "four years! Small space of time to us who are on the heights,—but to the young, still wandering happily on flowered-covered slopes, it is long, quite long. Ah, little Yuki, it is but yesterday that you came, as a child, to my Tabata villa. You clung timidly, at first, to Tetsujo's hand; but the serving-maids soon won you to the air. After that, at my request, Tetsujo brought you often. You were a scarlet poppy turned loose in that dim old garden. My eye would follow you through passages of the good Tetsujo's somewhat prosy discourse. You used to perch upon the gray rocks of the pond, and fish for hours, throwing back the small wriggling bits of gold as soon as caught. Do you remember, Yuki?"

"Yes, Lord, well do I remember," said Yuki, her mouth trembling into laughter. The self-consciousness faded. He knew that it would be so. It was for this that he had contrived the long

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speech of reminiscence. "Once," she went on shyly, "once, into that pond I fell, screaming with terror to think that certainly, now, all the goldfish would make haste to bite their enemy."

"Their best revenge, I take it, was in the cold you caught," laughed the prince.

"Nay, Highness," said she, gravely, "no cold at all did I acquire. The maid-servants and thy divine, pitying princess rescued me. They changed my worthless garments, and urged upon me much hot tea and a small, sweet powder. Indeed, but for the trouble my clumsiness occasioned, I enjoyed more the falling into that august pond than the fishing beside it."

Haganè smiled a little abstractedly. He did not laugh again. He turned to the table and smoothed the corners of a document. "The villa has no princess now, my child. In my many houses I come and go alone."

Yuki looked upon the floor. "My spirit is poisoned by your sorrow, Lord. Forgive my great rudeness in mentioning. I did not know."

He drew a short, impatient sigh. "The princess resides again with her own people in Choshiu. But these matters have interest for none but me. Hark, is that not the hour of noon now striking? I must dismiss you." She rose instantly at his words. He followed with more deliberation. She turned to the door, then wavered back to him, distressed evidently by thoughts she shrank from voicing.

"Speak, child," he said kindly, "no mad haste is necessary. Say what you will."

Still she moved soundless lips. In some inexplicable way she had fallen short. It was not only that she felt she had not reached his highest expectations, but, more definitely, she had failed to reach her own. Her acquired Americanism crackled on her, like a useless husk. She thirsted for new strength. Before her stood one able to give it, yet she could find no words to ask. "It is ten—weeks before I can start home, Lord," she managed at last to articulate. "I am only a girl, but I would die for Nippon, for my Emperor. What—what—" Again she faltered.

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Haganè took a small hand in his own and smiled reassurance. "Only the very young and inexperienced think it necessary to state willingness to die for a country. Give me the coming thought."

"In these last weeks what can I do,—what can I suffer,—how shall I pray,—that I may make myself worthy of return?"

The smile on the overhung dark face saddened into a look far tenderer than smiling. Yuki felt virtue, like a fluid, rush through her from his touch. "Keep always to the thought that you are Nipponese,—that you guard, in yourself, an immortal spirit, powerful for good or ill. Let not the tendrils of your outreaching soul cling to alien ideals, for, if so, each in the twining means a wrench and a scar, and the unscarred soul is sweeter to the gods. Think nothing of the body,—of personal desires, of personal reward. Say to yourself always, 'It is enough to be a Nipponese.'"

Yuki was already stilled and comforted. "Lord," she said, lifting brave eyes, "I think it true that the lowliest among us, through self-striving, may become a god. My little spark of light has slept until this moment. I can never again be quite the same girl who came into this room. I will curve the memory of your words about my spirit, as one shields his candle from a wind."

"In Nippon I see you next, my Yuki. And now, 'Sayonara,' till that time."

"Sayonara," whispered Yuki, and hurried out into a new day.

CHAPTER FIVE

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PREPARATIONS for an unexpectedly early start kept the Todd family in a condition of strained excitement. When the tension did relax (Mrs. Todd had more than once warned them), they would all probably shoot off into eternity, mere dull bits of leaden weight, as from a boy's rubber sling. Yet in these days the good lady had little time for speculations, whether mournful or the reverse. She, Gwendolen, and Yuki began at once a round of shopping and dressmaking. Official lady friends who had lived or visited in Japan hastened to tell of certain articles necessary to the civilized female which, absolutely, were not to be procured in Japan. At first Mrs. Todd hearkened eagerly, and made lists for future shopping; but she invariably lost the lists, and, after the first week, began to notice that some particular item declared by one gesticulating visitor to be

unpurchasable west of San Francisco, would, by the next, be named as a thing produced in full perfection only by Yokohama cobblers, jewellers, cabinet-makers, tanners, or tailors, as the case might be.

Much in the same manner, whereas one matron declared the Japanese servant a fiend, laden with an accumulation of domestic vices from the days of Pharaoh down, the next would congratulate Mrs. Todd on being about to enter upon an experience rare to this hemisphere,—perfect service, intelligently and cheerfully given.

The pleasant home on M street was abandoned, the occupants moving to a hotel. This was done that Mrs. Todd might personally supervise the packing and storing of furnishings grown dear through pleasant association. More than one stealthy tear plashed on an unresponsive packing-case.

Gwendolen's brimming joy gave room for but one regret. That lived and died in a single glance, as she saw her grand piano, ignominiously tilted, pathetically legless, carried past her through the wide front door, and down to the waiting hearse of a van.

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Mrs. Todd went to bed, during this strenuous period, immediately after dinner. She urged her daughter to follow the good example and get "rested" for struggles to come. But "No," said Gwendolen, laughing. "There will be plenty of time to rest when I'm old. I can't waste life now!"

Many of the girl's evening hours were devoted to Mr. Dodge and what he was pleased to term "Lessons in Japanese." When Yuki and Pierre were present,—Yuki now resided permanently at the Japanese Legation,—the Oriental listener would often need to bury a crimsoning face in crumpled sleeves to hide her mirth. Mr. Dodge's vocabulary was large, especially in the way of amorous and complimentary phrases, but his syntax and his pronunciation were things new on this planet. Pierre laughed too, with a superiority born of Yuki's private instruction. Gwendolen stoutly defended her professor, saying that his way of speaking the language sounded easier and more natural than Yuki's own.

Mr. Dodge, by one of those fortuitous happenings that lay, for him, like pebbles, in every chosen path, had found that he would be compelled to return to his post of duty by the same steamer on which the Todds were to sail. When he made this bold announcement, accompanied by a triumphant side-glance at Gwendolen, the girl was surprised to feel her heart give a warning throb. Despite her skill in the game and her audacity, she began to realize that in this young person she had probably met her equal. She rallied quickly in the face of danger. Exhilaration took the place of fear. She knew she was in for a good fight, and began at once to employ her other admirers in the way of Indian clubs and dumb-bells. Dodge very properly went home to South Carolina a few weeks before sailing, and did not return to Washington until the time of final departure.

If Yuki trembled at thought of her long days on an enchanted voyage, with Pierre for closest comrade, her new strength, born of Haganè, smiled down the apprehension. Not only would she refuse to yield to that beloved one a deeper pledge, but, if possible, she would win back from him the half-troth already given. She longed to return to her country, to her people, free of obligation. Her reverence demanded it. She should belong only to herself and them. So should she have a clearer road in which to approach the subject of a foreign marriage. Pierre, as yet, refused to see this vital point. He must be made to see. On those long balmy evenings on the ship, with the moon's sweet influence to help her, yes,—she could convince him,—she would triumph!

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While Senator Todd made his own few preparations, talked with all manner of congressmen on the ever-present topic of the threatened Far Eastern conflict, or reasoned with brother senators who decried so unconventional a thing as resignation from their august midst,—Pierre harassed the French Legation for confirmation of an appointment almost given, yet now, at the last, tantalizingly withheld. After insistent efforts, the best that he could gain was assurance that, in Tokio itself, in the hands of Count Ronsard, the present French minister, he would almost surely find his credentials waiting. Pierre, at his princess-mother's instigation had written personally to this Count Ronsard. "An old, dear friend of ours, mon fils," wrote Madame Olga. "Quite close, I assure you. He will be felicitated to offer what he can."

Pierre and Yuki in their many talks had come to believe that an assured diplomatic position in Tokio would greatly strengthen their chances for an early marriage. Their young ardors were to blow the drowsy coals of French and Japanese friendship. Their lives must have an influence for good! At such times the future glowed with a heavenly dawn. Pierre, ever since his arrival in Washington, little less than a year ago, had been a special favorite with Mrs. Todd. In the first place, he was a joy only to look upon, having personal beauty to a degree almost irritating in a man. He possessed, also, that subtler and rarer power called "charm." A great factor in his success was unflinching courtesy toward elderly women. He knew well the might of the chaperon. He cared little for men in any country, and the aggressive American he found peculiarly unattractive. But a woman, no matter what her age, race, or weight, was still a woman. Middleaged sighs fed his vanity equally with the giggling of débutantes in their first snare. He was not a Don Juan, far from it,—but a pleasure-loving, life-loving boy, who had never been refused a thing he wanted, and

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never intended to grudge himself a moment's delight that could be honorably enjoyed. His ideas of this honor,—it may be well to add,—were French. At different stages in his short career, Pierre had been or tried to be, in turn, a hermit, an atheist, a Roman Catholic priest like Francis of Assisi, an actor of old French classics, a poet, and an artist of the Chavannes school. With him one passion burned supreme. One fuse must disappear before a new one could be lighted. He had met Yuki first in the Todd drawing-rooms, on one of those Friday evenings allotted to the schoolgirls for receiving friends. She chanced to be wearing full Japanese attire of a soft, cloudy blue, a sash brocaded in silver ferns, and a cluster of the gold-colored "icho" berries drooping in her blue-black hair. As his eyes fell upon her, Pierre's past visions went to cold ash. All the poetry, the mysticism, the intellectuality, the exaggeration of discarded hopes flared now into a single new white flame of adoration.

December came. Christmas festivities impinged on the travellers' routine of preparations. Days which, at first, Gwendolen had declared interminable, accelerated strangely in progress, like round stones started down a gradual slope. During that last crowded week, Todd had his final, most important interview with the President and the Secretary of State. He was urged to impart with absolute freedom his personal opinions of the coming struggle, and its probable outcome for the world. In return he was given full and satisfactory instructions. He left the executive mansion strengthened in purpose, and clarified in his own beliefs.

At the station, on the morning of departure, an unexpectedly large crowd gathered to say "Farewell." Prominent were the Kanrios and their diplomatic suite. Gwendolen's youthful friends of both sexes advanced like an animated flower-garden, so profuse were the bouquets. The French ambassador also was there. A Russian attaché insisted upon kissing Pierre good-bye.

The two drawing-rooms of the sleeper "Nurino" were so heaped with dulcet offerings that the legitimate occupants—hurrying in to the warning cry of "Buo-o-o-ord!"—were forced to seek temporary accommodation in the open car.

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"Why! It's just like setting off for anywhere!" cried Gwendolen, a little blankly, as the train drew out through acrid smoke, and old familiar landmarks began their flight backward, to the city.

"Who cares about the setting off? It's the roosting on, that counts!" carolled the optimistic Dodge.

The train pulled steadily, now, for the South. After much disagreement and discussion, and the bending of yellow, black, and brown heads over countless railroad folders,—each with its own route in a pulsing artery of red,—they had decided for a southern tour. No one of the party except Dodge, who, if one chose to believe him, held acquaintance with all corners of the globe, had been lower than the Potomac River. Mrs. Todd remembered an aunt, native of New Orleans. The aunt had died long since, but the city remained. They were to have a glimpse of the Gulf Coast, and at least two days in the sleepy, picturesque, yet hugely prosperous Crescent City.

The month was January, in most places a bad month for weather; but in this opening of the year 1904 the South was apparently bent upon justifying its conventional adjective of "sunny." The little party left Washington in a scourge of sleet and a pall of gray; it reached New Orleans to find the whole city, creole alleys traced three centuries ago and broad avenues of later wealth, alike glorified,—"paved with afternoon." Scarcely a gulf breeze stirred. The levees by the muddy river lay like saurians, with turpentine and sugar barrels and bursting cotton bales upon their backs, in lieu of scales. In city gardens, palm-trees stood at "present arms" of glossy rectitude. Pansies, daisies, and other small bedding flowers bloomed in the open air. Potted ferns or crotons stood about on broad galleries, or upon the shell-white walks bordering emerald lawns.

Gwendolen declared it a delusion, a mirage, deliberately planned for their entanglement. Yuki admitted that even Japan could not offer so tropic a feast to the eye in January. Mrs. Todd found her greatest satisfaction in "doing" the place. Dodge, of course, was cicerone. He led them to the old French market and gave them a strange, steaming elixir, brewed in huge copper vats and misnamed mere "coffee." He knew the small lair called "Beguet's," where alone on earth, he solemnly affirmed, real breakfasts were to be procured. He hired a box at the French Opera for Sunday night.

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"Sunday!" Mrs. Todd gasped, with upraised hands and eyes.

"Sunday!" echoed Yuki, less vociferously, but with a corresponding air of pained astonishment.

"Certainment!" ejaculated Pierre, who was beginning to feel at home. "It is transplanted Paris. Why not Sunday night, better than another? All persons have been to mass, except our naughty selves. The piety of the others may chance to include us. God is good! Allons! The opera is Faust, with the full ballet and music. Time means little here! Vive New Orleans!" After a laughing glance into Mrs. Todd's still dubious countenance he whispered, insinuatingly, "It is never to be known in Washington or—Tokio—dear Madame."

In the end he carried his point and his party. Never had he been in such spirits. Yuki could scarcely keep her eyes from his radiant face. Mr. Todd declared him a mineral spring that had just blown its way through a boulder. He stopped turbaned mammies or wondering children on the banquets,—which in New Orleans means sidewalks,—that he might elicit, by his correct Parisian French, answers in the delicious native patois. At each success he hugged himself anew.

"Ç'est ça, même! Mo pas geignin l'argent pour butin çi lalà!" he murmured ecstatically. "Geignin plein!" Passing the cathedral, Pierre asked of a lounging, large-hipped negress: "Est-ce qu'il y à la messe à la Cathédrale demain?" to receive the impudent answer:

"Sainte Pitie! Est-çe que vous croire que le va levé apres so' bon diner au poisson pou' vini donner nous autres la sainte messe? Bon Dieu la Sainte Vierge! Ha! Ha!"

"Holy Mother! But it is French, en glacé,—crushed, with the cream swimming and the flavor heightened!"

Todd alone stared out across the dim, majestic river through De Soto's eyes. He tried to feel himself the man, to prophesy as that seer had prophesied. The great city and the long levees were builded in that vanished mind, before the first adobe brick was moulded, or the first dark cedar hewn. Now in himself, as Todd the new American minister, he felt the country of his dreams creep nearer, lured by the magnet of the Panama Canal. Within his own life, should God be pleased to spare him to a fair old age, new craft would thread the Mississippi delta, small merchantmen at first, and sailing vessels, each with the banner of the red sun on its mast. Asiatic labor, silent, skilful, insidious, would contest for preeminence with the saturnine Dago, the "cayjin," the Quadroon, and the established African.

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Each moment, westward from the city, held a novelty and a delight. The sugar-fields of Louisiana, stretching for leaden-colored miles, and soon to be pierced by myriad tiny spears of awakening green, appeared to Yuki a giant sort of rice-field from her own land.

"If it were cut up into many small piece, all of different shape and size, with little crooked baby-levees binding the edges,—it would be exacterlee the winter rice-fields of Nippon."

Sometimes, in an island of higher ground, the white-columned house of a sugar-planter gleamed, and near it rose mammoth live oaks, huge tumuli of green, the underbranches swaying with grizzled moss. In the open country, such trees crouched low above stealthy creeks, or blotted widening lagoons.

While in the city, they had read and heard of recent heavy rains to the West, flooding a wide agricultural district. On the borderland of Texas, they knew they had reached the threatened fields. Cypress, magnolia, sweet gum, and bay trees stood knee deep in a sea of dull chrome, churned from roads of clay. It seemed a lake of yellow onyx. Between the trunks writhed a tropical disorder of vines, palmetto, and undergrowth. In wide, clear spaces, drifting fence rails or half-submerged buildings told of ruin already accomplished. Now the whole unstable sea was covered by a carpet of the floating "water-hyacinth," which, in later months, was to turn the bayous and lagoons into veins of amethyst. It seemed incredible to the little party, staring solemnly from train windows, that they were in temperate America at all. Every floating spar of wood became an alligator's head, every springing tuft of white swamp flower a meditative stork.

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Night fell swiftly upon the watery forest, sucked down into it as to a familiar lair. With the next morning, the world had changed to a dry desert, above which arched an unrelated sky.

"Can we really be on the same planet?" asked Gwendolen; "or in the night, did this little measuring-worm of a train reach up and pull itself to Mars?"

Before, behind, everywhere, stretched spaces of exhausted gray sand, rising now and again into nerveless hills. For vegetation were set innumerable rosettes of the spiked yucca, with small heaps of the prickly pear, a cactus bush built up of fleshy bulbs, leaf out of leaf, like inflated green coral. On some of the thorny ridges perched star-like, yellow blooms. On others were stuck thick, purple fingers, known politely by the name of "figs." Dodge remarked sententiously that it was a very interesting plant; though, by raisers of cattle, not considered desirable. "Stock won't eat it a little bit," he explained cherubically. "Get stickers into their noses."

"Do you call that thing a plant?" cried Gwendolen, pointing. "It may grow, but it is no more a plant than a canary is a crab."

Dodge smiled again, the irritating smile of the well-informed. "Wait till to-morrow in Arizona, if you want to know how it feels to be struck dumb."

Gwendolen tossed her head. Her tendency during these initial days was to overact indifference.

"I rather think I shall not undergo the humiliation of incapacity to speak! Life heretofore has brought no crises in which I could not command a fairly adequate linguistic expression of my visual experiences."

"Whew,—how did you remember it all?" said Dodge under his breath. Yuki turned her intense face from the window. At sight of the absorbed, half-dazed expression, Gwendolen gave a little laugh, crying, "Here is one already nearing the borders of silence! That is Yuki's way. When she begins to feel things, she draws back in her shell, and puts sealing-wax on the door. What is it now, Yuki,—lack of English,—that keeps you so dumb?"

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"No, not exacterlee," said Yuki, flushing a little at the turning of all eyes. "I have not good English, of course; but I could not say to myself all that I see, even in Nipponese. When too many new things come, it is like fat people trying to squeeze together through a door,—all get mashed, and none come through."

Dodge gazed at the speaker in quizzical admiration. "Miss Onda, I long for a phonograph record. That is a masterly exposition of a profound psychological truth!"

Yuki cast a laughing, half-pathetic glance toward Pierre. "Is it very bad names that he is calling me, M. Le Beau?"

In spite of Gwendolen's hyperbolic boast, Arizona, next day, came near to fulfilling Dodge's prophecy. The world stretched bigger and broader, as though here, instead of at the Arctic poles, the "flattening-like-an-orange" of our globe took place. The sky, immeasurably remote and tangibly arched, was a thin crystal dome soldered to earth by the lead-line of the horizon. The red sand was hot to look at. The hills, though of vaster proportions, had more of helplessness and degeneracy in their sprawling curves. Yucca grew very closely now, marching up and down the slopes like fierce explosive little soldiers with bayonets too long for them. The objectionable prickly pears vanished. In their places rose a stranger order of being, cacti in tangled bunches, as of green serpents, sometimes with the licking red tongue of a blossom,—hunched woolly lambs of growth on high, thin stilts of shaggy black,—huge green melons, ribbed, spiked, and lazy, that seemed strangely at ease on their burning couches of sand. Far off, against the rim of nothingness, dry, blue mountain shapes emerged, mere tissue filaments of hue. And now, as part of the unreal perspective, giant cacti rose, at first no more than scratches and cross-marks on a window-pane, but coming steadily close. The first that flashed, tall, stark, and tangible, into the very faces of those who watched, brought small exclamations of wonder and distaste. It passed instantaneously, fleeing backward into nothingness,—a herald to proclaim the coming horde. In a few moments, imagination, the sunshine, and the day became mere mediums for the aggressive race. This scorched eternity was made for them. Isolated and defiant, their laws were to themselves. It seemed a deliberate assumption that they should mock reality, taking on the evil forms of crucifix, gallows, skeleton-trees, and mile-posts, where nothing but a famished death was to be pointed. The desert might have been a vast sea-bottom, set with grim coral trees and hardened polyyps.

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"They are a race of evil spirits, petrified," whispered Gwendolen. "I feel their sinister association with our human life. See what shapes they have chosen!"

"Yes," said Yuki in return, and caught Gwendolen's hand as if for comfort. "You are right, Gwendolen. I think it is a Buddhist hell of trees."

"But what could cause this doom to befall an innocent tree, little sister?"

"It must be evil karma," said Yuki, with wide yet shrinking eyes upon the desert. "Perhaps a tree where a blameless man was hanged, perhaps the tree of a martyr's sacrifice,—perhaps even,—" here her voice fell to an intense and dramatic whisper which chilled her listeners while it stirred them, "perhaps that terrible—terrible tree whereon our—Saviour—See—see! now, over there—there—where on top of a hill three great crosses, the middle one so great and black and high,—is it not Gethsemane?" She pointed with a shaking finger, unable to utter more.

"Come, Yuki, do not look—I forbid it!" cried Pierre, vehemently. In a moment, with a shudder, he added, "Albrecht Dürer might have dreamed them in a nightmare, had he killed his own child and slept afterward! Mother of God! I shall look no more!"

"Nor I either, Pierre," cried Mrs. Todd, in great relief. "You are right to correct Yuki,—she does have such morbid fancies. I've heard her tell stories of ghosts, and incarnations, and those scary things that would make the flesh creep on your bones. Thank heaven, this day is nearly done! Ugh! See how the lengthening shadows spread them on the sand!" Deliberately she pulled down the small window-shade, leaned back, and closed her eyes.

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"What's the matter, dear? Are you faint?" asked Mr. Todd, bending over her.

"No, but I'm thirsty. Ring for some lemonades, Cy. This dust has made my throat as dry as a lime-burner's wig!"

Gwendolen rose. "Well, you can have your lemonades, but I am going to watch the desert until night drives down the last black cactus-peg. It's a thing to remember!"

"Voilà! It's a thing to forget," challenged Pierre. "Nay, Yuki-ko, you must not follow. Tears are on your cheeks. Stay here, and let us talk of your beautiful land, forgetting the harsh ugliness outside."

He, too, leaned over, and pulled down a shade. Yuki made a slight motion of protest, then submitted. "Yes, let us talk of the umè-flowers," she whispered. "They are the first."

Gwendolen had taken a seat to herself at the far end of the open compartment. Here, alone, she watched the red sands smoulder into gray. For a brief half-hour the plant shadows stretched elastically into a network of black. Suddenly they sank, as water, into the sand. The upright stalks themselves began to waver and lose shape. An instant more and they would have vanished like their shadows; but now, in the western sky, just where the heated disc of copper had been lowered, an aftermath of glory mocked the night. The cactus forms, against the gleam, acquired new menace and fresh exaggeration. The brightness shut down quickly, like a box-lid, and a universe of stars sprang out. Tangled in their beams, again loomed up the cacti.

"Fair maid, thy summons to the lemonade!" said Dodge, close behind her. "By Jove! I almost committed a rhyme! Fair maid,—lemonade,—good combination, think I'll write it on my cuff."

At last the girl turned from her desert.

Next day, to the outspoken satisfaction of Mrs. Todd, aridity had begun to retreat before civilization. Even the small spot called Yuma seemed, with its station garden of green, a bit of Paradise. Before reaching it, Dodge had carefully printed a large notice, using the top of one of Gwendolen's florist boxes. This he hung in full view of all, at the end of the car.

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"We approach YUMA. No puns aloud. First offence, one bottle. Second offence, five bottles. Third offence, a whole case. By Order of the General Manager."

The few other travellers destined for the long California journey were, by this time, all on friendly terms. No one could have resisted the combined gayeties of Gwendolen, Dodge, and Pierre Le Beau. Yuki, though less responsive, was, as usual, an object both of interest and admiration.

In lower California Mrs. Todd averred that at last she was in America. The trip up the coast, with glimpses of Narragansett surf springing up in dazzling whiteness between rows of eucalyptus, pepper, and live-oak trees, or over the roofs of tiled adobe houses, could not turn her from the belief.

Near San Jose, cottages peered out from arching vines of rose. Gwendolen was distressed and surprised to find that roses, here, did not bloom continuously, and always in abundance. "They must show like glaciers, when they do come," she admitted.

With San Francisco, modern life, society, stress, began, anew. Old acquaintances sent in cards. Gwendolen began a whole volume of new admirers, while Yuki, with Pierre as escort, found certain Japanese friends and acquaintances, one the child of an old family servant of her father's house.

To many thousands of voyagers, San Francisco is but a stopping place, a bird-rest for preening. As a fact it is a city which possesses an unusual share of individuality, of "atmosphere," in the sense that writers use. No where else are to be seen such gray and wind-swept streets, where houses stand sidewise, as if mounting flights of stairs, the parlor windows of one house looking through the chimney-pots of its neighbor. Nowhere else are perched palaces like those of San Francisco, or a growth, as huge and strange in its exotic coloring, as Chinatown. The great, round, shimmering bay and Golden Gate are as a loom, and ships of the harbor, shuttles weaving together the nations of East and West.

On sailing day, new friends and new flowers gave the little party of the Todds "bon voyage."

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"If New Orleans is a transplanted Paris, this is a Tschaikowsky Symphonie Orientale translated into terms of American life," said Pierre.

Slowly the city turned from a city to a patch of lichen on a rock. Queer little ditches, which they knew for streets, showed lines of perpendicular-crawling beetles, which they recognized to be whizzing electric cars. They watched it all eagerly, leaning far along the stern rail of the ship.

Then the sea winds caught them, screaming a welcome into shrinking ears. The white, attendant sea-gulls laughed in harsh appreciation of the antics of the wind. The ocean lifted, and strove, and pounded his cosmic greeting; and,—and,—well—there was a good stewardess on board!

CHAPTER SIX

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THE first days of any voyage are admirable in proportion as little, or nothing, is said of them. In this, as in other phases of human intercourse, delicacy lies in restraint rather than in eloquence. Thus is the bloom of society preserved.

Mr. Dodge, the self-confident, the experienced, the ubiquitous, was first to "show up." The outer reefs of the California coast do not tend toward placidity. Even Dodge did not care to count the hours since he had begun to feel "sleepy" and had sought his cabin.

Mr. Todd next met the sun. To be more accurate, it was a fog, where only a small bright spot, rubbed as in the centre of a tarnished tray, indicated our chief luminary. Todd's cap was pulled very low, his ulster collar very high. His hands disappeared utterly into large pockets. He walked with the jerky directness of a marionette toward the smoking-room.

On the third day, when the sun actually shone and the pewter sky was undergoing a gradual transformation into blue enamel, Mr. Todd was able to sit on deck,—he still remained noticeably near the smoking-room,—and to enjoy unprintable yarns from fellow-smokers. Missionary children began to gambol around the promenade deck, and over the feet of swathed and flaccid mortals, lately exhumed, all with the blinking regard of insects suddenly disclosed beneath a garden stone. Dodge, for a wonder, was not in sight. Mr. Todd had his back toward the main-deck exit from the salon, when one of the group about him thumped a knee, stared up, crying, "By G—, look at that!" and called loudly upon his Maker to witness that the sight was fair.

Out to the deck had blown a golden apparition,—a tall, slim girl with yellow hair crushed under a wide and most unsailor-like hat of yellow sea-poppies. Her skirts and the rest of her were silken browns and yellows. She made straight for the group, rustling like a small eddy in a heap of autumn-leaves. Todd turned a few inches. At the expression on his face a third convive nudged the speaker. "Oh, er—beg ten thousand pardons—didn't have an idea—" mumbled the crimson one.

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"Neither did I," said Todd, enigmatically, as he rose.

"Oh, dearest of dads," they heard a fresh voice cry. "Now isn't this a world with the top off? I feel like a bunk caterpillar turned into a butterfly."

Pierre followed his three emancipated comrades, immediately after "tiffin," as the midday meal hereafter must be called. He was, as usual, immaculate in attire, but bore an air of citric melancholy.

Next arose, in all her might, Mrs. Cyrus Carton Todd. In her aggressive costume of starched piqué, fortified by gold lorgnettes and an air carefully adapted from certain acknowledged "grandes dames" of Washington, she took immediate possession of the Captain, the best deck chair, and the passenger list. As wife of a senator and lady of the new American minister to Japan, she was accepted at once, without demur, reigning Empress of the voyage.

Sportive infants, oblivious of comfortably extended limbs of lesser mortals, skirted those of Mrs. Todd. Silent Chinese "boys," dispensing beef-tea and gruel, swung pigtails aside from her austere garments.

Of the party Yuki alone now abode in the mysterious seclusion of her stateroom.

Before sunset, on that third afternoon, the sea, to use the Captain's expression, quieted into a "bloomin' mill-pond." White birds fluttered incessantly about the stern of the ship, sometimes sinking to the waves for an unstable rest, or rising to visit, in one great silver swoop, the startled and delighted passenger deck.

Pierre found a chair beside his chaperon. He moved it a confidential three inches nearer before asking, "Will she not be able to come up sometime before to-morrow? This is perfect."

"She has commissioned me to say that she will try to make the effort this evening, after our dinner; that is, if—" here she shook a playful finger—"if I will play propriety, and any kindly disposed person could be found to assist her upstairs."

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"Ah! I'll go down now, and take seat upon her doormat," cried Pierre, in his excitement.

"The Chinese coolie might spill chicken broth upon you."

The day waned slowly. Passengers were beginning already their postprandial walks. Mrs. Todd nodded patronizingly to one and then to another.

"Madame," began Pierre, with his caressing look, "you have been almost as a mother—a good, indulgent mother—to me in that big land of yours. You will continue to be my very good friend in Japan, will you not?"

"Why, silly boy, of course I will," she cried. "Have not I always been your friend and Yuki's,—even to the point of what Cyrus called 'entangling alliances'?"

"It is because of its preciousness that I want to hear you say it, dear Mrs. Todd. After all, I am ignorant of Japan, and of what social phantoms Yuki and I may have to fight. But with your championship, I am strong, invincible!" He gave her fat hand just the most delicate of pressures. It might have been the touch of a devoted son; it might, had Mrs. Todd been twenty years younger, have been—well, almost anything. His dark, impassioned eyes, the color of new-opened violets, hung on her kindly face.

If fault could be found with Pierre, it would be in excess of beauty. From the old blood of France he had received refinement, poise, delicacy,—the throbbing of purple veins in temples as satin-smooth as young leaves, and thin nostrils that shivered at every passing gust of emotion. From the more barbaric, vivid Russian mother had come depth of coloring, the flash of sudden animation, deep blue in the eyes, and gold in the hair. Yet with all its fairness the face was not effeminate. One could think of it, without offence, in the armor of a young crusader, or even behind the mediæval visor of a robber-baron. There might be a hint of cruelty behind the wet crimson of the perfect mouth. To Yuki that face was the epitome of all earthly beauty. Before it, the artist in her knelt, in adoration.

Shortly after twilight came the reverberating clamor of the first dinner-gong. Mrs. Todd and her feminine satellites had agreed to "dress." Mrs. Todd had never made acquaintance with a décolleté gown until her entrance into Washington, not so many years before. Now she was wont to declare loudly that she could not really enjoy her evening meal in covered shoulders,—a statement which always brought the twinkles to Todd's eyes. He openly loathed his "tombstone shirt-front;" but Gwendolen, of a later and more favored generation, wore her pretty low-cut frocks as unconsciously as a flower wears its sheath.

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Pierre sat through the interminable courses, scarcely knowing what he ate or to whom he spoke. His thoughts were all with Yuki. He was to see her again after three endless days! The little cool, slim palm would lie, perhaps, in his. He would hear her voice, as different from these chattering table women all around him as is the sound of running water to the whirr of machines. The past ten days of journeying—though indeed they had not been for a moment entirely alone—left a delicious aroma of familiarity, almost of married friendship. What hours the future was to hold for them in Japan, in Europe, in India!

Mrs. Todd's half-teasing voice drew him back from the dear reverie. "Come, Mister Le Beau, dinner is over at last. I noticed that you ate nothing. The Captain has been telling us the most delightful jokes. But we must not forget our promise to Miss Onda. Gwendolen, dear, will you go on deck and see that a chair is made ready for the poor child?" The speaker had been rising ponderously. She turned again to the Captain. "These Japanese are always wretched sailors, I am told."

"No good, any of them!" corroborated the Captain, with emphasis. "The sight of a floral anchor at a landlubber's funeral is enough to make them ill."

"I wonder how it will be with their admirals before the Russian navy," mused Todd, with pensive eyes on a blue-gowned Chinese steward.

"It wouldn't matter either way," sneered the Captain. "No fight is going to come off! I've known these Yokohama Japs for seventeen years, Mr. Todd. A bad lot! They are just trying a game of bluff borrowed from—no offence, gentlemen—from America." The Captain was a Liverpool Englishman.

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"Just so!" grinned Dodge, "the kind of bluff that works,—recipe handed down by one G. Washington."

Pierre and Mrs. Todd approached Yuki's cabin. She heard them, and tottered to the entrance of the tiny passage. Her face shone ghastly white above the square black collar of her adzuma-coat. Pierre instantly drew her arm within his own. She clung to him helplessly for an instant, then, with an obvious effort, rallied and stood erect.

"There, there, now, keep to Pierre's arm," encouraged Mrs. Todd, with the smile of a patron deity. "If you'll promise to be good, I'll go ahead and not look around." She preceded them slowly along the passage. Her décolleté back loomed, in the dim light, like the half of a large, round cheese.

Yuki, once safely on deck, tucked lovingly among soft rugs and pillows by Gwendolen, found little indeed to say. Mrs. Todd gave orders, before sweeping off to her game of bridge whist, that Yuki must not be teased into talking, but must lie still, and let the night air and the breeze refresh her. Pierre, of course, remained by her side. He cared little though the whole ship knew that he loved the Japanese girl and longed to make her his wife. Dodge and Gwendolen had affairs of their own to settle, and disappeared around the other side. Gradually the deck was deserted by all but Pierre and his companion. He secured a small hand in his own. The girl was too languid, or perhaps too blissful, to demur.

"Oh, to be seasick is most unpleasantest thing of all!" she whispered once, with a short but very genuine shudder. "I shall never cross back on this water,—never, never! The little bed downstairs it seem like a grave, and one wish hard that it was truly a grave."

After another long silence, broken only by whispered sentences from Pierre, she pointed to a constellation. "How nice and kind the stars are to come out here with us, so far from home! That cluster is exactly the same one I used to watch from my little room at school. When I see it in Japan, and count the stars to be sure all have followed, it will be stranger feeling yet."

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"Darling," said Pierre, "sometime we are to carry that little shining group the whole way round the world with us,—when you are my wife."

The great ship rose softly and sank again, as if breathing. The stars stared in, unwinking. Yuki's face was deepening in sweet content. Every shiver of the engine, every angry hurtling of the insulted waters, thrust them consciously nearer to Japan.

Roughening waves, toward the night of the fourth day, indicated, according to the Captain, approach to the Hawaiian Islands. He added, "If any one is keen enough on it to get up at daybreak, he will see the first outlying peaks."

Todd, in a passion of romantic interest that was part of the whole marvellous epic, climbed to the deck before dawn. The stars, he fancied, looked coldly upon him, as if they resented his presence at their coming defeat. He leaned far over, watching waves that lapped the sides of the ship in a strange rhythm. Under the brightening day he stared across an ocean apparently as eternal and infinite as space, that stretched, he knew, north and south beyond him, twelve thousand miles of unbroken liquid desert from pole to pole. And yet through the centuries, this perilous waste had been crossed from oasis to island oasis by the frail canoes of men;—dark Polynesian painted savages with marvellous powers of carving and inlaying, who had left traces of their coming from New Zealand to Alaska, and through the Philippines to Japan. He pictured the advent of that first dusky Ulysses who, in feathered armor and a Greek helmet carved from a cinnamon-tree, had here, ages before, terminated his thousand-mile wanderings from a forgotten South. All this had now become a new world for Todd's own light-haired Saxon race to fall heir to, stepping-stones in its inevitable stride to the teeming coasts of Asia.

Yuki, too, in such excitement that she could barely stop to dress, had been staring out of the port-hole of her stateroom since an early hour. If one of the great birds swooping incessantly along the sides of the ship had paused to look, he would have seen a small face, white as himself, fitted into the round brass frame. She was there before dawn had quickened under the sea. The mystery and the first unspeakable shiver of a newly created day had been hers. "And God moved upon the face of the waters," whispered reverent Oriental lips. She saw the first dark triangle of land glide toward her through the thinning darkness,—the shimmer of rose and green on half-veiled slopes, the gradual lighting up of tapering peaks,—and then, the full orchestration of the risen sun.

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She reached the deck to find not only Mr. Todd, but the greater number of the passengers, assembled to watch the gorgeous spectacle from the entrance of Honolulu Bay. Night had rolled up from the sleepy town, and surged in great sails of pearl-tinted cloud up dark blue-green gullies of the hills. Red scars of volcanic slopes burned through the morning, whole peaks seemed incandescent, and terraced gardens, cleared from lower mists, stood outlined in reflected orange light.

A few moments more, and the iridescent pageant vanished. Down on the shore, rude wharves and freight-sheds and cheap, new-painted boat-houses stared out impertinently. Back of the harbor front the little town nestled prettily enough in its setting of tropic greens, and half-way up the volcanic cliffs patches of tilled fields or clumps of forest-trees relieved the sandy wastes. At intervals a tall white house among its palms shone out like a child's block, half imbedded in moss.

As the ship touched the dock, and the company broke up to watch the native boys diving for coppers, Mrs. Todd gathered her clan together for a holiday on shore. Yuki had decided to wear a white American gown. Gwendolen also was in white, like a great lily. Dodge showed up in spotless duck and a pith helmet; Pierre wore immaculate flannels; while Mrs. Todd, in the stiffest of skirts, the thinnest of lawn waists, and a white linen Alpine hat a trifle too small, looked unfortunately like a perfume bottle with a white leather top.

They walked in radiant single-file down the gangway, the faces of all three women changing to

sudden blankness at the appalling rigidity of earth, after recent days on a swaying deck. "I—I—don't believe I can walk at all, just yet," said Mrs. Todd, and reached out for her natural protector. In an instant Dodge had whistled up two cabriolets driven by sleepy-eyed Kanakas in California hats. At the market, a low Spanish-looking edifice with no walls, Mrs. Todd insisted upon getting out. Some one on the ship had told her to be sure to see the market; and this the conscientious traveller intended to do, though the very peaks above them seemed to rock and leap with subconscious friskiness. Here thronged a mingled race, both buyers and sellers,—English, Japanese, Chinese, Hawaiians, and Yankees. All the vegetable stands were owned by Chinese, all the fruit by Kanakas. Dodge insisted on the fact as eloquent of racial tendencies. In this magic climate the growth of vegetables is accompanied by an even more fervid growth of weeds, and so requires patient vigilance. Fruit, on the other hand, cultivates itself. "All the lordly Hawaiian has to do," said Dodge, "is to stand or sit under the tree, and let it fall into his lap." Gwendolen took the value from this last remark by indicating a heap of horny "jackfruit,"—a thing the shape and size of a watermelon, which grows out of the trunk, apparently, of live oaks, and asking, scornfully, how much Kanaka would be left when one of those had fallen.

The fish dealers' department gleamed with iridescent color. Shrimps and crabs seemed fashioned in Favrille glass. Lobsters wore polka-dots of blue. None of these crustacea had claws, but whether deprived of them by man or nature was never ascertained.

As they drove up the narrow avenues, the unique mixture of the population became more apparent. Chinese evidently formed the inferior caste of laborer, content with a daily wage. Cleverer Japanese bustled about newly opened shops of foreign wares, or hung out professional signs of doctor, lawyer, or notary public. The Yankee strolled about with a half-disdainful glance; but the lordliest was not so proud as the ragged sons of Kamehameha, who, preëmpting shady nooks in doorways, stared disapprovingly on the passer-by. In the grounds of the former "palace," members of a present legislature lolled on the green, and nibbled peanuts. Pert Kanaka girls, in New York shirt-waists and automobile veils, minced by the side of fat mamas in Mother Hubbard gowns, generally of red, with huge ruffles about the yoke.

"Stop, Cy! Tell the man to stop. There's a druggist! I have several things to get!"

"And look! next to it a book-store advertising the latest novels," supplemented Gwendolen. "Doesn't that seem a joke? We must get some. I see souvenirs, and photographs, and—"

"I'll tell you what we'd better do. You women-folks get out and shop. Le Beau will stick to Yuki, I guess; while Dodge and I take this carriage around to the post-office,—I've heard there was one,—and try to find out the latest news about the war," cried Mr. Todd.

In a quarter of an hour they were back, breathless. "War's coming, and it's coming soon!" panted the senator.

"Yes, that's the ticket. Japan has called, and Russia must show her hand or crawfish," supplemented Dodge.

"But not really, really—yet *begun*?" whispered Yuki, who had turned very pale.

"What *does* the young man mean?" asked Mrs. Todd, anxiously, of her spouse. "I can't believe in irresponsible war rumors. I *sha'n't* believe them. Why, only two days before we left Washington, Prince Breakitoff assured me solemnly that the difficulty would never be allowed to reach the point of war."

Mr. Todd winked toward his secretary. "Well," he said solemnly, "Prince Breakitoff ought to know more about the facts of the case than a Hawaiian newspaper."

"He certainly *ought* to," said Dodge, ambiguously.

"War! Who dares to hint of war?" cried Pierre. "Look at this sky above us, and that tangle of sun and shower dragging rainbow echoes across a peacock-colored bay! Who could be found to fight on such an earth? Do you not say so, too, my Yuki?"

Yuki started slightly, and hesitated, as if to form her words. Before she could speak, Dodge had interrupted: "As long as we are so close, would you-all mind walking one more block on foot? The prettiest sight in the town is just to the left of that jutting brick wall down there." He pointed. Mrs. Todd was off. Yuki slipped in close to Gwendolen, and clung to her friend's arm. She did not want to think, just now, of war. Past new American shops they went, ice-cream "parlors," dry-goods displays of underwear,—"marked down" sales, of course,—and windows of ready-made gowns on insipid waxen dummies. Dodge had taken a few feet in advance. He now turned sharply, facing into a narrow street, one of the old native thoroughfares, bordered by walls of brick and stone where moss spread and dampness oozed. On an absurdly narrow pavement squatted a row of fat and shapeless beings, presumably women, half buried in wreaths and coils of strange flowers.

"Behold the far-famed lei sellers of Hawaii!" announced Dodge, with an histrionic gesture.

"I see no hens," said Mrs. Todd, through raised lorgnettes.

"These are a different brand of lei," explained Dodge, without a smile; "flower-wreaths that are to the hat of the Hawaiian dandy what an orchid or a gardenia is to the button-hole of a Fifth Avenue sport."

The sellers had sprung instantly into kneeling postures, all as if pulled by a single wire. Brown arms went forth, like those of crabs, flower hung. "Lei, lei, Honolulu lei! Prettie flower! Prettie ladees! Dollar—Fifty cents! Here, ladee, prettie lei, twunty-fi' cents!"

"Offer a quarter for three, and see them hustle," said Dodge.

"Oh, what visions of beauty!" breathed Gwendolen, and flung down silver coin at random. "See, ropes of carnations! Pink oleanders threaded into regular cables! And oh, the lovely yellow things,—my color,—golden acacias, I believe. I shall loop myself like an East Indian idol in these fragrant necklaces. And what are those purple things, and those? Why, why, I don't know the others at all. I thought I was friends with every flower. They smell like heaven!"

"Frangipani, ylang-ylang, stephanotis, plumaria, acacia," rattled Dodge, in the tone and manner of a professional guide.

"What a delightful courier you would make, Mr. Dodge!" cried saucy Gwendolen. "I think I'll bespeak your services, now, for my wedding journey."

"I'm jolly well apt to be along on that particular trip, you know," retorted the young man, with such cool assurance that all laughed—except Mrs. Todd. That good lady had begun to view, with some apprehension, the over-confident tactics of the attaché. Gwendolen, after an unsuccessful attempt to stare him "down," bent flushed cheeks and laughing eyes to the flowers. "We must all wear *lei*, of course," she cried, a trifle unsteadily. "It's positively the only thing to do on such a day! Yuki, pink carnations will be ravishing on your little white sailor-hat, and also, by a happy coincidence, on Pierre's new Panama. Dad, you and mother must have this divine stephanotis, mixed with a little smilax, for a green old age. Just think of buying strung stephanotis by the yard! And, Mr. Dodge,—last and not least, Mr. T. Caraway Dodge!" Mockingly she caught up a string of magenta-colored "bachelor buttons," and would have offered them with a curtsy; but already Dodge had carefully wound his helmet in coils of acacia flowers until it had become, in shape and size, an old-fashioned beehive made of gold.

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This time she presented her back squarely. The others withheld laughter until they should have read the expression on the chaperon's face. But she, oblivious apparently of this new bit of daring, had lorgnettes at her eyes, and was studying carefully a closely written list,—a composite of suggestions, made up for her by admiring ship friends. "Punch Bowl Crater, The Bishop Museum, Banana Plantations, Waki-ki Beach,—note colors on the shoals,—House where R. L. Stevenson resided," she was murmuring, as though to fix each in her memory. Suddenly she looked up. "Cyrus, the carriages! I doubt whether we can get them all in, but I intend to do my best."

"Mother!" began Gwendolen, in a note of protest. Yuki was smiling, and Pierre also. As long as they were together, nothing else mattered. The countenance of Dodge, however, had an acrobatic fall from elation to horrified disappointment. At sight of this, Gwendolen actually glittered mischief.

"Certainly, mother dear," she hastened to answer. "Let us take everything in,—even a little more, if possible. We all need our minds improved,—and some of us our manners!" Dodge, darting a look into her face, found only trustful innocence. The carriages had arrived. With great ostentation he assisted Mrs. Todd into her place. "I think I shall be able to supply one or two interesting spots not down on that list," he suggested, with a tentative look at the empty cushion beside her. "Claus Spreckels' house, the Infirmary, the Honolulu University with miles of hedges made up of volcanic stone overgrown with night-blooming cereus—you mustn't miss that!" Dodge's eyes and his smile were frankness embalmed and irradiated. Mrs. Todd perforce smiled in reply. "Jump in," she said cordially. "You're quite a treasure in travelling, Mr. Dodge."

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Gwendolen meekly took a rear seat by her father. As she pressed lovingly against him, sending upward the tiniest little teased smile of discomfiture, his face broke into merry wrinkles. "I think you've found your match this time, little girl," he whispered.

"You just wait," nodded the oracular Gwendolen.

It is a memorable experience, analogous to nothing else in the world, that landing, for one iridescent day, in the Pacific's mid-ocean, throwing one's fancies and one's heart into strange tropic scenes, and then returning at nightfall, like tired, happy children, to the great old mother-nursery of the ship.

By the next morning, not even a cloud on that horizon from which we are fleeing betrays the hiding-place of land. At once the island takes proper place as a vision, a mirage of the imagination, where souls of certain privileged beings have met, and are henceforth bound in a unity of mystic comradeship. After such a day, Pacific passengers turn to one another with kindlier smiles, the whole ship changes into one heaving picnic party, old Time himself joins in the holiday, and personal dislikes, brought on board, are flung to the waves. That most of these animosities, like the Biblical bread, return to the owners after not so many days, need not affect present hilarity.

As may be supposed, Gwendolen and her closest attendant, Dodge, were small whirling centres in the round of gay diversions. The conventional deck-games were started, and a terminating three days of competitive skill, with prizes bought at Honolulu and marked with the name of the ship and date of voyage, duly announced. Revelry was to culminate in a grand "fancy dress ball," the night before landing, a prize being given to the costumer who showed most skill in fashioning his or her attire from things procurable on board ship, and in carrying out the character assumed. In order to waste no more time upon this function, it may be stated that Mr. T. Caraway Dodge as "Dandy Jim,"—with painted purple rings on a dress shirt and a "claw-hammer" coat a size too small, ebony countenance, lips like two flaming sausages caught loosely at the ends, and a wig fashioned from the hair of his bunk mattress,—sang and cake-walked himself straight to the prize, while defeated contestants rent night with applause and acclamation.

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From the smoking-room an incessant clinking, as of fairy castanets, fretted the ears of feminine curiosity. Mr. Todd explained that it was merely the sound of checkers and chessmen rattling to the shiver of the ship's screw.

The sun came up each morning, small and round, like a mandarin orange; expanded himself into a blinding deity; and at evening went down again, a blood-red orange, into the sea. The days he brought were long and golden, but not long enough for all the practising of bull-board, quoits, shuffle-board, and deck tennis. Each morning, after breakfast, certain acrobatic performances, free of charge, were held. Bag-punching was the children's favorite. One could count on an audience there, of upturned faces, wide-eyed and solemn with admiration. Some of the passengers saw fit to attach pedometers, and walk an incredible number of miles each day.

In the evening, Mrs. Todd and bridge whist reigned supreme. The Captain proved to be a player; so, to his present anguish, was Dodge. Gwendolen took an elfish delight in luring this young man to a table, under pretence of desiring to be his partner, and then, at the last moment, slipping in a foreordained substitute; after which she sped off, carolling, to a moonlit deck. Once there, the fuming and impotent Dodge recognized only too clearly what she would do. At least a dozen new acquaintances of the other sex had been made thus far by Gwendolen. It was her wont to dispense Emersonian philosophy and delicately portioned encouragement to those who were fortunate enough to secure her companionship. There was a young Dutch merchant on his way to coffee plantations in Java, very blond and fierce as to mustachios, and mild in the eyes. A Chicago representative, on his way to sell to Eastern potentates his particular make of automobile, had already needed, to quote Gwendolen's own, words, "a slight slackening of speed."

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An English "leftenant" returning to South Africa, carried with him his own marvellous outfit for the making of afternoon tea, backed by a mammoth English plum-cake in a tin box. He was one to be propitiated, especially toward eight bells on an afternoon.

An Austrian viscount posed as the slayer of jungle beasts. "Beeg gam," he called them. He doted upon seeing this timid and shrinking maid cower beneath the bloody wonder of his yarns. No one before had inspired such thrilling denouements as Mees Todd. He recognized her at once for his affinity, and on the night before landing condescended to tell her so. The shock was rude, but he deserved what he got.

Pierre and Yuki joined in these several amusements and occupations during the morning and afternoon hours, both being much petted and nattered by the ladies of the ship, as beau ideals of young lovers. In the evenings, on the balmy deck, they were left to themselves. Wonderful talks grew between them,—whispers, sometimes, that the jealous wind tore from their lips before the last word came. Yuki had not won back the half-troth given, nor, on the other hand, had Pierre gained more.

Often their talk was of impersonal things. The young man delighted to draw from Yuki quaint phrases of comment, and hints of the Oriental imagery with which her fancy thrilled. She told him the story of the stars, Vega and Aquilla, called in her land the Herd-Boy and the Weaver-Girl; how, for some fault, committed before this little earth was made, they could cross the milky stream of Heaven, and meet, but one night in a year.

When he pointed to a flock of flying fish skimming in a blue and silver phantasy above a

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turquoise floor, she called them the souls of birds that had flown too far from land, and been drowned at sea.

Within a few days of landing, a certain change, perceptible, it may be, only to the most sensitive, crept into the elements of air and water, and tinged even the up-piling clouds. Yuki stared now, for long moments, in silence, toward that hidden bank of the West. Pierre felt a change in her; but when he questioned, she laughed a little nervously, and said it was merely the outer edge of Nippon's "aura." Undoubtedly she was restless, a little moody, a trifle excited, and touched, at times, with brooding thoughts. She dreaded the opening with Pierre of topics which, all along, she had tried to avoid. Yet now, so close to home, she must make stronger efforts to free herself.

One afternoon at sundown, when the great reverberating "dressing gong" had sent most of the ladies below-stairs, Pierre, hurrying up to Yuki, where, for a half-hour past she had sat alone in a far corner of the deck looking outward, leaned and said:

"This promises to be the most wonderful sunset of all. It may be our last. The Captain has just told me that, with good luck, we sight land to-morrow. Do you dare come out with me to the very prow of the ship?"

"Yes, I dares," smiled Yuki, rising instantly. "I have wished often to go to that small, lonely point of ship." As they started, he caught up a discarded wrap. "The wind is fresher there," he said.

In a few moments she remarked, in a slightly embarrassed tone, "That will be a very good place to say—something."

Pierre made no reply. He also had been thinking of it as an excellent place in which to say—something.

Together, in silence, they made way over the aerial bridge that connects the triangular front deck with the main one; moving over the heads of steerage passengers, principally Chinese, who squatted in the sunken square to breathe in what they could of the cool, evening breeze. The sun was setting,—a polished copper gong like that ship one which makes much noise," said Yuki. It sank, clear-cut and very round, just at that point of the horizon where Nippon might be thought to lie.

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Pierre placed the girl in the small angle at the peak. An arm was stretched behind her, and a hand clung to the rail, to protect them both. He leaned forward until his cheek almost pressed against her own. The soft incessant rush of wind blew her heavy hair back from a forehead spiritually pure and white. Her long, delicately modelled nose and small curved chin made a cameo against the blue-gray stone of dusk. Pierre, watching her intently, saw the last red ray of the sun quiver on her lips. The little hands were raised, as if unconsciously, and clapped thrice, very softly.

"Are you praying to your sun-god, little Christian Yuki?"

"Oh, no, indeed," said Yuki, quickly. "It is not prayer as we Christians call praying; it is only just our Japanese way of thanking Sun San for his great beauty, and the much good he does flowers, and people, and everything. In Japan we often thanks things just for being beautiful." She smiled up confidingly into his face. Her little hands, now lowered, flecked the rail like bits of white foam.

"Then I should pray to you, my darling, for in all this world never was anything more beautiful."

She made no effort to answer this, not even by her usual small, deprecating smile and shake of the head. The necessity of what she was to say, blotted from those first moments by visual beauty, now came heavily back to her. She steadied herself, turning slightly to see his face.

"Pierre, trust me a little more. Give back that promise,—the promise you won from my weakness. It holds me from my path like a thorn. Our cause will be better without it."

Pierre started, and looked at the girl incredulously. "Have you let me lead you here deliberately to ask me such a thing?"

"Do not admit anger to your thought, dear Pierre," she pleaded. "I must have said some time. I should have said to you long before this; but we have been so—happy."

"Yes," said Pierre, doggedly. "We have been happy; and I intend that we shall be happier still. That promise is all I have to hold you by. I'd draw it tighter if I could."

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"You will not understand,—you will not try to understand me," said the girl, in a despairing

voice. "Such promise given is disrespect to my parents, particularly to my father. If you do not release, I must tell to him, of course. It will be bad for you and me. Can you not trust me? Oh, Pierre, for love's sake, release—!"

"Release you!" he interrupted wildly. "This is my answer. It is for love's sake that I hold you, and will hold." He seized her in his arms, and held her with cruel strength. The night had come in fast. He did not care that the watchman by the tall, straight mast might see them. No one could hear the wind-driven, hurrying words. "This is my answer. I hold thus all you have given,—and more. You are sincere, I believe, but mistaken. A weak yielding on my part would make your parents, and perhaps yourself, despise me. I keep what I have, I say, and I demand still more. You must be true to me, no matter what occurs!"

"Pierre, Pierre, you trample on your own hope, though you will not see it! To release me generously is your own best way!"

"You are the self-deceived," cried Pierre. "Pledge yourself irrevocably. Then only are we strong."

In the western sky an orange strip of day remained. A single bird, black against the glow, flew screaming across it, beating curved wings in the wind. "He will not see at all," whispered Yuki, as if to the bird.

"Oh, dearest, you cannot know in your calm, innocent heart the scourge of a love like mine! I hunger for you, I thirst! Sobbing, I dream of you, and I wake to new tears that you are still so far away. In pity, in mere mercy to human suffering, say that no other man shall marry you. Say this much at least, that if prejudice and war hold us apart awhile, you will be true to me until we can seek some new road to happiness!"

"Do I not know,—do I not know?" she shivered, in answer to the first part of his speech. "Every day my heart is torn to small pieces, all of different size and shape. I do not understand how in sleep they come together once more. You are not lonely in that human suffering."

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"Oh, you love me!" cried the man. "And on this voyage you love me as you had not done before! Is it not true?"

"It is true," sobbed Yuki.

"Mine is not love," said Pierre, again holding her fast; "it is hell,—a raging hell of ecstasies! Oh, kiss me, Yuki; give me your lips before I die of joy! Now swear,—swear,—that no word but my own, —no circumstance but death, can loose you from me!"

"You torture like the old monks," she panted. "Oh, do not make me say!"

"I command you, Yuki," he persisted, feeling new strength as she faltered. "It is my right. We belong to each other. Promise,—promise,—promise,—nothing but death or my word to loose you!" He kissed her again and again, like a madman, pressing his lips down upon hers, catching her hands to kiss, devouring her eyes, cheeks, forehead, hair; while the girl, beaten down by the whirlwind, made no effort to resist.

Pierre took the long white ivory pin from her hair, and split it, thrusting the smaller portion into his coat, and returning that, with the ornament still attached, to her hair.

"I take this pledge, Yuki," he cried. "You have told me that it binds to the death a Japanese lover. We are bound. I hold you by a tangible bond. The next shall be a small, bright circle on this little hand. Give me the promise, Yuki,—no need to struggle now. Give it me!"

"Kwannon protect me," gasped the girl; "I promise!"

A sudden vacuum fell. Pierre's breath was hard to recapture. He thought that Yuki had fainted, for her trembling had stopped. He shook one shoulder and bent down to gaze into her set, white face. Her eyes were wide open, and held two stars. She moved her lips now, and leaned far outward, gazing intently, as if watching the flight of an unseen thing.

"Yuki, Yuki, what is it,—what do you see?" he cried, in terror.

"My soul! I think a small soul fled!" All at once she collapsed into unconsciousness. As Pierre lifted her, he shook springing tears away, and bit his quivering lips as he muttered,—"I feel as if I tortured a child; but she does not realize our perils. Her fast promise is our only hope. Thank God that I could win it!"

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CHAPTER SEVEN

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THE nearness of land as yet invisible gave to the ship next morning that access of animation noted in the approach to Hawaii, and in the day-distant interval from the Golden Gate.

Most of the passengers, scorning to notice a few rough waves, buzzed or moved in groups about the deck. Games were put away. Marine glasses and kodaks came into vogue. Gwendolen's bright eyes, with a pair equally alert and bright beside them, strained vision for the first land. The increase of motion, however slight, served to excuse Yuki's absence. Two persons only assigned a different reason,—her roommate, Gwendolen, and her fiancé, Pierre Le Beau.

Pierre had not breakfasted in the salon,—a fact noted by Gwendolen. He came to the upper deck very late, and lacked his usual eager look. Gwendolen saw him instantly. Making some excuse to the group about her, she went to him, saying in her direct, disconcerting way,—“What have you done to my Yuki-ko? She did not sleep all night, and I am sure she was crying! To cry is an unknown thing for Yuki.”

Pierre met her indignation with pathetic sweetness. He smiled. It was difficult to be harsh with Pierre. He looked past her to the shining water. “If Yuki did not speak of her feeling, should I, even though I knew?” he asked, with the extreme of gentleness.

Gwendolen flushed under the implied rebuke. Her purpose, however, was not turned aside. “Yuki is a person whose confidence or whose love should not be forced. From what I know of you both, I believe you coaxed and persuaded her, last night, into some new pledge that her own heart shrank from giving. If this is true, allow me to tell you that you have made a fatal error, Pierre Marie Le Beau.”

Pierre wheeled to the sea. It was as well that she could not see his face. No longer gentle, it flared into a cruel anger. His sole answer was the slightest, most exasperating of shrugs.

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Gwendolen saw these signs of irritation, and cried to herself, “Halt.” With a laugh that was quite successful for its kind she exclaimed, “Come, Pierre, we must not quarrel just because we both love Yuki. I know I seem rude, but I became Yuki's champion at school, and the habit clings. Forgive me for Yuki's sake.”

He took the slim, outstretched hand and kissed it, but allowed himself no further words. The girl felt baffled and uncomfortable. She recalled a saying of her father's, “Free speech is a luxury possible only to those whose opinions mean nothing.” She felt herself herded with that undesirable class.

“Well, I must get back to them,” she cried, nodding in the direction of the group lately deserted. “I promised them I'd come back at once.”

“Is Yuki indisposed this morning?” asked Pierre. “May I not expect her on deck?”

His tone was condescending. Gwendolen writhed under it. “She'll be up in half an hour, I guess,” she gave answer, and hurried away, rubbing the back of her hand against her dress as she went.

Dodge made room for her at the rail. She wedged herself in place with a sigh of content. “Look hard, now!” whispered her companion. “The others haven't a hint. Yes, right out there in front, *hard!*”

Gwendolen stared obediently. Surely there was something strange, prophetic on that far blue rim. “Is it—oh, can it be—that little roughened thread in the warp and woof of blue—is it—Japan?”

The rumor spun about the ship,—was caught up in whispers,—tangled,—tossed on to the next group. “Japan,—some one has seen Japan!”

Men, with feet very much apart, steadied themselves behind beetle-like marine glasses. “By Jove, there she is!” The waves outside fawned and bounded in answering excitement. Dolphins leaped high in air. A whole fleet of “Portuguese men-o'-war” rose to the surface and scurried on before them as if leading a swifter way.

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“I shall simply pass away with ecstasy!” cried Gwendolen. “Oh, why doesn't Yuki come? Look, Mr. Dodge; I believe I see sails—away off there, between us and the phantom land!”

"Doubtless a squad of detached fishing-smacks," said Dodge, with that courier-like precision which seemed part of him on land or in sight of land.

"Oh! oh! oh!" shrieked she, jumping up and down like a child. "We are rushing straight for one. It has a square sail laced across the slits with white shoestrings. Oh, we are going to run it down!"

"My *dear!*" remonstrated Mrs. Todd at the girl's impetuous manner. Her own kindly face beamed.

"Not on your life," said Dodge the Oracle. "They know how to look out for number one. You just watch 'em." Even as he spoke the small skiff darted impudently into the very shadow of their looming bulk, and sped off again like a swallow. Two impassive brown faces lifted for an instant from the great shining heap of bonito in the bottom of the boat, and were lowered.

"Not much floral-anchor business about those two, eh, Captain?" asked Mr. Todd, genially, of that magnate, as he strolled toward them.

"I admit the coast population to be amphibious," laughed the Captain, "but you can't make admirals out of fishermen. Miss Gwendolen, it will soon be time to look for Few-ji."

"Oh, oh!" cried Gwendolen again. She was made up, this morning, of wind-tossed golden hair and expletives. "Certainly no one ever saw it, truly, at such a distance!"

"I have," boasted Dodge. "On a clear day I've seen the thing a hundred miles off, when it looked like a little white tee on a blue golf links, don't you know."

"Golf links!" echoed Gwendolen. "What an unworthy simile!"

"Why not links?—first-class thing, a good links! Don't you play, Miss Todd?"

"No," answered Gwendolen, truthfully, "I don't play, but I like to pose, the costumes are so utterly fetching; and I dote on standing with my driver behind me, like girls in illustrated picture papers."

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She turned to search the shimmering horizon for the vision it would not yield. "Oh, where is that mountain! I wish Yuki would come. It might appear directly for Yuki-ko."

"Here is Yuki," said the low, strange voice that could have belonged to no other.

Gwendolen seized her. "Good-morning, Miss Onda," smiled Dodge. "Now we are all fit. Kindly invoke your enchanted summit to our wondering gaze. I have been told that it was bad luck to land after a long journey without a glimpse of Fuji-san."

"I think the bad luck for only Nipponese," said Yuki.

"And the good luck too, I presume, if it turns that way? How inhospitable!"

"Yes, I think so. The good luck and the bad luck," was Yuki's serious reply.

Pierre, strolling at the rear end of the passenger deck, must have seen Yuki. He made no sign, however, and continued to stroll alone, smoking cigarettes, with a pleasant look or reply for any chance acquaintance, but a mind evidently involved in its own problems.

Neither of the girls saw him. They leaned together now upon the rail. Gwendolen had an arm about her friend. Together they stared out toward the land. Dodge had been called away. Mr. and Mrs. Todd were seated, the former carefully counting out bills for various "tips" soon to be distributed. The schoolmates were practically alone.

The land showed clearly now its hill and rock formation. Layer after layer, set upright from the sea, vanished into hazy distance. Promontory after promontory tapered down at the far point to a surf-beaten line of rocks. Farther peaks rose in tones of blue,—some thin as water, others rich and dark, like great gentians. On the nearer hills, forests and shaven spots of green appeared. The water around them shone and stirred with sails, the square-laced sails of junks. Bronze-colored boatmen, scantily clad, stood on the swaying edge of a boat and shaded their eyes to peer upward at the strange, white-faced "seiyo-jin." Among the junks, sailless sampan, propelled by one crooked oar, tumbled like queer sea-beetles with a single jointed leg.

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"Gwendolen," said Yuki, in a very low voice, "do you see a long, green patch, like moss, over on that brown slope?"

"Yes; I was thinking it looked like curled parsley."

"That is really a forest,—quite a big little forest,—made of sugi, and camphor, and camellia trees. Listen; I thought then that I heard the deep sound of a bell!"

"I hear nothing but water and the wind."

"It was the temple bell," insisted Yuki. "And now, dear, look more close. Do you not see, right on the edge of beach, a small red something?"

"Why, yes; there is a little square of red like the framework of a door."

"It is torii,—red torii, or sacred gate; and beyond that gate are many, many stone steps leading up to the temple. Ah! such steps as those,—so quiet, so deep, so still! They lead the heart up before ever the clumsy feet have climbed."

A little steam launch, bearing the flag of the rising sun, came puffing and squealing toward them. The ship's steps were lowered. Grave, correct Japanese officers took possession. Their news was astounding. War's breath already heated the land. The Japanese minister at St. Petersburg even then made preparation for instant departure, and his Russian colleague in Yedo did the same. The severance of diplomatic relations between the countries meant, of course, no less than a declaration of war.

From the moment of hearing this, neither Mr. Todd nor his secretary had a thought for anything besides,—no, not even for pretty Gwendolen, who, for a while, sulked alone, then, seeing it useless, sought consolation in engaging herself to all the unmarried male passengers, one after the other, and most of the ship's officers, irrespective of connubial ties.

Pierre and Yuki had met, neither looking with entire frankness into the eyes of the other. To Yuki the promise given meant a haircloth shirt beneath her robe of gladness, a stone dragging her back from flight. To Pierre it was, in all sincerity, their one substantial pledge of future happiness. He was the man. It was for him to judge, not Yuki; and he believed the very reluctance with which she gave the word, a proof of its necessity. It was characteristic of both that no reference was made to the subject most vital in their thoughts. Yuki watched with apparent composure the slow approach to Yokohama Bay, Awa's cone-shaped masses, and the long, green northern coast fading into eastern haze. Fuji had not shone for them,—in spite of a cloudless day. "It sometimes went away like that," Yuki had assured the disappointed ones. "Children thought that it went visiting to the gardens of the gods."

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The harbor channel was free. The ship went slowly, majestically, like a great deliberate swan, sheer to the stone steps of the wharf. Yuki's reserve faltered. "My people,—oh, my dear people! I think I see their faces in that waiting crowd!" they heard her whisper. She stretched out her arms. A sob choked in her throat. Four years,—four long, long years, and yet how familiar the look of her native land! The little wind-bent pines along the stone dyke had not changed a leaf. Those long, waiting rows of empty jinrikishas might hold one that had been waiting for her through an hour of shopping in the foreign stores of Yokohama. And, oh, the dear welcoming friends there on the steps!

Their party was the first to cross the platform of the lowered flight of stairs. Yuki touched the first stone step, and gazed eagerly above her. Yes, that was her mother, that gentlest, sweetest, most beautiful face among them all! Behind her stood Onda Tetsujo, Yuki's father, with his plain blue robes, and gray, nobly poised head.

"Mother! Okkasan,—Shibaraku!" (How long the absence!) cried the girl, with a broken note of rapture in her voice. Bounding up the steps, she clasped and was clasped again by the slender gray figure. Tetsujo drew back, a fleeting look of perplexity in his face. He had not recognized Yuki, thus seen, for the first time, in her perfectly adapted foreign garments; but Iriya had known, from the moment her eyes caught the small brown-clad figure at the rail. The mother in her swept away, for the instant, high barriers of Japanese etiquette. She clung to her child, fondling her, pressing trembling lips to the soft young cheeks, and murmuring, "My baby,—my little one,—my treasure, who has come back to me!"

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A moment later they had drawn apart, both with wet eyes and quivering lips, and small, bashful side-looks of love; for such public demonstration is practically unknown among samurai women. Already these two were a little ashamed of it. Tetsujo realized at last that it was his daughter, but, because of her strange conduct, wore still an uncomprehending wrinkle between his heavy brows.

The Todd party, Pierre and Mr. T. Caraway Dodge included, came hesitatingly near. The Japanese crowd drew back, some in distaste, some in politeness, some because their own friends had arrived, and there was no longer a reason for staying. Yuki, with a hand on Gwendolen's arm, began the introductions. When it came to the two young men, she hesitated slightly. Her father's deep, keen eyes rested on the faces first of one, then of the other. The two names, as she hurried them over, were practically unintelligible.

Kind-hearted Mrs. Todd, observing Yuki's embarrassment and feeling that she had at least a hint as to its cause, rushed gallantly into the breach. Her efforts centred on shrinking Mrs. Onda. "Are you really Yuki's mother?" she demanded in a loud, playful voice. "You look to me like her sister. I wouldn't believe, unless I were told, that you had more than five years between you."

Yuki threw a glance of gratitude toward the speaker. "Mother, Mrs. Todd says that you appear augustly young to be indeed the daughter of a big girl like me."

Iriya flushed and bowed, looking more than ever like her daughter. She answered in Japanese, "Please honorably to thank the lady for her compliment, but acquaint her with the fact that I am already lamentably old. On my next birthday I shall be thirty-nine."

Tetsujo, having accomplished his share of stiff bows,—not forgetting an extra one for the new American minister,—said to his daughter, "My child, we are indeed happy to welcome you. Now thank your good friends in my name. Suitable presents shall be sent them. We must depart for Yedo." He moved one finger toward three waiting jinrikisha men near-by, and the vehicles, like magic, stood beside him.

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"Now, already it must be 'Sayonara.' My father desires me to go," said Yuki, and smiled a little tremulously from one foreign face to another. These farewells at the end of a long and pleasant journey are never careless things to say. "Of course I will see all—every one—very soon!"

"Yuki! Why, we never thought of this. You mustn't leave us so!" cried Gwendolen, in consternation.

"No!" added Pierre, with more vehemence. "It isn't to be thought of. Tell your father that we are counting on you for the day." He stepped close to her. Yuki instinctively shrank. The puzzled look came again to the face of Tetsujo.

"Be careful, Pierre! Look at his face! You will make a false move at the start," came Gwendolen's whisper.

"Do you expect me to stand here patiently and see her carried away? Non! Mon Dieu, it was to have been the consecrating day of our lives! I do not give it up. I will try speaking myself with her father."

"Gwendolen is right. Do not speak!" panted Yuki.

But Pierre was not one to relinquish bliss so easily. No move seemed to him quite as undesirable as the one about to take place. Facing the astonished samurai, he began a series of bows which he fondly conceived to embody the finer points of both French and Japanese etiquette.

"Monsieur Onda,—Onda San," he commenced eagerly, "Miss Yuki must not go. Ikimassen! Stay here with friends,—tomodachi. She can go your house—afternoon. Please do not take her now."

Onda looked blankly and in silence upon the antics of the strange creature. Not one gleam of comprehension enlivened his fixed gaze.

"Here, man, let me get to him," said Dodge, thrusting himself in front of Pierre. "I'll translate what you are trying to say, though it isn't a particle of use. Shall I go on?"

"Merci."

Speaking slowly, in fairly good Japanese, Dodge said, "We having hoped to enjoy the company of your daughter on this first day of landing, I am requested to entreat your august permission to allow her to remain. If you and your wife will join our party also, we shall feel honored by your condescension." "Never told a bigger lie in my life!" was his mental note after this last remark.

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Tetsujo replied by the courtesy of a stiff bow. With no further glance or word for the speaker, he stepped up into his jinrikisha, and once seated, said to Yuki, "Reply to the speech of the foreigner, my child."

"I am to go with my parents, of course," said Yuki, nervously. "I wish it. I did not know you were planning so sure for me to remain. I must go now, at once, but will see you as soon as I may,

to-morrow, or perhaps this very afternoon."

Iriya had bowed to the foreigners and entered her jinrikisha immediately after Tetsujo. Yuki now climbed into the remaining one, neither Dodge nor Pierre retaining enough self-possession to assist her. The three coolies caught up the shafts for starting.

"Here, stop, stop!" cried Gwendolen, springing forward. "Yuki, we don't even know your Tokio address!"

Tetsujo gave a gesture and a "cluck." The coolies sprang into action.

"Ko-ishikawa, Kobinata, Shi—jū—" trailed off Yuki's voice into the rattling of the streets.

"The ogre! I'll catch the next train for Tokio," cried Pierre.

"Better stay with us and see about your baggage, Pierre," said Mr. Todd, speaking for the first time. "The girl should go with her people, and you know it."

"But, poor boy," said Mrs. Todd, soothingly, her hand touching his arm, "I know how he has counted on seeing the sights with Yuki."

Onda Tetsujo's spoken order had been "stenshun!" (station), for so have the Japanese incorporated our familiar word. A train was just leaving for Yedo. Three second-class tickets were bought, and the kuruma-men overpaid and dismissed. Had they been merely "paid," a later train would have been taken.

The short encounter on the Yokohama pier evidently remained in the master's mind as a most disagreeable impression. While in no sense a stupid man, the quality of Onda's intellect was torpid rather than alert. Things came to him slowly, and remained long.

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It happened that their train was a "local," stopping at all the small intermediate stations. Between Yokohama and the next stop,—Kanagawa,—not a word was spoken. Yuki felt bewildered, dazed, distressed. What had happened? What was spoiling her home-coming? The promise was not all, for here were her parents, moody and ill at ease, and they as yet knew nothing of her pledge. Surely the few injudicious words Pierre tried to speak should not have wrought all this. Poor Pierre, with his hurt blue eyes and outstretched hand of longing! Well, the American girls used to say that true love never did run smooth. Here she gave a sigh so deep that Iriya started. All three gazed heavily from the windows, only half seeing the villages sweep past, and the wide, gleaming rice-fields in their winter flood, and the long edge of Yedo Bay set with pines, and flecked with shining sails. The gaudy fluttering of small banners above the tea booths of Kawasaki brought a momentary light of pleasure into the girl's eyes. It died down as quickly. Her father's averted face clouded her sun. Yet unconsciously the charm and the glamour of the country was stealing back. At Omori, perhaps the most beautiful of these suburban villages, their compartment, being toward the rear of the train, stopped, it would seem, in the very midst of a grove of "umè" flowers, just coming into bloom. It is an old orchard, knowing many generations of loving care. It is trimmed and tended for beauty alone, the small sour fruit called by foreigners "plums" being uneatable, and no more to the Japanese marketer than are "rose-apples" to us. The trees, set close together so that tips of branches met, were entirely leafless, and frosted over with a delicate lichen growth. On this silver filigree of boughs the blossoms shone, white, crimson, or pink,—translucent gems of flowers. The odor, stealing softly to Yuki in little throbs, smote her as with an ecstasy of remembrance. There is no subtler necromancer than perfume. Through it the past may be reconstructed, dead love quiver into life, and sorrow, often more precious than joy itself, steal back like a loving ghost.

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Yuki seemed to wake suddenly, as from a troubled sleep. "Why," she cried to herself, "I am at home again! This is Japan!" She sat upright now, eager and vivid, looking from one window to another, a new brightness in her face. The locomotive, which had been restlessly inactive for a few moments past, gave a long, shrill whistle, drew itself together, and prepared for another run. Just as the wheels were turning, a broad-faced woman of the peasant class, with a fat baby on her back, a toddler of two years led by one hand, and a pair of squawking geese held in the other, wriggled herself through the turnstile and waved the shrieking fowls, as signal for the train to stop. The gatekeeper, clutching after her, seized a limb of the sleeping infant. Instantly a human scream added to the clamor of the geese. Heads were thrust from car windows,—the guard, dropping the infant's leg, seized its mother by the sash. He chanced to be a small man, she an unusually large woman. As a consequence she dragged him after her. At this sight a train official, leaning as far outward as he could for laughing, signalled the engineer to "back." The victorious one hurled herself and her living burdens into an already overcrowded third-class car. A place was made for her, not without many exclamations, such as "Domo! Osoi!" (It is late.) "Kodomo-san itai ka!" (Is

Mr. Baby hurt?) and a few gruff sounds of "Iya desu yo!" (How disagreeable!) The locomotive, as if conscious of a good deed, tooted more loudly than before, and made another start.

Yuki sparkled with delight. "Think of a train official doing that in America!" she laughed aloud.

Iriya's answering smile was pathetic in its quickness of response. She moved closer, pressing against Yuki's smart, foreign shoulder. The two began to watch, like happy children, the passing scenes.

Tetsujo drew forth his pipe and smoked himself into serenity. He listened now to what the women said. There were other passengers, of course, but Tetsujo and his companions had preëmpted a little corner in the rear. Iriya spoke of old Suzumè, who was waiting so impatiently at home to see her charge,—of little Maru San, a distant connection of Suzumè, who, since Yuki's departure, had been employed as maid-of-all-work about the house. Messages of welcome from friends and relatives were given. At the last, dropping her voice impressively, Iriya spoke of the coming war. "It is inevitable," she said. "Prince Haganè informed Tetsujo only this morning. There can be no doubt."

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The old scenes, the old interests, glowed anew in the girl's heart. Really they had never left it, but, like certain writing, illegible except in warmth, the pictures slept until the breath of her own land awaked them. She had a strange sense of being slowly turned back to a child. In an English fairy-book a certain Alice could grow tall or short at will by nibbling at a magic mushroom. There had always been magic mushrooms in the East, long, long before that book was written,—strange mountain growths which are the only food of the ghost deer that attend the genii of the forest. Perhaps the little brown sembei which she had just bought at Omori from an insistent peddler was, in reality, a scrap of an enchanted mushroom. Perhaps she was really turning back into the little Japanese Yuki who had never been to America at all, who had never known a foreign lover, or given a promise which her reason told her to refuse. Her heart stopped beating for an instant. She took a second bite of sembei. Again the trouble faded. Yes, surely, it was a magic mushroom.

Now merry talk flowed from her smiling lips. Tetsujo moved nearer. She called him "Chichi Sama," as in baby days, and her mother "Haha San."

The train made its final stop. A torrent of blue-robed occupants poured out from every car. The sound of wooden clogs upon the concrete floor was like innumerable hollow shells scraped, lip down, upon an empty box. Yuki's heart swept in with the throng. She loved the noise, the bare station, the hissing car, the very dust of the travellers' feet. Tetsujo and Iriya exchanged glances behind her back, and smiled. Their eyes said, "This is our dear one,—our own; not an American changeling, but the daughter for whom we have been yearning."

CHAPTER EIGHT

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FROM the square, gray platform of Shimbashi station, terraced by stone steps, hung with tiled eaves, and surrounded by a swarming school of black jinrikishas, each with a chattering, gesticulating, blue-clad human horse before it, one dives at will into the iridescent life of modern Yedo. Regarded as a city, it is little more than a collection of villages carelessly swept together; little communities where the same streets catch up altered names; districts with opposing trades, antagonistic feast-days, and rival deities.

Tanners preëempt an unsavory ward. Shoemakers claim for themselves a network of small streets. The dry-goods merchants command an avenue. Pipe-sellers, wine-merchants, tobacconists, book-sellers, marketmen, carpenters,—each guild tends to make a centre for itself. Perhaps, as one consequence of this segregation, Tokio becomes the stronghold of street peddlers. It matters little to the housewife that the nearest market is four miles away, when sections of that market, strapped to boyish shoulders, go crying past her gate with the punctuality of planets. Tokio is a place where circulating libraries literally circulate; where perambulating oil-shops fill lamps on the patron's kitchen step or in the glass frame at his gate, and then stop to light them; where the tailor finishes a quilt or an overcoat on the bedroom floor, and the hair-dresser needs no local habitation.

In a great semicircle crowded near the Red Gate of the Imperial University, live and study and brawl and bluster the students,—the future Nogis, Togos, Kurokis, Saigos, Itos, and Oyamas of their race,—now no more than restless young spirits in a recognized democracy of their own. Some of them cook their own meals and patch their own faded hakama,—a species of heroism to make death on a battlefield grow tame. Others "board" in one of the long, barn-like dormitories, or in a convenient cheap lodging-house, often three and four in a room, at the enormous rate of fifty cents a week. Poverty seems to them admirable, nothing whatever to be ashamed of. The Japanese youth of the samurai class is bred to a distaste of bodily luxury. Should one of their number show a

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leaning toward soft cushions and rich food, the others ridicule him, call him "O Sharè Sama," the Tokio equivalent of "Dandy," and say that his soul grows fat.

Yuki sped through all, breathless with the wonder of home-returning. The three jinrikishas, Tetsujo, of course, in the lead, went one after the other in a straight line, as though on an invisible track. Whether in a lane four feet wide, or in an avenue two hundred, this goose-like manner of procedure never changed. Old familiar street-corners, familiar pines, changed shop fronts, appealed to the girl with a sense of reality. Her eyes filled and her heart beat faster as she caught her first glimpse, after four years, of towering moated walls where crawled the "Dragon Pines" of Iyemitsu, and of the high dark roof now sheltering her beloved ruler.

Beyond the palace and its moats came foreignized Yedo. Sidewalks were here, though pedestrians still preferred the middle of the street, turning aside good-naturedly at the warning "Hek! hek!" of approaching vehicles. The streets, conspicuously broad, were paved with concrete or with stone. On every side rose buildings just completed, of brick and stone, or great steel frames for other edifices. It might have been Connecticut. The sidewalk trees, set rigidly in hollowed concrete basins, refused to grow in Japanese fashion, and had the poise of elms. Down centres of these streets horse-cars jangled. Work was already started on the superseding electric line. Yuki observed it all with conscious pride, yet her eyes brightened with new eagerness as another quick turn plunged them once more into the heart of feudal Yedo.

The streets narrowed now to lanes, bordered on each side with shops,—mere open booths,—flung wide to the dim rear plaster wall. Shelves holding various wares came down sheer to the matted floor. In the middle of the space generally sat the master, while skirmishing about, sometimes in a gloomy slit of a passage to the rear, sometimes up or down stepladder-like stairs to a crouching upper story, could be seen the small apprentices, or kozo. The life of the Japanese kozo forms a literature to itself; but this is not the place to begin it. These were the narrow streets Yuki had longed for. Here were the shop signs swinging wonderful tones of blue, dark crimson, and white, here the great gold Chinese ideograph, sprawling across long banners.

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In a sort of pause between districts came a hint of suburbs, and, winding through it, Little Pebble River. A river is never more mysterious than when carrying its deep secrets through a busy town. This one, the Koishikawa, dominated the section through which it passed, giving its own name, and establishing certain small industries of dyeing, grinding, fishing, and boating possible nowhere else in Yedo, until the great central artery of the Sumida is reached. Cherry-trees joined finger-tips above the Koishikawa,—real grass crept down its banks to trail finger in the hurrying tide.

It was all beautiful, all real, all familiar. From afar the clanging of beaten metal smote the ears. Yuki remembered that the main bridge led almost to the great gate of the Arsenal. A moment later it came into view. Tall chimneys pulsed black worlds of smoke, and corrugated roofs scowled above spiked, enclosing walls. At every gate stood a sentry-box and a soldier in blue uniform.

"A mighty noise, young lady!" volunteered Yuki's jinrikisha man, in a hoarse shout. He nodded his head toward the clamor, and then looked backward to bestow on her a confidential grin. In the river, just in front of the arsenal, great muddy barges were poled in and beached,—with loads of coal and copper, iron and wood.

"Yes, indeed, it is a terrible noise," answered Yuki politely. "They must be very busy behind those walls." She sighed heavily, but her sigh was lost in the roar of flame. The fact that her country was at that very moment on the verge of war with Russia, perhaps with France also,—with France, Pierre's country!—was one of those thoughts she was trying to keep away.

"They work with double force by lamp and by sun," boasted the jinrikisha man, when they had passed the most deafening uproar. "Oh, but the Russians think us children to be cheated and lied to! But we are preparing a lesson for the cowardly bears,—we do not fear them! Look, O Jo San!" He chuckled loudly, and without relaxing his wonderful mechanical trot or falling an inch behind the pace of the two preceding kuruma, unwrapped from his wrist the inevitable twisted tenugui, or hand towel. Keeping one end under his palm, he let the rest stream backward, like a flag. Instead of the usual bird, flower, or landscape etching in indigo blue, the pattern represented a fleet of Japanese war-ships in full engagement with the Russian navy. Under the water-level great communities of deep-sea fish looked expectantly upward, chop-sticks and rice-bowls in their fins. A few Russian sailors, the first of a gorging repast, had commenced to sink downward. The eyes of the fish were admirable in their expression of calm certainty. Thus, before the firing of Togo's first challenge, did the Tokio populace enjoy prophetic visions.

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Beyond the arsenal, and its huddled concourse of working-men's houses waiting just without the walls, the Koishikawa took a more definite turn to the north. The Onda party, following it, came soon to a region of green lanes and pleasant gardens. The clamor of metal-workers died away. One knew that birds lived in the groves. Before them the highland of the district loomed in great dark masses, and splendid trees of camphor and of pine soared clear against the blue. At foot of the hill "Kobinata" (Little Sunshine) the three jinrikishas halted in unison, and the three runners looked with bovine yet inquiring faces, each upon his living burden. The hillside road, now to be taken,

rose steep and white between bamboo hedges. Onda motioned his coolie to lower the shafts. "I am a heavy man, and with my own feet will take the slope," he said.

"No, no, honorable master. Indeed I say no!" protested the coolie, while making the greatest haste to obey. "It is not fitting that so exalted a person as your divine lordship should walk. Though I break my worthless bones, I will draw you up that precipice!"

Onda, smiling slightly, stepped into the road. Iriya would have followed his example, but he motioned, bidding her, and likewise Yuki, to remain seated. He paused to tuck his blue robe a few inches higher, catching the pointed end-fold in his belt. Iriya and her grunting bearer went by him. He remained standing, waiting for Yuki. Their eyes met, and both smiled. He put one powerful hand to the back of the girl's vehicle, his face being then about on a level with hers, and, ascending the hill beside her, used his supplementary strength at the very steep or stony places.

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The girl sat very slim and straight, looking eagerly about her. "Father, what is it about this land of ours that makes all things so honorably different,—so strangely beautiful?"

"My daughter, it is not well to speak boastfully, even of one's land," answered Tetsujo; but his fine, strong face did not bear out the reproof of his words.

"There will be a gate now, soon to the left,—a little gate of straw thatching, tied with loops of black hemp twine! A pine-tree sends one stiff arm across it. On a clear day one sees, in that green frame, the snows of Fuji-san! Oh, can I bear it, father? I *must* speak. My heart aches already with the loveliness. See, even the trees know that they are beautiful; each has a soul! The trees of America have no souls."

"No, from what I have heard and seen of the Americans, their trees have only hardwood centres. It is what the Americans would prefer."

"Not all, not all," protested Yuki. "I have a friend, that blonde girl on the hatoba (wharf),—I have other friends who understand us strangely. I think in a previous life they must have been Japanese."

"Bah! It is but poor respect you pay our country," answered Tetsujo, half-teasingly. "Ah," he cried, catching her arm, "the little gate, my child,—the pine-tree." Yuki's coolie had stopped without bidding. His face, too, wore the smile of one who loves and understands. The little gate rose straight and square in its deep gold color of old straw, the black knots made fantastic decoration along the ridge, the pine-tree stretched an arm of everlasting green, and over the straight line of the leaves, far, far out to the West, hung the frail cone of Fuji, like a silver bowl inverted. Yuki did not try to speak. Her father and the coolie feasted also in silence. In a few moments the little procession, still wordless, began again the steep ascent.

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Now Tetsujo's eyes went to the pebbled ground. His next remark seemed at first incongruous. "Did you see the belching of black smoke, my Yuki, and did you hear the clashing of scourged steel?"

"Yes, father, and the smoke creeps after us like an evil spirit, even to the foot of Little Sunshine Hill."

"Nippon is soon to enter upon mortal struggle with a great and merciless foe. All arts of war and treachery will be used against us. We may not survive."

"Father, it must not come,—the gods must divert it!"

"Every samurai will give his life. Every child and woman of his race will lie, self-slain, in blood, before the yielding. And yet defeat may be decreed. To be blind is to be weak. We must face unflinchingly the ultimate horror."

"The old gods must protect us!" cried the girl.

"You are a Christian. The Christian gods will be invoked to aid our enemies."

"Oh, father, you hurt me! When I wished to become a Christian, like the other girls, I wrote you many letters,—you did not oppose it then."

"Neither do I oppose it now," said Tetsujo. "In things of religious faith each soul should seek an individual path. Because of your intelligence I allowed you to decide. But in patriotism,—in loyalty to your native land,—I still have responsibility. Ah, you are my one child, and most dearly beloved; but if ever I should see in you one taint of selfish swerving,—if I should suspect that through the foreign education the sinews of your love were weak—"

Yuki stopped him by a gesture. Her head was proudly lifted. Her eyes gleamed, and her thin nostrils shook,—“Such thoughts as these are not to be spoken between a samurai and his child. My very heart is knit of the fibres of that word ‘Nippon.’”

“You are certain, Yuki?” Tetsujo's question and his eyes dug deep.

Yuki hesitated less than a fraction of thought. “I am certain,” she said.

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A silence rose between them. Yuki's bright joyousness felt a drifting cloud. What did her father mean? Had Prince Haganè spoken ill of her? The promise to Pierre gnawed like a hungry worm. She fought anew the phantoms of love and approaching war. The two laden jinrikisha coolies tugged on with ostentatious groans. The hand towels now came into requisition for the mopping of streaming brows. The road began to curve into a level space, from which hedge-bordered lanes radiated. Again Tetsujo spoke.

“That new American envoy,—he with the nose of a sick vulture and the fine yellow eye,—is he favorable to us? Is he one that at all understands us?”

“Indeed, my father, he is of wonderful understanding. He and Baron Kanrio are as brothers in thought. Did not Prince Haganè speak of him?”

Ignoring the question, Tetsujo went on. “The younger of the two women,—that straw-colored maiden who seems standing on the edge of a small typhoon,—she, I suppose, is the school friend, the Miss Todd, you referred to.”

“Yes,” answered Yuki, a little resentfully. “And she is considered beautiful. I think her augustly beautiful, even as Amaterasu, our Sun Goddess.”

“Not ours. It may be that other nations have also sun goddesses,” said Tetsujo, significantly. “To me all foreign females are of hideous aspect. They look and strut like fowls. And the two young males,—sons of Mr. Todd, I take it,—they are as the painted toys sold in temple booths. Yet, if the foreigners have been kind, it is well to express gratitude, and to send gifts as costly as my purse will allow.”

“The Todds are rich,—very, very rich,—even as our great silk merchants,” cried Yuki, in indignation. “They do not want gifts, or expect them. It is not an American custom. Gwendolen, my friend, my sister, wishes only to be with me, freely, as we have been for four years past.”

Tetsujo considered. “I could not refuse you a continuance of friendship, my child, though I confess it will irk me greatly to see those strange creatures on my mats. After the first few days of your home-coming,—in a week, perhaps,—you can speak again of this desire.”

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Yuki's heart sank. A week,—and she had promised to see them to-morrow, perhaps this afternoon! She opened her lips to remonstrate, and then thought better of it. If he felt it a concession to admit Gwendolen, daughter of the new American minister, what would he say to Pierre? Deliberately she fought down the rising host of apprehensions. “No,” she whispered, “I shall not dwell upon it. I must not spoil my home-coming with uncertain fears. I shall try to be untroubled until I can tell my father all.”

Well along the top of the hill, Onda re-entered his kuruma, and with the word “hidari” (left), started the little string of vehicles down a path that ran in wavering lines between hedges of various growths. Many were of dwarf bamboo or sa-sa, other of a higher bamboo, springing from resilient stems twenty feet in air. A few were of the small-leafed dōdan, a bush which turns to wet vermilion with the frost. Several were of intertwined thorn, a cruel and relentless guardian. One showed a flat green wall like that of a three-story city house jutting upon a pavement; but the masonry was all of growth, rafters of thick stems, and facing of the close-clipped evergreen mochi-tree. The small tiled gate jutting from the centre of the lower edge seemed the entrance of a cave. Doubtless behind this imposing and misleading front nestled an unpretentious cot, a well-sweep, a small vegetable and flower garden, and a handful of old trees.

Onda's gate, some hundreds of yards further to the north, emerged in wooden simplicity from a sa-sa hedge. Along the street the bamboo only showed. Within it ran a line of well-trained thorn. This fence was characteristic of the race which had planned it; Onda's father and grandfather, and many generations before, had owned this spot of ground in Yedo.

Tetsujo, although the first to arrive, remained in his kuruma, while Iriya and Yuki made haste to descend. The former went at once to the gate, pulling aside a thin wooden panel. A little gate-bell jangled, and at the musical summons wooden-shod feet were heard, running down the pathway from the house. Old Suzumè, shrivelled, yellow, her black eyes darting excitement everywhere, fell on her knees in the gateway. She began immediately to mutter a jumble of ceremonious phrases, in the pauses drawing her breath with ferocious energy. Behind her showed a moon-faced maiden, who stared first, as if bewildered, and then suddenly fell to the earth beside

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Suzumè.

"That is sufficient," said Tetsujo, now descending and pushing between them as he entered the gate. "Here, Suzumè, take my purse, and let these good rascals rob us as little as possible. Go within, Maru, and prepare to remove the foreign shoes from the feet of your young mistress."

Maru, quaking like a jelly, as she always did when addressed directly by the "august master," obeyed instantly, and knelt at the stone house-step to receive the shoes. Suzumè unwillingly remained at the gate to haggle with the three jinrikisha men.

When the shoes were reverently drawn off, dusted on Maru's blue striped apron, and set side by side on the stone step, the little handmaid disappeared around the corner of the house. A moment later was heard the scurrying of soft stockinged feet within.

Yuki stretched a hand toward the closed shoji.

"No, dear, wait an instant," said Iriya, hurriedly interposing. "Let Maru San open the shoji. She has been rehearsing this for a year."

Yuki drew back. "I have forgotten so many things," she murmured, flushing.

"They are not lost; they will spring quickly in the warm rain of home love," said Tetsujo, behind them.

The shoji were sliding apart, both at once, with noiseless precision. In the opening Maru's globe-like countenance beamed. Now, for the first time, Iriya performed the equivalent of an introduction. "Maru San," she said, in her pleasant voice, "this is our o jo san (honorable young lady of the house), Onda Yuki-ko, for whom we have been longing."

"Hai, o jo san! Go kigen yō! Irasshai!" palpitated the little servant, asking her to enter.

"I have written you often of Maru," Iriya went on, turning to her daughter.

Tetsujo brushed unceremoniously through the group, and strode alone to the big corner guest-room at the rear.

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"She is the orphaned child of Suzumè's dead husband's step*-son," continued Iriya, placidly. "About two years ago she was left quite destitute, so of course her natural home was here. Maru is a good girl, and of much help to us."

"Ah, Mistress, Mistress," cried old Suzumè, nearly tripping on her clogs to reach them, "you know well that Maru is a very cat in the sun for laziness." The speaker struggled hard to look severe.

"Hai, hai," said Maru, in deprecating confirmation, and bobbed over to the matting.

"Why, o jo san, in my opinion Maru is not worth the honorable rice she puts in her gluttonous mouth," said Suzumè, on a high note of satisfaction. "Yet the kind mistress here, besides food and occasional outworn garments, allows her sixty sen each month for spending. Ah, Kwannon Sama, of divine compassion, will reward our mistress for her kind heart!"

Iriya laughed, a merry, low laugh, as young as Yuki's own.

"I thank you, Suzumè; but do you realize that the master sits alone in the zashiki, with no tea, no coal, no—"?

"Dō-mo!" exclaimed the old woman, and scrambled rapidly to her feet. "But I become more and more the fool with age, as a tree gathers lichen. I will attend."

"Be at leisure, honorable, ancient relative; I will fetch the tea," said Maru.

"No," cried Yuki, suddenly stretching out a hand; "I want to take it just as I used to as a little girl. I think it will please my father. Let me take it, Suzumè San!"

Maru paused with round, incredulous eyes. "Arà!" cried old Suzumè, scarcely knowing whether she were the more pleased or astonished. "A fashionable, wonderful young lady, educated in America, with numberless young Japanese noblemen waiting to marry her,—and she wishes to bear the tray like a tea-house musumè! Ma-a-a! How strange! Yet it is a good desire. The mistress's face shines with it. It shows your heart has not changed color, o jo san. I will prepare at once. Come, lazy fatling!" This last remark was of course addressed to Maru.

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In his wide, dim zashiki, or reception-room,—analogous to the drawing-room of the West,—Tetsujo sat alone. He was glad for a moment of solitude. His mind did not move swiftly on any subject. The bewilderment of his first vision of Yuki, changed from a clinging Japanese child to an alert, self-possessed American, had not altogether passed. Then that bobbing, blue-eyed he-creature on the hatoba,—he had given sour food for thought. What language was it that the thing had tried to speak, what wish to utter? Well, at least Yuki was safe now among her home people, away from the influence of all such mountebanks. In a few days she would be wishing to don again her Japanese dress, and then he could begin to believe he had a child.

The Onda residence faced directly to the north, thus giving the big guest-chamber and the outlying garden a southern exposure. Two sides of the room, the south and the west, had removable shoji. The inner walls were partly of plaster, partly of sliding, opaque panels of gold, called fusuma. These were painted in war-like designs by Kano artists. To-day the western shoji were all closed; but the sun, just reaching them, shed a mellow tone of light throughout the room. All southern shoji were out, admitting, as it were, the fine old garden as part of the decoration of the room. The day had deepened into one of those quite common to the Tokio winter, where the sunshine battles with a white glamour, scarcely to be called mist, and yet with the softening tone of it. No young spring growth was waking in the garden. All was sombre-green, ochre, or cold gray,—pines and evergreen azaleas, heaped rocks, stone lanterns, bridge, and the pear-shaped water of a pond. In line and structure the garden was still a thing of beauty, planned in an artist's mind. It had the look of a stained-glass window done in faded hues, of old tapestry, of wrought metal. At the corner of the guest-room veranda stood a huge old plum-tree just coming into white bloom.

Smiling Yuki, in tailor-made American gown and black stockings, brought in the tray and knelt before her father. The old warrior flushed with pleasure. "Why, this is better than I could have thought!"

"I told you I was just your little girl," said Yuki. "And oh, father, I do feel so queerly young and real again! I see everything around me just as I wish. It is like making things come true in dreams." Tetsujo caught her by a slender shoulder, looking deep, deep into answering eyes. For once, no troubled thoughts rose to blur the vision. Suddenly he smiled. "Then make *my* dream come true, my Yuki; remove the shapeless foreign garment."

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Yuki sprang to her feet, laughing with delight. "Yes, yes, that is the next real thing to do, of course. I will borrow a kimono from mother, as my trunks have not arrived. But don't let them bring in dinner till I get back. I am so hungry for a real dinner!"

"The soup shall not even be poured," promised Tetsujo. She gave a little bow like the dart of a humming-bird, and would have sped past him, but he, catching at a fold of her skirt, detained her. She stopped, and seeing the expression of his face, her own sobered. "Welcome, my daughter," said Tetsujo, in a tone that trembled; "welcome, child of my ancestors,—the last of an honorable race!"

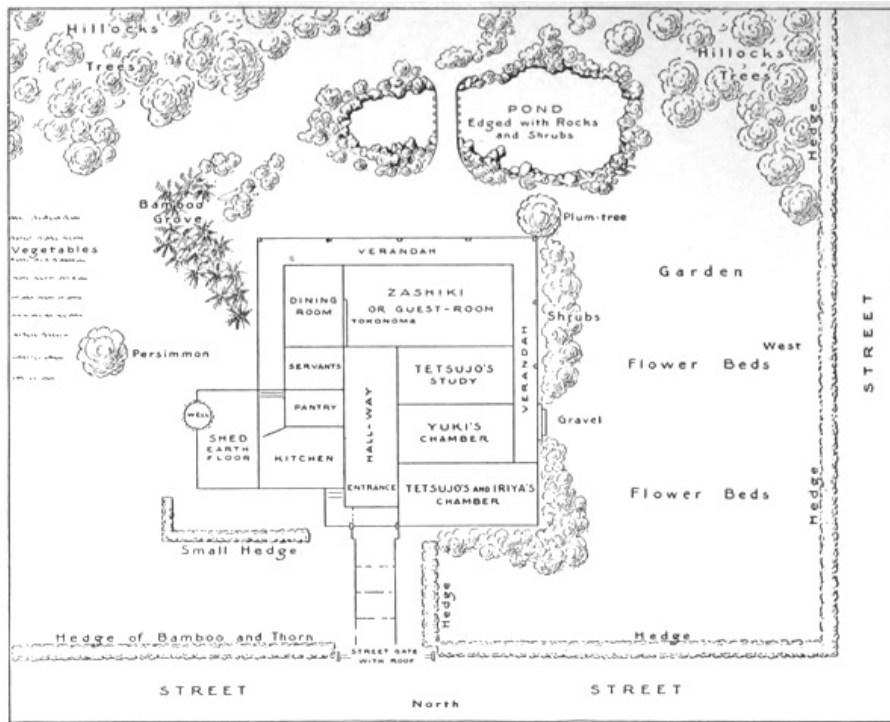
CHAPTER NINE

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NEXT to the zashiki, or guest-room, around by the corner of the big plum-tree on which, now, great snowy pearls of buds opened with every hour, was the master's benkyo-beya, or study, where sets of Chinese and Japanese classics, often running into a hundred volumes, had snug place in fragrant cabinets of unvarnished cypress wood.

Contiguous to this, along the western side, and bounded ten feet farther by the fusuma of her parents' chamber, Yuki's little sleeping-room was tucked away. The stately garden, curving around by the plum-tree, spread here wider paths and less pretentious hillocks. Just in front of Yuki's shoji and the narrow veranda which ran unchecked along the south and west of the house, two sedate gray stones led into a gravelled space. Here were flower-beds somewhat in foreign fashion, but without bordering plants or bricks. Many of the small bushes were resultant from seed-packets mailed by Yuki in Washington. Imported pansies, alyssum, geraniums, marigolds, and ragged-robins grew here in springtime in friendly proximity to indigenous asters, columbine, pinks, and small ground-orchids. These flower spaces were now vacant but for tiny springing communities of chrysanthemum shoots, bare stems of peony with swollen red buds at the tip, and a few indispensable small pines. Beyond it all was the tall hedge of sa-sa shutting out the street, and its ugly inner rind of thorn.

The eastern side of the house contained, so to speak, its executive offices, dining-room, servants' quarters, pantry, kitchen, and well-shed. Along this portion (except by the kitchen, which stepped down unaided to a bare earth floor) strips of narrow veranda and convenient stepping-stones led into a vegetable garden, small wood-yard, and strawberry patch. The longest bit of



TETSUJO'S HOUSE AND GARDEN

It was here, the morning after Yuki's arrival, that the women of the household were to be found. Suzumè chattered incessantly as she washed the breakfast-dishes and passed inward to arrange them on the pantry shelves. Little Maru San, a few feet away, out in the sunshine of the garden, scrubbed at pieces of a ripped-up kimono in a tub that stood high on its own three legs. Afterward she rinsed the bits and spread them smoothly to dry on a board. The tailless white cat, disdainfully satiate after a meal of tea, rice, and fish-bones, curled itself up in a fork of the bare persimmon-tree to sleep. Maru's favorite bantam cock, followed at a respectful distance by two wives and an unidentified black chick, sauntered along the kitchen drain, his yellow eye slanted for a swimming flake of white. The clear, windless air had a smell of new-washed leaves and of foreign violets. Yuki's heart stirred with the deep homeliness of it all. Iriya, noting her expression, asked brightly, "Is my dear one just a little happy to be at home?"

"No, mother, not a little happy, but very, very happy. It has been a long time."

Iriya was hanging out a bed-quilt of plaid silk, the squares three feet across and of superb coloring. "Yes," she repeated, "it has been a long time."

"Why did you let me go at all?" cried Yuki, passionately. "I was your only one. You must have missed me sorely. Sometimes I feel that I never should have gone."

"Hush, my jewel." Iriya gave an apprehensive glance toward the other side of the house. "Say not such words where the kind father may hear. He was so proud of you. It was his dearest wish, and Lord Haganè, our daimyo, advised it also. You see, we had no son, and Tetsujo was not willing to give me up that another wife might bring this hope to pass. He has been a good master to me, has Onda Tetsujo."

A glow of loving pride softened the regret that this thought of the son, that had not been given, always brought to her.

Suzumè looked up from her dish-tub, wrinkling with shrewd smiles. "You have no son—but what of it? Some day you will have a grand son-in-law, a young prince, maybe. Yuki-ko will make a marriage to bring glory to us all."

Yuki drooped her head. "I don't want to think of marriage yet. I just want to stay here in this precious home and try to win back some of those four long years which I have lost."

"But you are nineteen, Miss Yuki,—nearer twenty, in fact. A terrible age for a young lady of rank to be caught single."

"I wish it could be as you wish, my Yuki," sighed Iriya. "But, as Suzumè says, you are nearing twenty. I pray the gods that my son-in-law may not be of too exalted station to receive adoption

into this family, instead of your being absorbed into his. That would be the greatest joy life holds for me. But, alas! I am a selfish, talkative old woman to let such thoughts escape. I should wish your marriage to be only that which may possibly serve your country and repay your father for his sacrifices."

Yuki lifted a small queer look. "In America, where my father sent me, I was taught, in the matter of marriage, to do some of the thinking myself."

Iriya caught her breath. Suzumè stopped washing to stare. Maru, looking up with her round mouth formed for a "Ma-a-a!" jostled the tub in her excitement. It went over with a "swash." The soapy water, with drifting islands of blue cloth, flowed out swiftly, carrying the pompous bantam and his family on the unexpected tide. The cat opened one green eye, then the other.

"Come, my child," said Iriya, quickly, to Yuki, "condescend to bear me company to the guest-chamber. I have the flowers to arrange. Perhaps, in America, you have learned some new and beautiful composition."

Yuki's queer look deepened into a naughty little laugh and shrug as she turned to obey. She knew perfectly why her mother wished to get her from the hearing of Suzumè and Maru. Tokio is not free from gossip, and, though Suzumè was devoted to the family she served, she dearly loved the start, the incredulity, the deepening interest of a listener's face.

To her mother's last suggestion Yuki replied, "I fear not, mother. The only idea of arrangement they have in America is to get many different flowers together, chop them to the same length of stem, and push them down evenly into a shapeless vase with other flowers painted on the sides."

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"Ah," said Iriya, crestfallen and surprised, "we shall not then adopt the foreign arrangement."

The mother and daughter clasped hands, swinging them as children do, and moved along the narrow veranda. They were now skirting the closed shoji of the dining-room. In turning the corner, the plum-tree came into full sight. A hundred blossoms must have opened since the dawn. Yuki broke from her mother with a cry, ran to the tree, and threw her arms about the great trunk. "Oh, you are the most beautiful tree in the whole world!" she said aloud, and looked with adoration up into its shining branches.

As Iriya reached her, she lowered her gaze. "Do you remember, mother, that morning four years ago, when I went away, how I clung to this tree last of all, sobbing from my heart the poem that my father taught me?—

"Though bereft and poor,
I in exile wandering
Far on mount and moor,
Happy plum beside my door,
Oh, forget not thou the spring."

"I remember well," said Iriya, and drew her daughter's outstretched hand to her cheek.

Something shone suddenly in Yuki's eyes. "And I wept so passionately that father, half in tears himself, came and entreated me to cease. He said that if I shed more tears upon it, his tree, like that of Michizanè, might rise through the air and follow me to exile."

"Yes," smiled Iriya; "often have I recalled it in the time of spring, standing under this tree alone."

"It really did follow me after all, you know," the girl went on shyly. "It came at night, in dreams, when you and father could not miss it. Did it ever fail to return before the dawn?"

"No," returned Iriya, with deep gravity. "The dear tree loves us also. Never once did it fail to return."

Tetsujo strode toward them from his study. "How can one ponder on the classics, with pigeons cooing beneath his very eaves?"

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Yuki clung to him. "You had the classics for four long years when I was away."

"So had I water through those four long years, small pigeon,—yet while I live must I thirst. The

classics feed deep wells of the soul."

He put a strong, loving hand about her, and drew her near. It sprang into Yuki's mind to speak now of her foreign friends, to ask permission to visit them or, at least, to send them her Tokio address. Pierre's beautiful face and blue eyes reproached her. But this moment was too sweet for jeopardy. She pressed her cheek against the rough blue cotton of her father's shoulder. Iriya, stealing nearer, put also a loving arm about the girl. The sunshine made a halo for the three. The plum, loosening its first petals, sent them down in fragrant benediction.

So her day passed, a wonderful day, steeped in love and childish recollections. At night, the winds being chill, and the fear of robbers inherent in the Japanese mind, all shoji, and after them the wooden storm panels (amado), were tightly drawn. In the ashes of the great brass hibachi balls of charcoal glowed like incandescent apples. A lamp was suspended from the ceiling, swinging but a few feet above their heads. Here the four women of the household grouped themselves. Tetsujo had gone out for a call. The pieces of kimono, ripped and washed that morning by Maru San, were now to be refashioned. Iriya, Suzumè, and Maru drew forth little sewing-boxes and prepared for work. Yuki, half sitting, half lying on the floor, fondled the tailless cat, and declared boldly that she hated sewing and was not going to begin that part of a Japanese woman's drudgery quite so early.

"All good wives love sewing, particularly on the master's nightclothes," said Suzumè, reprovingly, and peering over the rim of huge horn spectacles toward the culprit.

"The o jo san will tell us something of foreign habits as we sew," suggested Iriya, the peacemaker.

"Yes—yes—I will be what is called over there the bureau of information," laughed wilful Yuki. "Any questions from you, Mr. Cat?" she cried, holding the drowsy animal high above her and smiling into its blinking eyes.—"Do American cats like rice?" "No." "Queer cats, you say,—and so they think of you." "Do they wear tails?" "Yes, long ones." "What do they use them for?" "For getting pinched in doors." "No more questions, Pussy San? Ah, you will never learn. Ruskin says that curiosity forms tendrils of the mind."

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"What I would like to feel sure of, honorable young lady, is this," began Suzumè, primly, with a disapproving glance toward the cat.

"We are ready, Madame Suzumè, speak on," said Yuki, cuddling pussy back into her sleeve.

"Is it really true, as newspapers and pictures say, that women over there, even women of decent character, go to evening entertainments with no clothes above the waist, dance with red-faced men until they are on the verge of apoplexy, and then have to be restored by much fanning and a cold medicine called 'punch'?"

"Not altogether, good nurse," said Yuki, fighting hard to retain a semblance of gravity. "They wear cloth and flowers, feathers and jewelry above the waist, and arrange them with great beauty; but it is true that they dance with men, and that their shoulders and arms are bare."

"That is a strange custom," mused Suzumè. "Even our Sacred Empress condescends to go with bare arms. Why, I wonder, do they wish to expose arms more than legs? There is more leg, and in a supple young girl it is more shapely."

"That is too hard a thing for me," laughed Yuki. "Well, Maru, your eyes are big and solemn like the Owl San in our pine. What is your question?"

Maru, after much giggling and blushing, confessed to a desire to know, once for all, whether foreigners had toes like real people, or whether, as she had been assured from childhood, they possessed but a single horny hoof, which, from desire to hide the ugliness, they kept in pointed leather cases known as shoes.

"That is false entirely. I have seen hundreds of barefoot children in America, and they all had ten toes, even as we."

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Maru seemed cast down. "Ma-a-a! what foolish tales are spread," she murmured. "Doubtless the foreigners have similar strange beliefs of us."

"It is what the great creatures eat that turns me sick," cried old Suzumè, and nearly perforated a finger in her vehemence. "Their soup is like the contents of a slop-bucket, with warm grease swimming on the top. The stuff would choke in a decent person's throat. And then the great heaps of animal flesh,—and greasy vegetables, and implements like gardener's tools to eat them with! And then—Kwannon preserve us—the unspeakable nightmares that come even after the tasting of such food!"

"Arà!" cried the maid, roused to new excitement by this recital of horror, "it is said that America is an honorably highly civilized country, and Nippon merely a divine half-civilized country, but I thank the gods who have given me to live in this half-civilized country."

At bedtime, Yuki, creeping between soft, fragrant futons, drew a deep sigh of childish content. The andon in the corner, shedding its gentle, paper-screened light, continued the impression of sunshine. The girl smiled to find herself again counting the lapped cedar boards of the ceiling, "Hitotsu—futatsu—mitsu—yotsu—" following them into uncertain dimness at the far end of the chamber. As in childhood she speculated upon the possibilities of that small black knot-hole left vacant in the wood. How much smaller now it was than four years ago! Still there was a chance, a pygmy probability, that a very small nedzumi might creep through, and, falling to the floor, scamper over mats and bedding, and—here came the shudder!—over the very face of a sleeper. She drew the bedclothes up spasmodically, then smiled to think how bright would be the eyes of the little mouse, twinkling in semi-darkness. In a moment more, with the smile still on her lips, she was asleep.

So a second day passed, and a third,—hushed, golden days, too precious to be imperilled. With the fourth morning, Sunday, came a change. In the night a storm had risen, sweeping down from Kamschatka along the Yezo coast to the wide unsheltered plain of Yedo. Here it wallowed like a great beast in a field, snorting with fury, crushing trees, fences, and houses, and fighting back the black clouds that would have crowded in upon it.

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Through Yuki's troubled sleep came the sounds of vehicles rattling on foreign streets, and the blurred chime of church-bells. Her first conscious thought was, "It is Sunday. Gwendolen and I must be sure to go to service."

The wooden amado of the house chattered with fright. The wind gave long, derisive howls as it swept under the low-hanging roof, clutched and shook the rafters, and then darted out to the heart of the storm once more. Yuki realized slowly that she was not in America at all, that she was at home, in Tokio. With a slower, heavier recognition came the knowledge that her friend Gwendolen was here also, and if she were in Washington could not seem more remote.

She heard old Suzumè and Maru straining to open the amado, then Tetsujo's voice calling loudly from his chamber, "Keep them all shut on the eastern side!"

"Oh, my dear plum-tree! It will be torn like mist," said the girl aloud. She sat upright, patting instinctively the loops of her hair, dressed now in Japanese fashion. The floating wick of her andon fell over the edge of the saucer and went out, leaving the room in grayer darkness. The foreign clock that hung in the kitchen rang out the hour of seven. "What gloom! The storm must be terrible indeed!" A moment after the girl said, with a shudder, "This is the day on which I am to speak of my love. I hear his voice calling through the wind. I must wait no longer. Yes, I will speak to-day."

At breakfast the small family of three was silent and preoccupied. The one glimpse they had taken of the shivering, naked plum-tree would have sufficiently accounted for the depression. Iriya and Yuki sat a little behind the master, eating from their small rice-bowls, and attending in turn upon his wants. As Suzumè crept in to remove the half-emptied dishes, Yuki said to her father, "Father, a little later, when you have smoked and read your paper, may I speak with you?"

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"Why, certainly, my child," said Tetsujo, kindly, looking up from the damp printed sheet he had already unfurled; "though I may have but few thoughts apart from this terrible storm."

"It is a terrible storm," shuddered Iriya. "A great camphor-tree in the Zen Temple garden has fallen. It was a goblin-tree, and the priests fear evil."

"I spoke not of the storm in the material universe, but of that vast political tempest brewing over us. Our minister leaves St. Petersburg to-morrow. War has practically come."

No comment was made. The three tacitly avoided, each, the glance of the other. Iriya rose quietly, then Yuki. In the door-frame the girl paused. "I shall return in half an hour, father."

Tetsujo nodded. "I shall be here."

In her own room Yuki moved about mechanically, putting into place her few indispensable possessions,—a silver brush, comb, and hand-glass, her white prayer-book and neat Bible, a picture of Gwendolen in a burnt-leather frame, and a lacquered box containing a second photograph, not of Gwendolen, and a package of letters, all addressed in the same hand. She fought to keep her

imagination from the coming war. Its dark omen only strengthened her determination to have things understood. She prayed for strength and self-control. Punctual to the moment she entered the guest-room, bowing again to her father. He looked up from his brooding reverie. Something in the girl's face made him ask, "Ah, have you indeed a matter of importance? My little Yuki has gone. This is a woman who comes to speak with me."

"Alas, father. Childhood, like the petals of the plum-tree, vanishes at the breath of storms."

"What storm can have found you so early, my little one?"

Yuki drew in a long breath, and steadied herself for a deliberate reply. In the pause Tetsujo leaned out, and with one motion of his powerful hand flung a panel of the shoji to one side, giving a view of the drenched and storm-tormented garden. On the veranda floor, usually so smooth, beaten plum-petals clung like bits of white leather. The drip from the low-tiled roof enclosed them in the bars of a silver cage.

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"This is my distress, father," began Yuki. "I am a Japanese girl, with my first loyalty toward you and my native country;—yet, in that new land where you sent me,—I have come—I have grown honorably to feel, almost without warning, the—influence of a—person."

Tetsujo looked faintly surprised. "Indeed, I trust so, my child. You would be but a poor, unresponsive creature to have felt no influences. It is from such things that character and knowledge are builded. There were many persons who influenced you, I take it,—some for good, perhaps some for evil. To an intelligent mind a warning is valuable. Now, at home, you will have the leisure to sort and adapt such impressions, casting away those that are trivial and employing those which may be of service to Japan."

"It is augustly as you indicate, dear father," returned Yuki, the distress in her dark eyes deepening. "I attempted to observe many things. But the influence I spoke of is not that kind you are thinking. It—it—is a very special influence. In America they call it—love." She bowed her head over slightly. A faint pink tide of embarrassment showed on her forehead and in the small bared triangle of her throat.

Tetsujo controlled himself well. "You mean—love—'ai'—the love of a man and a woman who wish to marry?"

"In America one thinks very differently of such matters," said Yuki, her eyes still lowered. "Yet I suppose the feeling is honorably the same everywhere. Yes, father, it is of such love that I now must tell you."

"We have many Japanese terms for Love," mused Tetsujo. "Love of country, of Our Emperor, of parents, of beauty, of virtue,—but the term which you now employ should not be spoken by a samurai to a woman not his wife. You pay a high price for Western knowledge, my poor child, if already the dew-breath of modesty has dried from your young life."

"Father," she pleaded, "I am still a Japanese. I know how it must seem to you. I suffer in the speaking, but still I must speak. I promised. I must speak."

"You promised?" echoed Tetsujo, and looked more keenly into her shrinking face. "To whom could you have promised such a thing?"

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"To him—that one—I first alluded to." She did not attempt now to meet his eyes, but fingered nervously along the edge of her sleeve.

"Can it be possible that in that country unmarried youths speak in unmannerly directness to young women of such intimate affairs? I had heard a hint of this unbelievable indelicacy, and once your mother, Iriya, hinted that we should warn you. But I scoffed then at the thought of your needing the admonition. Alas! being a woman, she knew you better than I."

His head sank forward. Yuki twisted her slim hands into wisps. "In America all speak of these things, father. They think us immodest for other reasons, and foolishly sensitive in this. The schoolgirls talk—and the matrons. All theatres treat of it—and books are full of it. You sent me no warning—I could not know, of myself. Please, honorably, restrain anger against me."

"I must not be angry," muttered Tetsujo, who now gave every symptom of a rising storm of wrath. "I must be calm. But gods! this is a foul spectre to meet at the very outset! Am I to understand that this man—this person—spoke directly to you, and you listened without first receiving permission from your parents? He could have gone, at least, to my friend, and my country's representative, Baron Kanrio."

"Father, father," cried the girl, "you *are* becoming angry. I did not have the time to reflect. In

America one does things first and thinks about them afterward. I am not sure that person ever has even met—our noble baron."

If she hoped to palliate by this last disclosure she was quickly undeceived. "The gamester—the oaf! Insolent fool! An impostor unknown even by sight to your natural guardian in a distant land! He must be an alien! No Japanese—not even a Yedo scavenger—could have been guilty of that misdeed!"

"But he spoke quite openly to my best American friends, the Todds," said Yuki, desperately. Tetsujo's rising excitement and anger lapped like flames about this new thought.

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"And that Mr. Todd, now come to be minister in our very home,—did he encourage your filial impiety?"

"It was not so much Mr. Todd as Madame, his wife, and my schoolmate, Gwendolen," admitted Yuki, with a sinking heart.

"Ah, I might have known it," said Tetsujo. His relief was evident. "Only women! Mere cackling geese. America echoes to their shrill voices. That is of no consequence."

"In that country women are of much consequence, and everyone speaks openly of affairs of love and—marriage," persisted Yuki, who now clung half hopelessly to this one tangible point.

"And you yourself—ingrate—would willingly bestow yourself, without a word from me or your mother, upon a man who is a stranger, and whose conduct, heard from your partial lips, impresses me as characteristic of a fool and an outcast?"

His brows were black and twitching. Yuki knew that she must take her stand now or never. "You see only the side of Japanese convention, father. I have given to him a promise. When your consent and that of my mother are gained, I shall be glad to be his wife."

Tetsujo started convulsively, then controlled himself. The sudden checking in of passion recoiled through the very air. With rigid hands he stuffed and lighted his small pipe. When he spoke his voice sounded flat and hollow, like beaten wood.

"Such a promise, unratified by me, of course means nothing, unless—it be defiance of heaven and of natural decency. It binds no one—you least of all. Consider it unsaid."

Yuki looked directly upon him. Her soft feminine chin grew a little squarer, more like his. "That promise is given, father. Neither you nor I have power to recall it. It has gained a living growth in the soul of a third person." She turned half-closed eyes to the garden. Tetsujo went forward in two small stiff jerks. His eyes fastened on her face, as though he saw it for the first time. Veins swelled in his neck, and the fingers on his small pipe-stem grew slowly flat, like the heads of adders.

"Is that you speaking, Onda Yuki?" he asked. "The gods grant that I wake from this dream! But if it be reality, then sorrow is to come. If this man be a foreigner, let him stay in his own land! You are mine utterly,—at my disposal in marriage as in all else. There are ways, in Japan, to curb such mad demons as those that now look at me through your eyes. Go! leave me. I shall hear no more of this,—or else it may be that I shall forget my fatherhood, as you your obligations. Go!"

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"Father," said Yuki, quietly, "you must hear more of this or drive me from the house. You owe me consideration and justice; for the ideas that I have, you yourself sent me to America to gain. You even let me be a Christian. With the Christians marriage is a sacred thing—"

"Be still!" said Tetsujo, in a terrible, low voice. His pipe dropped to the floor. The coal burrowed itself, a charred and smoking ring, into the fragrant matting. The odor was that of field-grass burning. The man rocked himself to and fro for control. His lean hands plunged deep into his sleeves, and grasped, one each, a jerking arm. He was terrified at his own obsession of fury, and his soul warned him against a yielding to his madness. His greenish twisted lips writhed horribly once or twice before the next words came. One corner of his mouth went far down at the corner. His words hissed from a small distorted aperture near the chin. "You were allowed to turn Christian for the acquiring knowledge of their foolish—creed. I believed that the soul of a samurai's daughter,—of my daughter,—would be untainted by the immoral portions of their doctrine. I see now my credulity! Gods! I will consume myself with this heat! When you marry—wench,—which shall be soon,—if your Japanese husband approves not of Christianity, you will cease to be Christian!"

The two pairs of eyes met, hard, flashing, defiant. Yuki rose to her feet. He sprang after her. His right hand now felt instinctively for the sword-hilts which should have been at his hip. The leering, down-drawn mouth twitched and writhed.

"Your words do not lash from me my heritage of race!" she cried aloud. "I am still your daughter,—a samurai's daughter!" With a movement like light she stripped back her left sleeve, baring a white, blue-threaded arm. "Because I am a samurai's daughter I refuse a coward's obedience! Hot blood of a samurai stings these veins no less than those bronze arteries you clutch. Show me reason and I will listen. Apart from that I defy you! I shall be faithful to the man I love even though your legal rights prevent our happiness. Turn me into the street,—slay me with your own hand,—I shall not be compelled into a marriage of your choosing!"

Onda clutched his throat. The breath came gurgling like a liquid. For an instant it seemed as if he must hurl himself bodily upon her. Then he stumbled backward against the plaster wall of the room, clawing at its tinted surface. Yuki's eyes never left him. Now he lurched again toward her, then fell back, shaken like a jointed puppet by his own consuming rage. "Gods of my Ancestors! Demons of the deepest Hell! Go, go!—lest indeed I slay you. You fiend—you hanna! From my sight, I say!—I cannot endure—"

He cowered again, striking himself into temporary blindness with one powerful fist.

"I go, father, in obedience,—not in fear," said the girl's clear voice. He sprawled forward, and fell, sobbing like an exhausted runner. Yuki covered her face and went.

CHAPTER TEN

WITH the Imperial Restoration in Japan—an event, in time, just thirty-five years before the date mentioned at the beginning of this story—many of the nobles of Japan met with ruin. This was especially the case with the "hatamoto," a class directly dependent for revenue and patronage upon the favor of the usurping "Shogun." The real Emperor, then a boy of sixteen, living in seclusion at Kioto, was still nominal ruler and spiritual head of the government, forming a sort of "Holy Roman Empire," translated into terms of Buddhism. When, as a result of revolution and many sharp, fierce battles, this boy was brought in triumph to take his rightful place as temporal ruler also, with a new court in the great capital of Tokio, the Shogun, direct descendant of the mighty Iyeyasu, went into dignified retirement. Over-rich monasteries and temples, arrogant after centuries of Tokugawa benefice, were forced to part with broad lands, and even, in certain instances, with personal treasure. The simpler "Shinto" faith, an indigenous nature-spirit and ancestor-worshipping creed, opposed its principles to gorgeous Buddhist forms. The pure spirit of the younger faith and the profundities of its philosophy did not suffer. The blow was aimed at externals. The child-like Japanese soul to-day kneels with equal sincerity at a wayside Shinto shrine or before the gold-hung altars of Sakyamuni.

This revolution, then, was threefold and complete. Politics, religion, society, shifted within their national circle and assumed new aspects. The centre of all was the young ruler, Mutsuhito. Now the "kugè," or court nobles of Kioto, who had willingly shared retirement and comparative poverty with this true descendant of the gods, came again into power. But besides these two classes, the hatamoto and other dependent samurai, and the kugè, was still a third,—the most important,—the daimyo or feudal lords of the empire. Some among these had never yet given satisfactory hostages to the Shoguns, and lived always in a state of insolent pride and suppressed insurrection. At need of their Emperor, the true mettle of their loyalty rang out. Men, money, lives, property, were poured out like water for this beloved cause. Those who had been haughtiest to the Shoguns bowed now in deepest reverence to the boy Mutsuhito, in whose veins ran the blood of their ancient dynasty. He was to them truly divine; not in the impossible, superstitious sense, but as a sort of human channel flowing between the old gods and modern men. Through him were reconstruction and new national glory to be gained. A life laid down in his cause were but newly come alive.

Prominent among such patriots was the old Daimyo of Konda, father of the present Prince Haganè. His title more literally translated would be that of "Duke," or "Feudal Prince." His lands, lying far to the south, with a rough channel to divide them from the mainland, held almost a separate and independent existence. His chief province, and the one from which he took his title, was Konda. "Haganè" was the family name. At the first hint of national uprising the old daimyo, abandoning his own loved home, came at once to Kioto, and later made the journey with the young Emperor to Yedo. By right he assumed the place of guardian and adviser. The old daimyo was, as it chanced, somewhat learned in foreign matters, and this, in spite of the Shogun's rigid exclusion of all things foreign, of the death-penalty to any Japanese attempting to leave Japan, or, having managed to leave, attempting to return. This was a mighty armor of self-protection to the Tokugawa policy; but, in common with most armor, it had just one small flaw. In this case the flaw was a tiny island, granted to the Dutch, called "Deshima." Not far from the Konda borders lay this innocent fleck of earth, surrounded by blue native seas, and overgrown, like other islands, with tall feathery bamboo, camellia, and camphor trees; and yet, because of its existence, Haganè gained

foreign books,—from it he smuggled a Dutch interpreter who could read and write not only his own language, but Japanese. Other curious minds drew near this spring of knowledge; and, partly because of it, long before Perry's expedition to the Far East, the Japanese people had become restless, eager, awake, and in ferment for a national readjustment.

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Haganè's one son, Sanètomo, a few years older than the boy Emperor, and reared as nearly in friendship with him as reverence would allow, was among the first youths of his class to travel in Europe, and to acquire any European language. Upon his father's death, he was asked by the Emperor to take at once the offices and semi-royal prerogatives of the lamented elder statesman. All the daimyos had received national bonds for the alienation of their fiefs; and thus those who had been most powerful still enjoyed great wealth in their own right.

With the Emperor once firmly established, etiquette and the restrictions of court-life began to prove irksome to Sanètomo. One could have continued to practise fine manners under the Shoguns. Here to-day was something better. A new army was to be formed; after that a new navy. Haganè advised adaptation of tactics from the German military school, its unbending automatonism appearing to him a safe restriction for enthusiastic beginners. From the first, however, his mind had been fixed upon the administrative methods of that marvellous small heart of an enormous empire, England. Japan should be to the Far East what England had become to the West. What one island had accomplished, that also could another do.

The Japanese nation as a whole went reeling drunk with over-potations of foreign ideas. For a while it seemed that everything Japanese was to be swept away. The small opposition party, frenzied by the apparition, took hideous revenge in murder, assassination, and suicide. Haganè's faith did not for a moment waver. After excess comes nausea, reaction. So had his countrymen, in more than one epoch now long past, drunk in the new. In time they would reject the unneeded, and infuse new power in what they had adopted. The thinkers of his empire could afford to wait.

When the new constitution was promulgated in February, 1889, there was rejoicing such as this old earth seldom sees. Haganè was created Minister of War. This position he had continued to hold, with varying intervals. He was now the incumbent. Much of his time was spent, perforce, in the "foreign" official residence, well within sight of the Imperial moats. Most of such edifices in Tokio are depressing. This was particularly cheerless. The house of brick, wood, and plaster, chiefly plaster, stood full two stories high, was of ample dimensions, and had a huge, square, blue-tiled roof. Though planned and built by the most artistic nation now alive, it had not one line of beauty, nor one successful effort after fine proportion. In these early days it seemed an accepted creed among the Japanese that anything to be truly "foreign" must necessarily offend the eye; yet, thought the ingenuous pupils, since ugliness apparently goes in the company of wealth, power, material welfare, and political recognition,—why, by all means, let us be uglier than the foreigners themselves!

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Around the house lay something called a garden, a watery emulsion of American flower beds and a Japanese landscape creation. The effect of the whole place was amorphous, unstable, depressing, with the one redeeming feature of bigness.

Onda Tetsujo, speeding toward this haven in his hired jinrikisha, rattled along the uneven stone of the street, and then turned into the one great entrance of the imposing shell. The garden wall had a secret gate or two, but these were generally kept bolted. The storm of the early morning was abating. A drizzling, discouraged rain, with irregular gusts of wind through it, persisted in efforts to exclude all cheer. Onda knocked at one of the rear doors of the Japanese wing, and was but little surprised to hear, from the man who opened for him, that his Excellency the Prince, having transacted all official business for the day, had now retired to his "besso" (villa) on the high land of suburban "Tabata."

Onda re-entered his vehicle and gave the curt order, "Tabata." In the street he added, "Call an atoshi, and pull up the hood and oil-cloth." An atoshi, or "Mr. After," was summoned, the oil-cloth hood of the jinrikisha drawn far over and held in place by a single black cord knotted to one shaft. A sort of oil-cloth lap-robe, hung up in front and hooked to the inner lining of the hood, afforded complete immunity from wetting. Within the careful adjustment sat Tetsujo, blinking and scowling. The day had brought him a new and unwelcomed experience,—defiance from a woman. He wondered, as he was dragged along the viscid street, whether, in the happy, vanished feudal days, any warrior of his clan had known a similar indignity. There was on record the case of a wilful bride who, married against her wishes to an Onda chief, had disguised herself in a suit of armor grown too small for him, and sought heroic death in battle. But even this was better than open insult and defiance. Well, Yuki must be watched closely. Her education and beauty were not to be thrown away on a foreigner who, likely as not, would tire of and desert her. She must marry a young Japanese already well along on the way to official or military promotion. When this Russian war came, Japan would need all her people, men and women. His only child should not be given over to the loose affections of a foreigner. He scowled anew at the thought, and gave so savage a sound that his coolies stopped short in the road to inquire whether the honorable master were in pain.

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"No," growled Tetsujo, in return, "a warrior does not feel pain; that is for babes and women."

A few minutes later the redoubled grunts and groans of his bearers—evidently sharing shamelessly the weaker prerogatives of the other sex—told Tetsujo that they had begun the ascent of the Tabata slope. At the eastern edge, where the hill goes down like a cliff, and one looking far out over rice-fields sees the Sumida River finding a shining road to Tokio, and the great twin peaks of Tsukuba-yama standing guard over the other half of the world, spread the broad eaves of Prince Haganè's villa.

Onda gave a sigh of relief as he stepped out under the door-roof.

"O tanomi moshimasu!" (I make request) he called, rapping on the closed shoji panels with his knuckles.

"Hai!" came almost instantly from within, and a housemaid was on her knees pushing the panels softly aside, a hand on each.

"The august one—is he within?" asked the visitor.

"Hai! Illustrious Sir. Deign to mount the step, and, seating yourself on the hard mats, be refreshed by our tasteless tea and worthless cakes, while I hasten to announce your joy-giving appearance."

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Tetsujo dismissed his kuruma men, shook off his shoes, and remained seated on the mats, still with folded arms, still deep in thought. The little maid, returning quickly, murmured that "the noble master would receive his honorable guest at once."

Prince Haganè sat alone in the great room, immediately surrounded by boxes and trays with tea, writing, and smoking outfits. There was one beautiful hibachi, or firepot, of hammered brass. An English book on International Law lay on the floor beside him among newspapers in Japanese, Chinese, English, French, and German. Passages in these papers had been heavily marked by the blue and red pencil still held in the reader's hand. He did not rise or bow as Tetsujo entered, merely turning his face toward the opened fusuma and saying, "Most welcome, good Tetsujo. Enter and forget the storm."

"I fear I have brought the storm in with me, your Highness," Tetsujo could not refrain from crying. He fell on his knees just within the door, bowed many times, and drew in his breath loudly. Haganè lifted an unread newspaper and made several markings while Tetsujo continued his genuflections. Having at last completed a number satisfactory to his sense of propriety, he sat upright. Haganè folded this last paper, and put it into a heap with the others.

"Draw nearer," he said with a smile. "It is a day for a chat between old friends. No, be not so humble—nearer yet—I insist. Now—that is better and more companionable. Pour yourself some tea."

"Honors are heaped upon your unworthy servant," rejoined Onda, pouring tea, first for the prince, then for himself. "I have just come from the official residence of your Highness. How cold and un-homelike appear all foreign houses; while this—" he paused to look slowly around—"this warms a man's heart to see."

"Though insignificant, it has a certain restfulness," admitted the host. "Lacking a mistress, it cannot seem in reality a home."

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Tetsujo's face clouded. "Speak not to me of mistresses, Lord," he mumbled sourly.

Haganè gave him a queer glance, but said nothing. He understood well the nature of his own kerai. So angular a thought as now distressed him must soon work its way to the surface of speech. "To-day I am in mind of the Chinese sage who taught us that all women are mere manifestations of demoniac force. They are sent here to tempt us—to test—to torment. Would that I could reach a heaven of warriors, untainted by their sex—!"

"Surely, my Tetsujo," interrupted Haganè, gravely, "those of your household bring no torment. I have never known a better wife than Iriya."

"I complain not of Iriya," said the other, a hint of excitement creeping into his voice; "but, Lord, had you seen that ingrate that I must call my daughter! Had you seen Yuki an hour since, you would have perceived what the Chinese mean by she-demons."

"Yuki!" echoed Haganè, this time in genuine surprise. "Is there not some mistake? Yuki is spirited; but I cannot picture her as a—demon!"

"I will honorably relate the event. My heart, with the memory, seethes and bubbles as a small cauldron." In a voice often shaken from control by passion, with a dark countenance slowly deepening into a bronze red of agitation, Tetsujo imparted the story of his child's defiance. Not once did Prince Haganè lift his head, not even when Tetsujo, beating the matted floor in his rage, roared out, "Her eyes flashed, my Lord, like those of a dragon-maid in battle! They scorched me like sparks! They would not fall though I sent out the whole volume of my will to quench them. It was defiance—defiance—naked and unashamed! The very air around me turned to flame. Murder dried my tongue. Had I worn my short swords as of old,—"

Haganè gave an exclamation and looked up. "What then! Are you yourself a demon, Tetsujo,— or a father? Scorn to you, thus speaking of a maid! It was your own strong spirit darting upon you from her bright eyes. Gods! the look of her must have been magnificent!"

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"Magnificent! Yes, as hell, perhaps, is magnificent! Think you not, Lord, that she deserves death for such impiety?"

"My poor Tetsujo," said Haganè, "I pray you, quaff more tea and be calm. You alone cannot walk backward, when the rest of the nation races to the fore. Yuki's death for such a cause would certainly mean your hanging, and, in my opinion, a fate that you would well deserve. Come now, let us reason like men, not squirm and crackle like live devil-fish thrown upon coals. The point of the matter is, that your daughter wishes to marry one of her choice, and not one of yours. Naturally, you oppose this."

"Oppose!" echoed Tetsujo, straining in his seat, "I forbid it! I defy her to attempt it! Should she persist, she shall have my curse and that of my ancestors—"

"Nay, nay, my Tetsujo, be calm. Anger is the worst leak in a man's store of self-respect. I cannot talk further until you grow calm." He paused and slowly poured for himself a cup of tea, as if to give the old warrior time for self-recollection.

Tetsujo drew a tenugui from his sleeve, mopped his damp brow, pulled his kimono collar into smoother folds, and settled, by degrees, into an appearance of tranquillity. Now and again a small convulsive shudder still passed over him, a movement involuntary and uncontrollable, such as is seen in a runaway horse brought suddenly to a stand.

"Now let me question," began Haganè's deep tones again. "Answer nothing, my friend, but what I ask. Are you certain that this man, whom our little Yuki thinks she loves, is, indeed, a foreigner?"

"I am not honorably certain, your Highness, even of so much. But I think he is a foreigner. No Japanese, not even a street scavenger of Yedo, as I told her—"

Haganè raised a hand for silence. "You should, first of all, have ascertained his race, his name, and his profession. He may be a hired Russian spy for all we know."

Tetsujo almost bounded from his place. "A Russian spy! God of Battles,—I thought not of that!"

"And did you bethink you to inquire whether the—person—had already followed her to this country?"

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Tetsujo's eyes rolled fearfully. He found no ready words. "My Lord—my Lord—" he gasped.

"You now perceive, Tetsujo, there are better things for a man to do with his wits than ignite them, and, with the burning bits, play a foolish jugglery. Our first concern is to find out whether or not that man is here."

Tetsujo bowed over to hide his chagrin. "Your wisdom is that of Dō-ku and Benkei Sama in one," he murmured.

Haganè stuffed and lighted a small pipe. "When you met your daughter on the hatoba at Yokohama were there young males of the party?"

"Hai, master. I recall now two strange and alert ones who appeared to be young."

"Was one of a pink color, like buds of a kaido bloom, and eyes a deep-blue color?"

"All were red and hideous. The one who tried to speak with me had rice-straw on his head in

place of decent hair."

"Ah," said Haganè, puffing at his pipe.

"Yes, your Highness, and in our conversation she informed me that the Todds were well aware of her shameful passion, and that the women upheld it."

Silence fell between the men. Tetsujo bit his finger-nails in his impatience.

"In three more days," began the other, slowly, "Mr. Todd will be formally presented to his Sacred Majesty; after that ceremony he will not, I think, permit his women to aid Yuki in a marriage which is against your wishes and—mine."

Onda gave a joyful start.

"Wait," said Haganè, "there is more to be said; I must take a moment's counsel with myself." At these words he fell into a reverie so profound that his spirit seemed to be absent from his breathing body.

Tetsujo controlled himself as best he could. The whole affair was galling to his pride. He resented even Haganè's knowing of the indignity; yet he had no recourse but Haganè. The rain-water, trickling with a sound of dull clinking coins down the tin corner-spouts, irritated him to madness. He hated the little wet sparrows who sat up under the eaves and exchanged uncomplimentary remarks about the weather. Haganè's power of concentration was in itself reproof and another source of irritation. The great man came to himself without a start.

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"Listen, Onda Tetsujo, I will offer advice, but it must be taken entire. I will have no variation, mind you, or personal addition."

"I shall receive it humbly, on my head," grumbled the kerai.

Haganè controlled a smile. "Upon your return, treat the maiden gently. Defiance is her best armor. We must not be harsh. Win her confidence by renewed kindnesses. If possible, bend your haughty will to the point of expressing regret for this morning's anger."

"Excuse myself to a woman—to my own daughter!"

"I shall not insist upon that point. I said only if it were possible. Some things are not possible, even to a Buddha."

"And this is even such," cried Tetsujo.

"Let it pass. My purpose may be accomplished without. It is indispensable, however, that you be kind. Give to her, unsolicited, permission to invite the women of the Todd family to your home."

"This, too, is difficult," muttered Tetsujo; "but with the aid of Fudo Bosatsu (Bodhisàttwa of the Fiery Immovability) I can achieve it."

"Excellent," said the other; "now for my part. I will, on the day of Mr. Todd's presentation, arrange for a banquet here at Tabata, to which I will invite the family of Mr. Todd and also the two young men whom you saw at Yokohama. If Yuki's foreign lover is here at all, he is of that party."

"I am not worthy of such deep thought and consideration at your hands, Lord," said Tetsujo, gratefully.

"Be not deceived. It is for Yuki's sake as well. Since her early childhood I have watched with deep interest the growth of her fine intellect and the development of her unusual beauty. Lacking children of my own, I have felt something of a father's affection for her. I too wish to keep her for Japan. I approve not the thought of a foreign marriage."

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Tetsujo lifted his head. "One question more, your Highness. Is it your belief that Yuki will surely betray herself, if indeed the foreign devil whom she—she—well, the foreign devil,—should arrive?"

"I think she cannot utterly deceive us both," said Haganè, diplomatically.

Still Onda looked doubtful. "Yesterday I should have said the same; but since this defiance—this exhibition of unwomanly strength—"

"My life has been one long school of human character. Yuki will not deceive us both,"

reiterated the Prince.

"I am content. I will now remove my worthless body from your sight, having claimed already far too much of your august consideration." Tetsujo bowed and rose. The other rose also, following him half across the room.

"There is yet one bit of counsel," said he. "For the next three days, until the banquet, Yuki must not leave the house alone. Let her go where she will, Tetsujo, but be you always near. If a foreigner should force entrance, or stop your daughter on the street, allow no private speech between them; and if he persist, as mad foreigners will, call the nearest guard, and make free use of my name."

"Your mercy is as wide as Heaven, Lord," murmured the kerai, as he finally took his departure.

Through the gentle and most willing mediator, Iriya, Tetsujo transmitted his willingness to receive Yuki's foreign friends. This sudden clemency, riding on the very back of fury, turned to the girl a masked face of new fear. She knew her father incapable of such sudden reversion, or of the subtlety implied. A stronger power was behind him. She was to be watched and experimented upon. Yet, in spite of this intuitive belief, she could not put aside the opportunity of seeing her friend, of hearing from her lover.

A messenger bore her carefully worded note to the American Legation. Mrs. Todd and Gwendolen responded almost instantly. The former overwhelmed her with endearments and reproaches, an exhibition embarrassing to the girl and terrifying to Iriya. The servants peeped in through chinks in the hall shoji, and at this sight Maru clapped a hand to her mouth to keep from shrieking, and, fleeing to the backyard, rocked to and fro, sobbing, "The big foreign lady is eating our young mistress; oh, what terrible creatures are the foreigners!"

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Meanwhile Mrs. Todd, happily unconscious of the effect she was producing, continued her volley of ejaculations. "My dearest child! *Such* relief when your note came. Gwendolen and I were almost distracted, weren't we, Gwendolen? Of course Cyrus called us geese, and said we were making mountains out of mole-hills; but Cy is always disagreeable when we get into a twitter. But I can assure you, my dear, there is one man at least who does not think us silly; he has been worse off than either of us, hasn't he, Gwennie?"

"Be careful—be careful," said Yuki, in a low voice.

Iriya was in the room, a very figure-head of a hostess with her reserved, timid ways and lack of fluent English. She managed now by gestures, and a very careful use of certain phrases learned by rote from a book of foreign etiquette, to invite her guests to be seated. When this was accomplished, not without many suppressed grunts from the stout lady, Gwendolen managed to get near her friend, and to put out a cool, slim hand, with a pressure of re-assuring love. Yuki clasped the hand quickly, but did not forget another warning look. She leaned next toward the great cluster of hot-house flowers which the American girl wore at her belt, and, under cover of examining them, whispered, "My father is already opposed to me. I do not know what to do. Even writing a letter is impossible. Only tell him to be patient, and have faith."

"He's beside himself," returned Gwendolen, in the same suppressed voice. "He carries on like a girl at a *matinée*; but this word from you will help him. Of course all of us knew that something was going wrong."

Mrs. Todd, to divert attention from the whisperers, engaged Iriya in vociferous conversation. "Yuki back again! You very happy?" she asked in a loud voice, as if her hostess were deaf.

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"Yes," rejoined Iriya, timidly, in English, "we are quite hap-pee."

"Why, she understands beautifully!" cried Mrs. Todd to the two girls, in triumph, as at a personal achievement.

"Mother reads English well, and even in talking she understands things, when one is thoughtful to speak slowly and emphatic, as you have done, dear Mrs. Todd. But she is bashful about the trying," said Yuki.

"She needn't be, I'm sure!" cried the matron. "She pronounces real well. But it's a never-ending marvel to me how these people pick it up. Why, there's hardly a shop in the Ginza where they don't talk it! I'm sure I'll never catch on to your queer language, Yuki-ko, if I live here a hundred years."

"Come look at my dear plum-tree that I used to talk about in America," said Yuki to Gwendolen, rising as she spoke. Iriya looked up in consternation. Her artless face showed perfectly that she had been forbidden to let Yuki from her sight. Behind a certain closed fusuma panel, the one opening directly into Tetsujo's study, came a very low sound, as if of a stifled cough. Yuki threw a sad little smile back over her shoulder to Iriya. "I am not going from the veranda, mother," she said in English.

"Good heavens!" whispered Gwendolen, as they reached the further side of the room, "are you a condemned prisoner already?"

"No," said Yuki, "but I am a watched one. It is too humiliating."

"Are they afraid Pierre will run away with you?"

"They know nothing of Pierre, only that I wish to choose for myself the man I am to marry. They do not even certainly know that he is a foreigner. I must keep them from knowing, or they will be more angrier yet."

"Your father is not exactly a lover of foreigners, is he?" asked Gwendolen, dryly.

Yuki gave a sorry little smile. "And a Frenchman, Gwendolen,—a Frenchman with the Russian mother! It is going to be a long, hard fight, like the coming war itself. But I must be brave. My promise I have given to Pierre."

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"Poor darling," cried Gwendolen, clasping her closer, "I almost wish you hadn't; but, of course, when one is in love,—I have a letter for you here. Shall you dare take it?"

Yuki flushed and looked miserable, as she said, "Yes, I shall take it, though I must use the deceit. I will for the first time deceive. When we go back, put it on the floor in your handkerchief, and I will take it up. I feel to be sick at the thought of such treachery to my parents; but what am I to do?"

Neither had much thought for the beautiful plum-tree now opening optimistic blooms after the storm of yesterday. As the girls came into the room together, Mrs. Todd said to Yuki, "Your mother tells me that you are all invited to the banquet of Prince Haganè for next Friday."

"Yes," said Yuki, smiling and seating herself near the speaker, "we have accepted; but at the last moment mother will find some good excuse for staying away. She always does. Is not that true, Mama San?"

The substance of the loving gibe being translated, Iriya blushed and tittered, and put her face to her sleeve, like any schoolgirl. "Naugh-tee Yuki-ko," she managed to say, "make bad talk of Mama San!"

At this moment the bell of the entrance gate gave a jangle unusually loud and abrupt. Immediately bare feet of servants were heard scurrying about the floors of the house. Iriya drew her head erect to listen. "It is another honorable visitor," she murmured, and half arose, sinking back, as she remembered her husband's injunction.

Yuki's heart had begun to beat. There was something most un-Japanese in the harsh, sudden clamor of the tiny bell. Masculine footsteps, unmistakably in foreign shoes, came around by the kitchen side of the house through rows of green "na," and crunched the gravel of the paths. Yuki's face went white. This was a breach of etiquette possible only to a foreigner, and to one newly arrived in Japan.

As the group of four women gazed outward, not knowing what to expect, Pierre Le Beau's high-bred, sensitive face, a little worn by the suspense of the past three days, came around the corner, and stared at them across the narrow, polished veranda. Yuki and Iriya were alike incapable of speech. A sulphurous, low growl was heard behind the fusuma.

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"Shake off your shoes and join us," came Mrs. Todd's loud, jovial command.

"If Miss Onda repeats the invitation," said he, with eyes upon the shrinking girl.

Iriya bowed without realizing what she did. It was against all decency for women to receive, alone, a male visitor. She longed to call her husband, but did not dare. For once in her courteous, quiet life, Iriya Onda was at a loss what to do. Yuki made up her mind quickly. Though her heart longed, burned to have him near, she knew that he must be sent away. If he came in, Tetsujo would realize instantly who it was, and would transmit the knowledge to his shrewder and more far-sighted monitor. She was helpless, alone, unarmed, but none the less determined to fight the battle of a love to which she had promised fidelity. With effort she raised herself to a stiff, upright

posture, and, keeping her voice clear and cold, she said, "Sir, if my honored father were at home he would doubtless entreat you to enter, but in his absence, neither my mother nor myself have authority to take that pleasant duty upon ourselves. If you will pardon my great rudeness, sir, we shall need to be excused from receiving you at all."

For an instant the young man stared. Slowly his face grew white. He gave one glance of concentrated love, pain, and resentment, and then passed, without a word, along the edge of the veranda, and under the out-leaning plum-tree. Yuki, watching him with a dying heart, felt that never again could she look upon her favorite tree without seeing that fair, bowed head beneath the branches. Mrs. Todd gaped, incredulous, at the girl. Gwendolen alone realized the situation. She sprang to her feet instantly. "Mother!" she cried, "the young man came for us, of course. We have trespassed too long on Mrs. Onda's hospitality; now let us join our unfortunate visitor at the gate and have him ride home with us, I have something of importance to say to him."

Yuki gave a little sob of gratitude and relief. Mrs. Todd, partly comprehending, heaved upward to her feet. "Yes," she said to Gwendolen, but with a disapproving glance poured, full-measure, upon the Japanese girl, "let us ask him to ride home. The poor fellow looked as if the earth had crumbled under his feet."

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Yuki felt the reproach. She could have laughed aloud at the irony of it.

Mrs. Todd walked in what she supposed a stately fashion across the room. Her feet pressed into the soft matting as into a stiff dough, leaving behind her a track of shallow indentations.

At parting Gwendolen whispered in her friend's ear, "I understood. Your father has been watching all along. I will make things clear to the other."

When the panelled gate was closed once more, and the little bell cold after long reverberation, Yuki felt a great physical shudder. Her nerves demanded of her the respite of tears, but still she held herself in check. The luxury of weeping and the hidden letter alike must wait until a night hour when the rest of the house was asleep.

She went out into the sunshine of the garden, well within sight of the house. She tried not to think, or to allow forebodings. Against the old plum-tree she leaned, catching idly the white drifting petals. Each might have been a separate poem, so freighted is Japanese lore with fancies and exquisite imagery drawn from this favorite flower. The transience of life, its sweetness, fidelity to natural law, wifehood and womanly tenderness, rebirth, immortality,—all these thoughts and more came to her softly as the petals came. Through each mood, like the clang and clash of brass through low melody, recurred the vision of Pierre—of his yellow hair beneath the old plum-tree. But with the petals fell uncounted moments, heaped less tangibly into hours. So passed the day and succeeding days.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

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THE short interval between the Todds' visit and Prince Haganè's banquet was wrought, within the confines of the Onda home, of small, shifting particles of disquiet, discontent, despondency,—a sort of mist that kept the spirit dark and chill.

Tetsujo found difficulty in meeting his daughter's gaze; though, when her face was averted, he looked long, and moodily enough. He had spoken to her more than once, always in forced, crisp speech, chopping his words into inches and weighing each separate cube. Through this mechanical means he informed her that she was to attend Prince Haganè's banquet without fail, and ride there in a double jinrikisha with him, her father. Iriya and the servants were permitted to resume normal relations with the culprit. Externally things went into their old domestic grooves.

It came to the girl, not with a shock of surprise, but rather as an insidious growth of conviction, that the decision behind Tetsujo's demeanor was inspired by no less a person than Lord Haganè. At first it seemed incredible that so great a man could concern himself with the affairs of a mere girl. At this very moment he was in the midst of a threatened national crisis. Friendship with her father could scarcely account for all. Haganè must have some personal suspicion of the existence of Pierre, of Pierre's family, and of his attitude toward her. Her mind went back to her meeting with the Prince in Washington. She had been the one to introduce Pierre. Now she tried to recall every look and word of that morning interview, which followed her débutante ball. Again she saw Haganè's stern, scarred face, thrilled to the kindness of his voice as he spoke of her childhood, and pondered anew his meaning in the final admonition to loyalty. Perhaps even then he suspected that she and Pierre were more than friends. No, she could not believe it! Even if he did suspect, it was

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not certain that he would disapprove. Haganè was known everywhere as a friend to foreigners. He had travelled much, and had seen with his own eyes the splendor and the opportunities of foreign courts. He would know that, as wife of a diplomat, no matter what his country, she could serve her own.

At any rate she was soon again to meet the ex-daimyo. She was glad at least of this, and until she judged for herself, would not believe absolutely that the great man was against her. The thought of seeing him, of standing near him, gave her a sort of gentle strength and calm, as one feels when standing beside a great tree. If she could only get a warning to her lover,—to that less strong but dearly loved Pierre! Toward him she was beginning to feel, not only a girl's romantic devotion, but a mother's protecting tenderness. Here in her own country she longed to have her arms around him, shielding and at the same time preventing him from ignorance and prejudice. At Haganè's villa he was possibly to face an ordeal, unwarned by a hint from her. A little hope crept closer. Pierre was a passionate admirer of all the arts of Japan, Haganè an untiring collector. At the Tabata banquet pictures would surely be displayed. It was possible that Pierre's intelligence and appreciation might win him the most powerful of friends.

Most of the night before the banquet the young girl lay awake. The faint light of the andon flowed across her, melting into soft grayness at the far end of the room. It ruled, as with a heavy pencil, the overlapping boards of the ceiling. She counted them, but to no purpose. Sleep perched higher.

"A flock of sheep that leisurely pass by,—one after one; bees murmuring—" she quoted under her breath, and lay still as a fallen rose. Sleep grinned down from the small, high branches of night. She thought of dark running water, of a green curtain stretched across nothingness, of a deep, bottomless pool; but sleep, the raven, never stirred a feather.

Beside her bed, on the soft, matted floor, lay a white prayer-book, a tiny vase containing a few sprays of umè (plum-flower), and a chatelaine watch set with pearls. The watch had been a graduation present from Gwendolen. From time to time Yuki lifted the animated toy, turned its face toward the andon, and held it to her ear, only to fall back with a smothered sigh.

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"Will the blessed daylight never come?" thought Yuki for the hundredth time. Just as she had relinquished all hope of it, slumber darted down, but in its harsh beak was a dream.

She wandered, silent, on a great black moor. Near her feet, as she moved, a dull light flickered, turning all the dry grass red, and making, as it were, a muffled pathway for her guidance. She was searching, searching, searching,—for what, for whom, she could not recall. Her memory was darkened like the moor, and its dull flashes showed alike only empty space. Suddenly, far off to the right, a steadier beacon sprang. Stars seemed to be climbing up by a stair as yet invisible. The moor quivered into an even glow,—a mist rising as from a sea of blood. Not fifty paces from her eyes stood Pierre. He smiled, and stretched out his arms to her. The red glare whitened as it fell on him. Then she knew for what she had been searching. She would have fled to him, but found she could not move at all.

Out of the Eastern light now came armed men, lances, falchions, spears, all glittering in the unreal glow. She knew it for a daimyo's procession. It came forward swiftly to the gap which held her wide from Pierre. Decked horses, bullock-carts with huge black-lacquered wheels, and countless warriors, some mounted, some on foot, must pass her. There was movement of tramping; the horses reared and struck heavily on the earth, yet no sound came. Staring at that point from which the long procession rose, she saw it still curving up from an illimitable horizon,—first points of spears and banners; then heads; then men, horses, chariots,—an endless chain. She crouched nearer to the ghosts within her reach, hoping to recognize a friendly face, or at least a kind one, whom she could importune to let her through the line. She peered under hoods and helmets and into the bamboo-blinds of bullock-carts, then fell to earth with a scream, for the faces were not human; each was an ape that grinned at her. In Japan no dream is more prophetic of evil than a dream of apes.

At the agonized cry Suzumè ran from her room at the far side of the house. From the adjoining room came Iriya. Fusuma were flung wide.

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"Forgive—forgive—my rudeness in honorably disturbing you at this hour," gasped the girl. "It was a dream, so terrible a dream!"

"Oh, tell it to the nanten-bush, Miss Yuki. There is one beside your doorstone!" screamed little Maru as she came.

"Too late!" muttered Suzumè. "Already she has broken silence."

"She shivers with fear, poor jewel," said Iriya, chafing the icy hands. "Suzumè, if a coal of fire can be found, brew hot tea for her. That will be best."

"A coal always sleeps in my ashes," boasted the nurse. "I shall at once prepare the drink."

"Mother, you must not remain awake with me at such an hour," chattered the girl.

"Dawn is very near, my child. I hear,—yes, listen,—I hear the first sparrow."

"Little friendly sparrow, how I thank you!" cried Yuki, aloud; then throwing herself into her mother's arms, she began to sob.

That afternoon, when Yuki stepped into the big double kuruma where Tetsujo was already seated, she had never, in spite of sleeplessness and bad dreams, looked more beautiful. Iriya, as her daughter had predicted, found on this last day many excellent reasons for staying at home.

The robing of Yuki had occupied several hours. First, the thick black hair must be done in the latest fashion. Happily this, ever changing, was for the moment in a style peculiarly becoming to her. A great wing stood out at each side, concealing all but the lower tips of the ears. A third division, puffed high above the forehead, completed a shining framework to the pale, spiritual face. Among the coils at the back, a strip of dull pink silk was interwoven,—a flesh-colored centre to a great orchid of jet. She wore a single hairpin, a filigree toy of gold and tinsel representing fireflies in a tiny cage. Her gray kimono of thin silk showed the pink undergarment. The delicate hue appeared in puffed and wadded edges also at throat, wrists, and around the hem. Cherry-flowers were dyed at intervals into the substance of the gray. The obi, that crowning glory of a Japanese woman's dress, was of blue gray satin, with embroidered fireflies of gold.

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Even surly Tetsujo smiled as this fair vision stood upon the doorstone. Little Maru set the high lacquered clogs with pink velvet thongs in readiness. Iriya held out the long black adzuma-coat, while old Suzumè shook odors of incense and sandalwood from the crêpe folds of the head-kerchief called "dzukin."

"Sayonara danna san! (master!) Sayonara o jo san!" called the three women on their knees in the doorway.

"Sayonara, arigato gozaimasu!" (I thank you!) cried Yuki in return, waving a slender hand from the side of the jinrikisha. Tetsujo seemed not to hear.

The unusual proximity brought to the girl, and, as she justly surmised, to Tetsujo also, an unwholesome embarrassment. Each met the difficulty in a characteristic way,—Yuki by throwing her full interest into flashing street scenes about her; Tetsujo by a morose withdrawal into his feudal shell. Twice Yuki spoke concerning some sight that gave her pleasure. Her father's discouraging reply, in both cases, was a grunt. On the slope of Tabata he got out, shook himself like a great dog, and sent Yuki on in the jinrikisha until level land was reached. The girl thought sadly of another hill-ascent, so short a time before; of Tetsujo's kind, loving face as he mounted the slope of Kobinata, his hand on the arm of her little vehicle, his eyes free to her own. Now she was being carried by this same father before a judge, before a man who could help to rule his empire, and yet who, if her fears proved stable, now stooped to coerce a wilful girl.

The entrance gate and court of the Tabata villa had taken on, strangely, the look of its master. The gate was of unpolished cedar, studded with brass nails half a foot across, and barred with hinges that might have swung a hill. The massive panels now stood hospitably ajar. Above them leaned a single pine, red-stemmed and tall, of the indigenous Japanese variety. It, too, resembled Haganè. The house beyond was but little larger or more pretentious than that of Onda the kerai; but the variety of woods used in finishing bespoke both taste and great wealth. The roof, with its dark-blue scalloped tiling was edged at the rim with flattened discs of baked clay, and in the centre of each, in rough intaglio, curved the crest of the Haganè clan.

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Sombre shoji opened, before the visitors had time to dismount. Just within, a superb suitatè, or single screen of gold, painted in snow-laden bamboo trees, shut out interior vistas. Yuki was conducted to a woman's apartment, where she could remove her wraps and examine her shining blue-black coiffure for a misplaced hair. Tetsujo strode to the guest-room. At sight of Prince Haganè seated, still alone, he gave a great sigh of relief. Haganè turned with a smile,—"You love not our foreign friends, good Tetsujo."

"I love them as our cat loves pickled plums, my liege."

Haganè laughed indulgently. "At least you can distinguish the men from the women,—be sure to give me the signal should one of the young males prove to be he who was with Yuki on the

hatoba, and who so rudely forced an entrance to your premises."

"I shall not forget," said Tetsujo.

The wide room was unchanged but for an unusually elaborate flower-composition in the tokonoma (recess). A most valuable set of pictures, three in number, and all mounted alike on priceless brocade, filled the soft, gray tinted space beyond the flowers.

Yuki entered alone. Neither of the men had heard her soft stockinged step, nor her gentle pushing aside of a golden fusuma.

"Go kigen (august health), your Highness," she murmured, sinking where she stood and touching her forehead to the floor.

"Ah, it is Yuki-ko. Come nearer, child," said the host, kindly. As she moved toward him, his eyes rested with frank delight on the vision of her beauty. "You are now truly a maiden of Japan. That last image of you in Washington, if I remember rightly, was of a small brown wren of Paris."

"So at the time you observed, Augustness, and my spirit thereat was poisoned by deep shame."

"A thing so easily rectified can scarcely be a cause of shame," smiled Haganè. "You are now as truly Japanese as even your jealous father could desire. Will you kindly clap and serve us tea, small pigeon?"

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Yuki obeyed instantly and in silence. She was glad to have some occupation for her hands, glad that her eyes had good excuse for drooping. In Prince Haganè's presence the old magnetism, the old troubled sense of his power, again possessed her. Compared with him, nothing else seemed real. He established new values for the spirit. One in the room with him needed no vision to certify his actual place. He dominated and charged the air around him. She felt his eyes as they rested on her slim white hands; she knew when that gaze was turned away.

Haganè, indeed, looked long at the girl. At times he appeared to study her with a gentle, speculative gravity. Of her beauty there had never been a doubt, and to-day she looked her best. Haganè's experience of women had been wide. Now he was saying to himself that this was the fairest maiden of the whole world. Her beauty filled the room like perfume. An old Chinese poet in singing of her would have called her "a flake of white jade held against a star." In the statesman's mind fragments of poetry flitted, similes of moon-light, of white blossoms newly opened in the dew, of hillside grasses in the wind, of a young spring willow with a nightingale in the branches. Poetry is as natural to all classes of Japanese as profanity to the average sailor. Haganè gained new delight in imagery. Should a foreigner be allowed to bear away the sweetness of this flower? No; Tetsujo was justified in his indignation. No foreigner should have her. She must marry some young nobleman of her own land; some honorable and brilliant youth with a future, and at least a hint of personal beauty to match her own. Haganè's mind ran rapidly through a list of eligible men. Objections rose at every point. One was of poor health, another lived a life of open immorality, a third possessed a mother of uncertain temper; Yuki-ko must not have her young life crushed by the tyranny of a shrewish mother-in-law. She should by right be married to a statesman, and be mistress at once of an official home. In this way would her beauty and foreign education be brought into immediate service. If he himself were a young man, what rapture to have that living thing, made up of dew and morning, entirely one's own! Haganè drew a single sharp breath and was calm.

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On the gravelled walk of the entrance court came the sound of a carriage.

"His Excellency Mister Todd-u, Madame Todd-u, Mees Todd-u, Mister Douje, and Mister Le Beau," announced a servant in what he thought English.

Haganè went forward to meet them. "Welcome to my cottage. Are we all known, one to the other?"

"Yes, your Highness," answered Mr. Todd, "unless Mr. Le Beau here is the exception."

"Mister Le Beau," repeated Haganè, very distinctly. "I remember with much clearness the meeting with Mister Le Beau. In your admirable dwelling in the capital city of Washington that meeting took place. Yuki—Miss Onda—performed the introduction ceremony. I remember well."

"And I, your Highness," instantly answered Pierre, with a succession of the sprightly bows that had so incensed old Onda. "It is to be supposed that I should bear in memory so great an event; but I could not have dared to hope for so great a condescension from you."

Haganè replied by a smile and a nod. The latter might have served equally for the kerai who, well within the shadow of Mrs. Todd, made vehement signs of corroboration to his daimyo.

The host then asked of the party, "Shall I not order for you foreign chairs? We keep them in the storehouse for such occasions."

"Thank you kindly, Prince," answered Mrs. Todd for all; "we'll take the floor. In Rome we do as the Romans do." With a lunge the good lady disposed herself in the centre of the apartment, sitting, as it were, at her own feet. The others placed themselves near her, making roughly the outline of a horseshoe, Dodge being at one end, with Yuki beside him, and Prince Haganè at the other.

Gwendolen had with difficulty kept Pierre away from Yuki. "Remember," she had warned, "this may be a sort of Sherlock Holmes affair for making you two betray yourselves and each other. You can't be too careful. Old Haganè is a vibrating lodestone of uncanny intuition, and Onda a parental avalanche just ready to slide!"

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In the effort to keep his hungry eyes from Yuki, Pierre began to explore the room. His attention was first caught by the arrangement of dwarf pine branches and brown cones, in combination with straggling sprays of a yellow orchid. Then he saw the three paintings beyond. "Saint Raphael! what are those?" he murmured under his breath, and made as if to rise from the floor. All turned to him; he sought only the eyes of his host. "Your Highness," he pleaded, his face vital with intelligence, "if not unpardonably rude, may I rise and examine more closely those marvellous paintings?"

Haganè reflected a hint of his brightness. "With greatest pleasure. They are, of course, hung to be seen. I am honored that they attract your notice."

Pierre rushed to the tokonoma, taking instinctively the attitudes of a self-forgetting connoisseur.

"Say, I can't stay out of this!" cried the minister, and crooked his long legs into the angles of a katydid in his efforts to rise. Following the two others, he reached the tokonoma, planting himself, feet wide apart, exactly in front.

Such pictures, painted in sets of three and mounted in single, flexible panels of rich brocade, were designed for hanging in the broad tokonoma of noblemen's houses, or in the living-rooms of priests. This set was in monochrome, on paper which had been stained by time to the color of old ivory. The central painting represented a famous Chinese poet sitting in meditation upon a misty mountain-ledge. The lateral ones were landscapes, one of winter snow, the other, summer fulness. Each illustrated a well-known verse of the poet.

"So this is Japanese art,—the real thing,—is it?" asked Mr. Todd of Pierre. "You must excuse me, Prince," he went on to his host, "Pierre is always reading and talking about the beauty of it, but I'll be gosh—I'll be shot, I mean,—if I can tell what it is about. Over in my own country, now, I can distinguish a tree from a vase of Johnny-jump-ups, and a farmyard from a nood female; but with these pictures, somehow, the harder I look the more I seem to be standing on my head."

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"Cy, I am ashamed of you! *I* love Japanese art, your Highness, and so does my daughter!" expostulated Mrs. Todd, from the floor. "It is so nice, and thin, and cool. I always recommend Japanese pictures to my friends for their summer cottages, and I am hanging our Legation with them now. Dear Mrs. Y., of Washington,—you know the name, of course,—has the most gorgeous screen of gold-leaf, painted in wildflowers. When she has a big reception she always puts it upside down behind her sofa, because it has more flowers at the bottom than at the top,—and nobody ever notices the difference."

The young Frenchman's cheek flushed. He leaned more closely to the paintings, partly to hide his expression. Gwendolen exchanged horrified glances with Dodge, then the sense of fun in both triumphed. Pierre spoke next in low tones, so that none but Haganè could hear him. "I am only a beginner,—a student. There has been little published in foreign languages about your wonderful art, and European collections are rare. Am I wrong in thinking these to be something unusual? The lines of the three flow together like music, yet each is a separate composition. *We* have nothing like it!"

"They are masterpieces by Kano Motonobu," said Haganè.

"Mon Dieu!" breathed Pierre, and seemed as if he would devour with new scrutiny the marvellous visions.

The host's eyes remained fastened upon his enthusiastic guest. He watched every flicker of intelligence, of changing expression. Suddenly the young man turned, met the look, and smiled. It was like sunlight on a meadow when Pierre smiled. "Your Highness," he murmured, "a touch of art should make the whole world kin! Is it not so? Teach me something more of this new mystery of beauty,—be my friend!"

Haganè lowered his lids quickly, but in the downward sweep he caught a glimpse of Yuki's

"Monsieur honors me by offering such a privilege," said Haganè, in an expressionless tone. He bowed slightly. Pierre drew back, feeling unaccountably rebuffed. Why had the great man said "Monsieur"? Before that, the plain term "Mister" had been employed. Vanity, never very far from the citadel of Pierre's being, posited an explanation. "He calls you by the French title," said Vanity, "because he realizes that no Occidental of another country than France could show such appreciation." Pierre recalled the awful remarks of Todd, the deeper idiocy of his complacent lady. "Yes, that is it," said Pierre to Vanity.

Haganè had now re-seated himself. He was a few yards directly across from Dodge and Yuki. He studied furtively the countenance of Dodge. With this regard he was quickly satisfied. The American's clear brown eyes were as free from guile as those of a setter pup. He turned again to Pierre, who had now thrown himself, in a graceful attitude of lounging, beside fair Gwendolen. Gwendolen deflected the glance from her companion. Her merry hazel eyes dwelt with bright friendliness and an utter absence of awe upon the titled host. For the first time Haganè noticed her, looked directly at her, perceived in her something a little more than blown golden hair and girlish audacity. Something in her gaze gave him an impression of pliant boughs, elastic yet imperishable. This trained commander seldom failed to recognize the intangible, unmistakable flash of the thing we call, for a better name, character. Something in answer to it, a salute of his own brave spirit, rose to the deep eyes. A little thrill passed over Gwendolen. "Gracious!" she thought to herself. "That's no mere war-engine, that's a man, and a great one!" To cover her vague embarrassment she leaned to him, letting coquetry blot the real from her face, and pleaded, "Show us some more pictures, please, your Highness. I hear that you have storehouses crammed with them. Even I, in spite of what mother says, appreciate those in the tokonoma. *Please!*"

Haganè bowed unsmiling. The mere dainty allurements of a pretty girl seemed to him almost an affront, as if his old nurse should give him a kite to fly, or a top to spin. He fell into thought. After a moment's somewhat uncomfortable silence he said slowly, "There is one painting I should like to show this honorable group of friends; but first its strange history must be told, and I fear that I have not the fluent English."

"Oh, we simply must have the story! Your English is all right, Prince; I'll declare it is. Please tell us," cried Gwendolen the irrepressible, and she moved a few inches closer.

"Yes, your Highness, your English is wonderful. You don't make half the grammatical mistakes that I do now!" supplemented Mrs. Todd.

Haganè drew a slow glance around the semicircle, plunged his hands within his silken sleeves, and began to speak. His voice was very deep, and in some consonant sounds, of a slight harshness. The vowels were full, rich, and resonant. His speech held at command a certain strange, almost benumbing magnetism, a compelling response, such as one experiences in the after-vibrations of a great bell.

"Oh, I feel in my bones that it is going to be a ghost story, a real one," whispered Gwendolen, with a shiver of excitement.

Haganè did not notice the remark. Todd and Mr. Dodge sent her, in unison, a bright glance of appreciation.

"The painting for which I now attempt the speaking," said Haganè, "made, for centuries, the chief altarpiece of a certain old temple in Yamato. It was a very old temple,—yes, among the very first built in Nippon for Buddhist worship. One night, when the black sky was rent with storm, and lightning hurled out many terrible spears, one flash found that temple, burning it swiftly to a square of low red ashes. Everything burned; gold and brass and iron melted like wax—all but the picture; and three days after they found it still on red coals, glowing more fierce and red than they. Nothing was harmed in it except the brocaded edge, and that was soon replaced. This is the picture you shall see."

"Oh!" breathed Gwendolen.

"Afterward it was conveyed to a famous temple of Kioto; but the head priest, the Ajari, being of timid thought, refused to shelter it. By his order it was carried in secrecy to a much smaller temple, very distant, in the province of Konda, where is my father's home of birth."

He paused. The listeners all shifted position a little, all but Yuki, who sat upright and motionless, her soul living in her long dark eyes.

"Even in so small a temple its power began to attract many worshippers and wonder-seekers. The fame of it grew like the grasses of summer. At the time of our Restoration, the beginning of that cycle of our time called 'Mei-ji,' its destruction was officially decreed. It was designated 'the

object of slavish superstition.' My father was requested, with his own hands, to annihilate it."

"Ah," muttered Pierre, with feeling. "But, thank the good God, it wasn't destroyed, since you are soon to show it!"

One of Mrs. Todd's thick feet had gone to sleep. She stretched it out under her skirt with great caution.

Haganè looked up into Pierre's bright eyes. "As you observe, Monsieur, it was not annihilated. My father made request of Government that it be sold privately to him, and in return he gave pledge that it never again be used—publicly—as the altarpiece. Thus it came into my possession."

There had been something suggestive, almost sinister, in his use of the word "publicly." His glance had just brushed Yuki's face. Gwendolen's hands turned cold. "But what power needed to be suppressed—what harm could a picture do?" cried the blonde girl, eagerly.

Before attempting an answer, Haganè clapped for a servant, and, with a few low words, sent him off for the picture. He turned, looking first at Gwendolen, then at Yuki. "It is a painting of the Red God, Aizen Bosatsu. It was prayed to, and sacrificed to by men and women who loved. Generally they were persons who wished to become the man and wife against the wishes of parents and guardians; less often, of some guilty one already married, and wishing an impure love. Its strange power is this,—that one consumed with passion, making offerings, passing long nights in prayer, and crying forth incessantly desperate invocation, may see the red flesh and crimson lotos petals fall away like shrivelled bark, revealing the white and shining face of Kwannon the Merciful. This is the reward of those who pray for the strength to be loyal, who wish, in their deeper essence, the ultimate Good. But the painting has another—and more awful power—"

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"Yes, yes, Lord," whispered Yuki, speaking now for the first time.

"Should the mad soul clamor on for earthly desire, ignoring what is high,—then will the Red God burn, burn, burn, even as the heated heart of evil passion burns; and the power of that suppliant to do evil will be strengthened. Circumstances may be compelled, and the wish, however harmful, be attained. With each new triumph of a soul, the merit of the picture deepens; with each malefic use, the evil grows more strong."

"What, Lord, would be the penalty—what to a wicked soul would be the price?" asked Yuki's bloodless lips.

"Your early training was Buddhistic, child," answered Haganè, in the gentlest of voices. "You know the doctrine of rebirth! Instinct tells you the price already."

Tetsujo had withdrawn his eyes from their fierce contemplation of his daughter, as if the sight continually fed his anger. He rocked now, with downcast eyes and folded arms, on his cushion, ignoring everything but his own black thoughts.

Gwendolen tried in vain to catch Yuki's eye. She saw that already Yuki was betraying what Haganè and old Onda wished to know. The moment was fatal and memorable.

The servant now returned, bearing a long box of dull red lacquer. Yuki shivered so that all saw her.

"Examine the quaint carvings of devils, Monsieur," said Haganè to Pierre, with light affability. As Pierre leaned to take the box, Yuki gave an imperceptible start forward, caught her breath, and then resumed self-control.

"Gems, all of them!" cried Pierre, in impersonal delight. "They are unbelievable in cleverness. Each seems an evil passion caught in fleeting human form."

"Monsieur is intuitive. They are hungry spirits of the Gaki underworld, creatures of ever aching, ever unsatisfied desires. The Hindoo scriptures call them 'preta.' Perhaps you Christians have not such uncomfortable passions, ne?"

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Gwendolen had another shock to receive. In this new light, flashed past before one realized its presence, Haganè showed to her the eyes of a demon, a creature of power and of passion. She recoiled from him as from the supernatural. The new discomfort was vented on the box. "Let us have the picture, Prince, or I'll go wild. Please, somebody sit on that box,—the squirming devils give me a waking nightmare. Why did anybody want to carve such things?"

Haganè smiled a very quiet smile, just on the borderland between his demon and his statesman's self. Yuki, too, watched him, with an intensity of which she was not aware. Slowly he lifted the lid of the box, and took out a long cylindrical roll wrapped in some faded stuff that

exhaled a strange, stifling perfume, as of old shrines. Then he rose, with his usual dignified, deliberate motions. The servant, who had been waiting, handed him a small wand tipped with a claw of ivory, such as is used everywhere in Japan for hanging kakemono. Passing the cord over a brass stud on the wall, he leaned over and downward, unrolling the painting by slow inches.

At first nothing appeared but a groundwork of dark silk, a surface crackled and blackened as by heat and time. A pointed, thin flame first arose, then a fiery crown of filigree work that hid suggestions of strange animal forms, then a staring countenance of an archaic, Hindoo type, provocative, menacing, appalling! Shoulders rose, swathed thick in springing flame; a body hung with jewels of red gold; arms bended at the elbow, crossed legs just visible through drapery, and lastly the incandescent throne of a vermilion lotos. The thing glowed wet and fresh, like new-spilled blood. Before its artistic wonder was the wonder of vitality, for the image lived,—not in a world of heavy human flesh, nor yet in realms ethereal, but in some raging holocaust where the two worlds chafe and meet. One flaming hand grasped a bunch of golden arrows; from the other depended coils of gold and orange rope. Each petal of the lotos throne stood sharp and clear in an outline of hot gold, and the long, parallel veinings were of copper. In a room suddenly darkened it should spring out in illumination of its own. A scorching breath blew from it. The leer on the god's face deepened.

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"Ugh!" shuddered Mrs. Todd. She tried to check the exclamation, and apparently none but Dodge, who sat beside her, heard the cry.

"Be careful," whispered Dodge. "He does not tell you half. Men have fought and died for that painting. It is one of the famous things of Japan, and almost impossible to see. He surely has a reason in this display."

Yuki and Gwendolen were equally still and voiceless.

"Mother of God!" Pierre ejaculated, ignoring ceremony, and running to the place where the painting, now in full length, hung. "What a masterpiece! What torment of genius! There is passion in the very curves of the petals,—how they answer the lines of drapery, even the lines of his ugly face! The flaming halo repeats it like a fugue. Mon Dieu! One scarcely can endure such supreme beauty." His voice broke. He turned away. Haganè watched him curiously. "Your Highness," said he, after a very brief interval, and now with frank, tear-bright eyes on the prince, "I know not the morality of it, but I, for one, would not be willing to pray in such fashion that this superb and glorious monster should fade to a silly white. Rather would I add fury to him, and evil,—if that would keep his flame inspired!"

Abruptly Haganè turned his face to Yuki. For some moments past he had ignored her. She had no time to struggle for self-control. Her thought lay beached on the ashen face. The two eyes met. In an instant, as if weary, Haganè turned away, and, crossing the room, seated himself near Onda.

"Shall we proceed to serve the food, your Highness?" asked another servant, on his knees, in the doorway.

"Yes, at once. First roll the picture up, and remove it to the kura."

The banquet was in pure Japanese fashion. The entertainment began with the usual foolish mistakes on the part of the foreigners. Yuki was last of all to drift back into the world of the commonplace; Pierre, of the party, being in highest spirits. Everything delighted him,—the food, the trays, the little "ne-san" hired for the occasion to pour sakè, the sakè itself, the sakè bottles,—all! Recklessly now, he forced a position beside Yuki, taking her unresponsiveness as part of the decorum expected of a young girl in Japan. Haganè showed him special favor, plying him with wine, and exchanging numberless tiny cups, each one a step, for Pierre, into further indiscretion. Yuki felt hope slowly die within her. She saw beyond doubt that Haganè was against Pierre and with her father. She knew that she had been chief factor in the betrayal of their love. For a moment she hated, she even despised a little, the man she had been taught to look on as a god.

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Never had a sweeter sound come to her ears than Mrs. Todd's loud command, "Well, Cy, if we are to go at all, we had better start. This sakè is beginning to do queer things to my legs!"

At the farewell ceremonies on the doorstep, Haganè managed to whisper to his kerai, "Watch her closely. Let her not leave your sight until you have heard again from me. There is instant danger!"

PROSPER RONSARD, the French minister to Tokio, had formed very early in life the ambition to be a Far Eastern diplomat. His way to the goal was made in regular steps of enjoyment. First there had been Morocco, scarcely more to him now than a far-off memory of yellow sands and white cubes of houses, both emphasized, at effective intervals, by theatrical groups of palms. Then came Cairo,—gay entrancing Cairo! His life there held experiences that old age might lick its chops over. Leaving all else aside, the one flame-tree near his hotel window in Cairo would have burned that memory deep. Then there were French Siam, Tonquin, Nagasaki, and, at last, Tokio.

The hot blood of the East flowed now, as native, in Ronsard's veins; but the keen, calculating, questioning judgment of the European statesman kept cool tenure of his brain. In Tokio he found all past Eastern trickery to be useless chaff. Here were no inferior Orientals to browbeat, threaten, or cajole. From Tonquin to Nagasaki he had crossed more than the Yellow Sea; he had sailed over three submerged centuries and landed on a green cliff. Here, in Japan, were men with reasons as clear as his own, and methods that often proved themselves more effective. In the mission to Tokio he soon realized that his full ambition had been won. Every faculty, trained through long apprenticeship, was here needed; and it was part of his intelligence that at times he realized them all as insufficient. That span of "Mysterious Asia" stretched between Algiers and Tonquin, brilliant and pleasurable indeed, was, from the diplomatic standpoint, a mere dank subway coming up at the central station, Tokio.

The fascinations of the East, potent as they were, could not quite wean the Parisian from love of his native home. Visits to France were made with strict regularity. It was his wont to declare, and with much show of verity, that the perpetual resident of Paris could never know its real charm. To live there always, paying bills, meeting disappointments, enduring illnesses with the inartistic accompaniments of medicine boxes and physicians, was like having an inexhaustible supply of one's favorite vintage kept in a water-cooler on the back gallery. Ronsard had the true sensualist's gift of extracting flavors.

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On these home visits he was eagerly sought after by his friends and club fellows, and by the more intelligent among fashionable women. In this latter category shone pre-eminent the widowed Princess Olga Le Beau. Rumor often had it that his next return to the East would be brightened by the wedded companionship of this lady, but each time Rumor hid her face.

The princess had married while yet a schoolgirl. Pierre, her only child, was born within the year of the marriage. Before the boy was ten, his father, Gaston Le Beau, died by accident. Slander called it suicide, and hinted that the princess was the cause. Nothing, however, could have been more decorous or more becoming than the mourning of the princess. As slowly she came back to the world of fashion, Pierre was sent away to England to be educated. A growing stripling of a boy is a fatal gauge to his mother's waning youth. He was seldom pressed to come home during the holidays, Princess Olga preferring to visit him in England (a country which she loathed), or sometimes to take small tours with him through infrequented parts of Europe.

After his very creditable career at an English university, she urged him tenderly further to improve his mind by travel, and hinted that she would prefer a diplomatic career for him. As she spoke, she was thinking of Ronsard, but doubtless had her reasons for not mentioning him. It was not until the young man's year of residence in America, and his own choice of Tokio as a place at which to open his diplomatic primer, that the power of this intimate family friend had been invoked. As we have seen, Princess Olga gave the name, by letter, to her son. Pierre wrote promptly, but the hastened departure of the Todds, and his determination to sail with them and Yuki, would have given him no time to receive a long and thoughtful answer, even had such been written.

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Count Ronsard's motto, more or less rigidly adhered to in dealings with his own sex, was "never to write a letter or to destroy one." Knowing that the young man was soon to appear, he calmly waited the event. In official life the French minister was, of course, designated by the simple republican title of "Monsieur." With his friends, the old aristocratic "Count" was permitted and enjoyed. To have slipped Pierre into a second, third, or fourth secretaryship would have been a simple matter. Count Ronsard, however, wisely determined to judge the character of the applicant before admitting him into the bachelor comradeship of the Legation. This square white residence, set in the midst of a fine, walled, daimyo garden left over from feudal days, had never, during the count's long term of service, known feminine sway. High orgies, balls, and state dinners were held there in plenty, but the only women who appeared at them were invited guests or hired geisha. The master of the house carried his bachelor fancy so far that he insisted upon a similar undetached state being preserved by his subordinates.

Count Ronsard was a dilettante in music and art, and a professional lover of beauty, especially in the form presented by his friend and countryman, Bouguereau. His favorite writer was Daudet; his favorite luxury, eating. Withal, he was a trained statesman and a subtle diplomat.

Pierre, upon his arrival in Tokio, had been urged to make the Legation his temporary home. His first question was, of course, for the appointment. Count Ronsard gave evasive reply. As this continued to be the case, Pierre felt, in decency, that he must cease to press the matter. As days passed, and the count, so indulgent, fatherly, and candid in other things, continued to avoid the discussion of Pierre's hopes, the young man could not fail to draw the conclusion that the elder had

his personal reasons for not wishing to come to a decision. Pierre did not greatly care. The anxiety about Yuki kept his thoughts busy. More than once he had been on the point of confiding in Count Ronsard and of asking advice, but each time something prevented. Mrs. Todd, in this stress, was his unfailing sympathizer. Gwendolen was kind, but he knew well that there was now, and always had been, a certain reserve in her approbation of his love-affair. The laxity of hours at the French Legation, and the absence of all restrictions, suited well the boy's present restless temper.

The morning after Prince Haganè's banquet he woke to a feeling of heaviness and depression that sakè could not altogether account for. Small bits of recollection began to sting him like briar-points left under the skin. He saw now, in Yuki's white face, a protest which, twelve hours before, he had wilfully ignored. Gwendolen's eyes flashed again indignant warning. The extreme attentiveness of the host, a lurid after-image of the pictured god, the innumerable small cups that, at the time, had seemed innocuous, came over him in humiliating memories. "Gwendolen was right. It was all a test, and I, as usual, played the impulsive fool!" thought he, bitterly.

On reaching the breakfast-room he was pleasantly surprised to find his host still at table. A heap of letters, opened and unopened, showed the cause of delay. Several with foreign postmarks were at Pierre's plate. As the young man entered, Ronsard touched an electric button, giving four short, peculiar rings. A few seconds later a servant appeared with a tray of steaming coffee and food.

"What news from war-centres, your Excellency?" was Pierre's perfunctory question.

"Mon Dieu, war is surely coming! We are upon the very verge, though our friends the Russians pretend not to believe. Kurino is to abandon St. Petersburg. I still have a gleam of hope that the Japanese will have common intelligence, and withdraw."

"If Kurino leaves, then the Russian minister here must withdraw. I was told yesterday that he too made preparations."

"Each move may be a feint. Diplomacy is largely made up of feints." Here he gave a fleshy shrug. "But, my young friend, our speculations will not change events. As the Japanese say, 'Shi-ka-ta ga nai,' which, being interpreted, means, 'Way out, there is none.' Tell me of yourself. You are pale. Do the joys of Tokio prove too arduous?"

The speaker, lolling back in his leathern chair, lighted another cigarette, his eighth since breakfast, and turned an inquiring leer upon his companion. Pierre was staring into the smoky coal fire. He had scarcely heard Ronsard's last words. Yet all at once he felt that here was an opportunity to ask the advice he had been craving.

"Last night I was at a Japanese banquet, an affair splendid, but small, given to the family of the newly presented American minister, Mr. Todd, by Prince Haganè," he began.

Ronsard showed unmistakable interest. "Ah, the prince! The old toad who sits at the heart of empire in Japan. And at his private villa! You are fortunate, Monsieur."

Pierre nodded.

"And you said a family affair. I hear there is a Miss Todd. Am I to understand that you and the charming Mademoiselle—"

Pierre gave a gesture. "No," he said, "not she,—though the charm is unquestioned. Mr. Dodge and I were included because of being ship-comrades with the Todd party. There were also present Miss Onda and her father. Miss Onda was on the ship with us. She was educated in Washington. I knew her there."

"Ah," murmured the other, more thoughtfully. "Rumors of Miss Onda's great beauty are already abroad. They will contemplate an official marriage for her with some fortunate heathen, honored in his own land. Cela!"

"She will marry no Japanese," said Pierre, quickly. He felt Ronsard's upward look, but did not meet it. His heart moved a little faster. This was his first bold step upon a bridge too narrow for turning.

"Ah," murmured Ronsard again.

"Yes," repeated Pierre, "she will marry no Japanese. I—I—am in a position to know."

"She is already betrothed, perhaps?"

"Yes."

"And not to a Japanese?"

"No."

"To an American, I presume. You say she has been educated in that country. *Educated!* And in America! The thought is droll."

"Not to an American either, your Excellency. To one of your own race,—to a Frenchman."

"Ah," said Ronsard. It was wonderful what expression he could cram into that small, elastic sound. Evidently the intonation on this occasion was far from pleasing to the listener. Pierre's blue eyes flashed and darkened. Fixing them for the first time steadily on his companion he said, "She is betrothed, your Excellency, to me. Do I receive your felicitations?"

His look was a challenge. Ronsard passed a fat hand over his mouth before asking, "With her family's consent?"

"Not yet. Our betrothal was in Washington, shortly before sailing, and entered into with the full knowledge and consent of her intimate friends, the Todds. As to the Japanese father's consent, we had planned and hoped to gain it immediately upon reaching Japan."

Ronsard's thin eyebrows arched to the very roots of his thin, gray hair. "You have arrived,—two weeks, is it not? You have not gained?"

"Things went wrong with me from the instant of landing," said Pierre, dejectedly. "I offended in some unknown way that grim image she calls her parent. I do not know yet in what I did wrong; but he keeps us apart, and prevents her even from writing an explanation. The Todds have seen her but once, and learned only the bald fact of her father's opposition. At the banquet last night we both seemed under espionage,—subjects for dissection, in fact. I am bewildered with the misery of it, your Excellency, for I love the girl. My one hope is that I have her promise, and on her loyalty alone I must now rely."

Count Ronsard drew a long, long whiff from his cigarette, and then ostentatiously flipped the ash in air. It dissolved before reaching the floor, a vague little puff of gray nothingness. "That is what the Japanese think of such a promise! The true Jehovah in Japan is the composite will of the family. Is it not partly so in France, Monsieur? If you really desired marriage with this bit of ivory, and—pardon me—so harsh a yoke seems utterly unnecessary, you should have persuaded your inamorata to become a Christian, and, while still in America, have consummated a Christian marriage. Even a Japanese, in these enlightened days, would not dare to attack such a bond."

"She is a Christian already," said Pierre. "And for an American marriage I pleaded with a scourged soul. Even Madame Todd advised it; but Yuki-ko would not listen. She must wait, she said, for her family's consent."

"Very proper of Mademoiselle," said Ronsard, gravely. As Pierre made no immediate reply, the count went on with his theme, "The Japanese family, my son, is like a large web, or a small solar system. In the midst, as a central sun, or reptile, squats the father. Behind him is the mystery and power of *his* father, living or dead, and his father's father, back to the visionary era of Jimmu Tenno. All about him, as planets, or flies, are dotted the children, the wife, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins to the tenth branch, the family servants and their connections, the family cat, the family dog, the family ghost, the priests, soothsayers, physicians,—Mon Dieu, down to the very crickets who chirp beneath the family doorstone. In a question of marriage, all these must be consulted. The bride is no more than a gnat caught somewhere in the web, or a very small satellite belonging to a distant world."

"It is of interest, your Excellency," protested Pierre; "but I have no mind to give it. Consider my plight. I am young, madly in love, and touched with despair. I turn to you as a father."

"A father?" echoed the count, with a small gleam of amusement in his eyes, "Mother of God! It is a name to conjure with. What will you?"

"You have lived here long; you know the country well. Aid me to win the only woman I can ever love."

"In lawful marriage? Shall I assist you to inclose yourself in that barbed-wire fence of love?"

"There can be no other thought for Miss Onda and me," said Pierre, stiffly.

Count Ronsard shrugged. "You are quixotic. I was so at your age. Such sentiments are, I assure you, wasted in this place. The Japanese themselves prefer the laxer course. They very properly execrate these mixed marriages, especially legal mixed marriages."

The man's voice was so soft, so kindly, so self-controlled, that Pierre, in a sort of wonder, turned again to study his face. The minister met his look with the friendliest of smiles and a little nod. Then, as if to give the student of physiognomy every chance, he modestly lowered his eyes.

It was a face that must have been old even in childhood,—old, and shrewd, and self-indulgent. The unhealthy fat, which gave his body an unstable rotundity, showed here chiefly in the cheeks, sagging them down into loosely filled bags, and drawing long wrinkles in the pull. The forehead, very narrow toward the top, with hair growing downward in a deep point, was as gray as the scant, bristling hair. The whole face, indeed, was gray; its hueless monotony given emphasis by the single note of the underlip which protruded, moist, velvety, and round, like a scarlet fungus from the bark of a rotting tree.

"To be candid, my boy," murmured the minister, still with eyelids drooped, "your penchant for Miss Onda was already known to me. A ship is a huge floating laboratory of social gossip. Touch land, voilà, and the germs fly. My attaché, Monsieur Mouquin, chanced to witness your meeting with Papa Onda. He saw your rejection, and the manner in which your betrothed was heartlessly abducted. We—that is, Mouquin and myself—have even ventured to speculate upon possibilities, diplomatic possibilities in the interest of France, that may be lying dormant in your continued—er—friendship with the charming Miss Onda. At the axis of each new twig of history, Monsieur, sits the love of a woman."

"I—I trust that I do not clearly understand your Excellency," said Pierre, fighting down, as he spoke, a whole swarm of unsavory intuitions.

The count gave a small, resigned sigh, turned slightly in his chair, and tapped with one white hand his heap of opened letters. "Several of these documents suggest the appointment of a certain young Monsieur Le Beau to office in the French Legation at Tokio. The old Duc de St. Cyr is writer of one."

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"Monsieur le Duc is my great-uncle, and my friend," said Pierre.

"You will realize that it becomes my duty to acquaint myself with the calibre of such an applicant, of a youth so highly recommended, and especially at a time when relations between our country and Japan are slightly—er—neuralgic."

"I have no previous record in civil service, but I believe I could do something for France."

"Ah, that is just the point!" said the count, with more eagerness than he had yet showed. "To serve France,—that is our whole concern. You have had no training, it is true; yet you have already a weapon that old and tried diplomats might weep for. I refer, as you conjecture, to your friendship with Mademoiselle Onda, daughter of Tetsujo Onda, and ward, in a sense, of his Highness Prince Haganè."

Pierre, in a flash, was upon his feet. Cigarette ashes tumbled from the folds of his waistcoat. He hurled a newly lighted tube into the fire. "You, sir," he began, with evident effort to control his voice, "you, sir, are experienced, and I am ignorant; you are calm and I am impetuous,—perhaps I should listen courteously to what you wish to say; but I believe it impossible for me to do so. I love this girl as a man loves the woman whom he desires to make his honored wife. In England, where I went to school, I learned ideas, stricter perhaps than Parisian conceptions, of the sacredness and the responsibility of marriage. This girl is a thing of snow. No tie could be too strong, no sacrament too safe, for pledging my fidelity. You see, I could not listen."

The count, as the young man was speaking, gazed steadily into the fire. His face remained as expressionless as a leaf. Pierre, striding here and there in his agitation, came back at length to the mantel, and stood still. The count spoke slowly.

"It is far better for France and for you that I speak my mind fully; yet, because you are ignorant and impetuous, you cannot, as you say, listen in decent reserve. It is ever so with youth."

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The deep sadness of the elder man swept aside Pierre's rising indignation. He looked very old now, huddled in the great chair, his hands spread, palm outward, to the blaze.

Pierre threw himself on an ottoman near. "Pardon my boorishness. I will listen, Monsieur, though your words be fangs. You are my mother's valued friend, and for that alone I should owe you reverence. Speak what you will."

At the re-mention of the word "mother," the same curious look flickered in Ronsard's eyes. He drew a sigh, gathered himself into a more upright posture, and asked of Pierre, in judicial tones, "Let me inquire, Monsieur, whether you and Mademoiselle Onda, or your friends the Todds, have thought out any logical conclusion, should the family of Onda determine that you are to be definitely repulsed?"

Pierre dropped his head to his hands. "No, we can think of nothing,—except elopement, and that, now, is impossible."

"Have you thought for her of a possible forced marriage?"

"To a Japanese? Yes, my God, when have I not thought it! No, Monsieur, I do not think it—I will not; she would accept death sooner than break her troth to me. I have her word, her broken hairpin—"

"A menacing implement—" interpolated Ronsard.

"Can you think it possible, your Excellency?"

"What, the forced marriage?" Ronsard broke off, looked at Pierre, and then, as if in compassion, removed his gaze.

"Make it not unendurable," muttered Pierre, through whitening lips.

"I make nothing," said Ronsard. "You have begun the train of disaster; I can but trace the map of possible retreat. Yes, I believe truly that the next move in her family will be to marry her off to some eligible suitor,—an old man, probably, one strong enough to keep you and the girl in check. Some worn-out voluptuary, or a War-God in Pig Iron, like old Haganè himself."

Pierre raised bloodshot eyes. His mouth writhed and opened, but no words came. The old diplomat's voice had been like cut velvet, woven on wires of steel. [pg 16]

"You—you—do not—spare—" Pierre managed to gasp at length.

Ronsard wore, if anything, a look of satisfaction. He now lifted a jewelled hand to press and pinch and fondle the moist, warm cushion of the protruding lip. His eyes, from under their drooping lids, darted sharp fusillades of meaning upon his shrinking companion. The very sting restored Pierre. "Yes," resumed the other, as if Pierre had spoken, "in such mariages de convenance personal affection is left aside. Yet how deplorable—how impossible—that a Botticelli in ivory and pearl should never know the joys of ardent love! Opportunities always arise. And then, as wife of a Japanese official, Mademoiselle Onda might prove invaluable to France—invaluable!"

Pierre rose this time slowly. Both delicate hands gripped the rim of the table hard. For a moment he shut his eyes that the vision of the sneering, sensual face might not tempt the blow his young arm tingled to inflict. "It is enough," he said, "I was wrong in thinking that I could listen. If your Excellency will now be so good as to excuse me—"

Ronsard gave a gesture of good fellowship. He smiled cunningly to himself as Pierre vanished from the room. Self-congratulations fawned upon him. His aim had been true. The poisoned arrow was in place, and though Pierre might snap, or draw it forth, the wound would fester.

Among his morning letters one had been carefully concealed. It was of the latest tint and shape of fashion. It smelled of Paris and intrigue. The last words were these, "Say nothing to my headstrong boy of this letter, but, for my sake, keep him from serious entanglement. I object not, you will understand, to passing follies; but let not the handcuffs of a Japanese marriage click. Mon Dieu, think of grandchildren! Yours, for the old time's sake, Olga Le Beau." The count read it through once more, rubbed it thoughtfully against his red lip, and finally, with a sentimental sigh, placed it on the coals.

Dropping his head forward, he began to dream. At first it was of Paris, only Paris, with its gay streets, beautiful women, its theatres and supper-rooms. What waste of years to have lived so long away! Yet in the East had been compensations. Diplomacy, as he conceived it, was the highest form of gambling; life itself, a spinning roulette table. Diplomacy was the only profession for one with romance, poetry, passion in his veins, and brains in his skull. Pierre, Olga Brekendorff's child, was fitted for the career, if, at the outset, he did not manacle his own hands. He must not marry, least of all marry a Japanese girl of high connections. Let the girl love him, and be given to another. Visions of purloined state papers, of secrets won in the marriage chamber only to be given France next morning, of Japanese chagrin at the mysterious betrayal of plans, caressed him with leprous fingers. Ah, to be young once more and beautiful, like Pierre! How like his eyes were to the Russian mother! No wonder the Japanese girl loved him! [pg 16]

A sharp knock roused him.

"Entrez! Oidè!"

Mouquin rushed in as if pursued, leaving the door open. Within a few feet of Ronsard he stood still, shivering in an ague of excitement.

"Well, what is it? Speak, man. You chatter and grimace like an ape."

Mouquin waved a small square of paper printed in Japanese. "An extra! War! They say Togo has fired!"

Ronsard leaned forward and snatched the paper. He read Japanese well.

"War! Togo fired this morning! Three Russian boats already sunk! Mother of God!"

The telephone began a frantic ringing. Mouquin went to it sidewise. "Your Excellency, the Russian minister."

"Hold the wire." Ronsard got to his feet. Mouquin still chattered. His words came now in a torrent. He was drunk with the bigness of the hour. "Fired, your Excellency! Japan the pygmy, with no further provocation, has dared fire upon Imperial Russia!"

Ronsard eyed the speaker with a sort of scorn. "True, Monsieur, and, as I understand, Japan the pygmy has begun already to sink Imperial Russia."

Mouquin stared for a moment at the speaker, seeking a clue to the unexpected words. Perhaps he saw for himself a chance at singularity. He bowed over, gave a low laugh, and backing toward the door cried out, "And has begun to—*sink* Imperial Russia! Banzai Nippon!" He went out quickly.

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Ronsard stood quiet by the telephone. It hissed and bubbled like an impaled crab. He lifted the receiver slowly, his eyes still on the door. "I know it now," he murmured, "I have long suspected it. Somewhere in this desert of gray huts Mouquin has a Japanese wife. It was her lips that uttered through him that 'Banzai Nippon.' And so I think it would soon be with the impressionable Pierre. Hello! Oui, it is Ronsard."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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INTO the wide, white streets of modern Yedo, Pierre stumbled alone. There had been no definite thought in his hurried flight, only a craving to flee from the polluting face and soft, compelling voice of his compatriot. How was it possible for a man with the intelligence of Ronsard to harbor such ideas of Japanese character? Yuki's very presence breathed purity; yet that old man had said—had dared to hint— Pierre broke away from the recollection, hid his eyes, and groaned. As a consequence he was nearly hurled to earth by a passing kuruma-man, whose warning cry of "Hek! Hek!" had been ignored.

Pierre recovered himself with difficulty. The occupant of the vehicle, a stout burgher of the middle class with sulphur-colored socks and a gaudy watch-chain, essayed some laughing excuse; but the wiry human steed, deliberately putting his shafts to the ground, squared himself before the offending "Seiyo-jin" to deliver a volley of heterogeneous oaths, selected at random from the stores of other nations. Pierre, unmoved by these comic insults, apologized to the burgher in three languages, and hurried on.

Now for the first time he noticed that flags were being hung at every door. Flags fluttered from the backs of jinrikishas and were stuck on top of pull-cart loads. Past him hurried newsboys with printed hand-bills held eagerly upward. Small bells jangled at their hips.

"Nan desu ka?" (What is it?) he asked politely of a passer-by.

"Ikusa," was the brief response, accompanied, as Pierre could not help seeing, by a disdainful, yet triumphant scowl. "Ikusa" was a word not included in the Frenchman's short vocabulary.

Four University students, with the exaggeratedly short skirts, and the brawny, bare legs of the Satsuma faction, came lurching toward him. All grinned at sight of the alien, and shouted with one voice, "Banzai Nippon!"

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Pierre understood this phrase at least. "An excellent sentiment," he remarked gravely in English; "but now will you kindly inform me why it seems appropriate to the present moment?"

The boys nudged one another and giggled. One of them at length answered in careful English, "Mr. Togo has war already begun. Many Russian battle-ships, having been this day fired upon, have into sea-bottom sinked. All will be sinked! Banzai Nippon!"

"Banzai Nippon!" roared his comrades; and the four, with sundry delighted, backward glances at the bewildered foreigner, hurried on.

Pierre, ignoring consequences, again stood still. Jinrikishas clattered past him to the right, to the left, singly, or now in long, black strings. The faces of human horses and vehicle occupants were alike vivified by a singular excitement. Many of the little trotting men conversed volubly with those whom they bore. "Ikusa! Ikusa!" was the burden of all speech.

"Ikusa," repeated Pierre, dully. "This 'Ikusa' undoubtedly means 'war.'" He knew in his soul that the rumor was true. Visions of the scowling Onda, of Prince Haganè, of the leering, intelligent eyes of Count Ronsard, flew past him with the real faces of the streets. He cursed aloud. "War!" a new wedge between himself and Yuki.

He walked on now with nervous energy. "Yu-ki—Yu-ki—Yu-ki,"—his heart and steps kept pace with the refrain. The whole world fell into the despairing swing of it. "Yu-ki—Yu-ki—Yu-ki!"

A little Japanese matron, hastening to a sick neighbor's house with the great news, gave him a commiserating glance. Her husband was a sailor on one of the battle-ships now fighting. She was proud and happy. What sorrow could it be that made the young foreigner's eyes so deep and blue? Surely this was not war! It must be love. She had heard that in the affairs of love the foreigners found strange griefs.

"Dō-mo!" murmured the little dame to herself, "I am grateful to the gods this day to be a Japanese with my husband in a glorious fight."

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Pierre walked now, still unheeding, in a direction almost due west from the French Legation. On his right hand stretched the long moats edged stiffly with young willows. He had been told that these trees were planted by an adoring people on the day, just fifteen years before, that the Emperor, out of his wise and loving heart, had given to them a parliamentary government. Only fifteen years! The willows had none of them attained full growth, and yet the nation that had planted them had that morning fired upon one of the proudest and most implacable empires of old Europe.

On the enormous campus directly in front of the Imperial gates, citizens by thousands were assembling. They surged here and there in a breathless, whispered excitement. Their lowered voices and moving garments made a sound as of the sea.

All eyes were turned upward to the Imperial moat walls, where white dots of faces belonging to the court ladies peered over for an instant and vanished.

The Emperor was not visible. The crowd did not expect to see him, and had he suddenly manifested himself would have felt chagrin rather than exultation. They knew that his heart was with them, and they revered him thus silently with the feeling one has in a vast cathedral, just before the service begins.

The Frenchman hurried by with down-bent head, knowing himself an intruder. At the Sakurada gate of the moat system he again took his bearings, and saw that by continuing in a straight course he would reach the American Legation. He realized on the instant that this was the place where he wished to go. In all this beautiful, mysterious land he had but two friends, Mrs. Todd and Gwendolen.

On a steep slope facing to the northeast, and leading up by several roads to the broad and thickly populated district of Azabu, Tokio, can be seen a Japanese gate which is large without being imposing, and severe without being dignified. Perhaps the peculiar contours of the land in this unfavored spot, the infelicitous swerve of the road, and an awkward grading of the hill, make the tall gateway always appear just a little uneasy. This is the main entrance of the American Legation. Behind it stands a large structure of wood with office-buildings attached. The contrast of buildings and gate is not cheerful. Nor is the large surrounding garden of less amorphous aspect. A wide stretch of well-kept lawn with no particular outline, disheartening attempts along the edges at bits of Japanese hill and rock formation, together with certain unrelated patches of shrub and tree, coexist in a sort of Eurasian tolerance.

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Pretty Gwendolen openly called her present domicile a barn. Mrs. Todd had begun at once buying blindly and indiscriminately from peddlers, hawkers, and "curio-men," who infest the official homes of new-comers. As a result, the high walls of the Legation rooms were being rapidly covered with atrocious kakemono, some too high, some too low, and all, from the standpoint of art, utterly vicious. On tables, shelves, and mantelpieces stood gaudy Japanese vases such as a native rag-picker could hardly have been persuaded to use (though the price given by Mrs. Todd for a single article might have educated his son), and various household utensils, each, to the eye of a Japanese visitor, uttering a shriek of incongruity.

Should a Japanese lady fill one of her low-ceiled, spacious rooms with foreign lithographs

representing lambs, blue-eyed children, baskets of fruit, nude women, jockeys, and landscapes, each in a flaring gold frame, hanging them anywhere from two feet above the matting to the ceiling line itself,—should she, between these rectangular blasphemies, suspend bits of foreign underwear, old neckties, garters, belts, hair-brushes, and egg-beaters, and, to complete the artistic impression, set about on the floor decorated soup-tureens, water-coolers with growing plants, and lard-baskets piled high with Japanese cakes,—an American visitor, entering for the first time, would get much the same impression that Japanese visitors derived from Mrs. Todd's drawing-rooms.

On this clear morning of February 9, 1904, the American Legation, in company with all others of the great Eastern capital, hummed and vibrated to the excitement of war. Telephone wires were kept hot. Messengers went back and forth ceaselessly with "chits" (notes) written in English, French, Spanish, German, and other tongues. Carriage-wheels rolled and rattled in every street. Pierre was ushered into the main drawing-room, a place which always made him shudder and think of William Morris. Mrs. Todd, Gwendolen, and Mr. Dodge were already there. The two latter were standing; Dodge evidently was on the point of departure. Mrs. Todd sat close to the soft-coal fire, sewing some green American fringe on a kesa—a Buddhist priest's robe—which she was to use for a piano cover.

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Gwendolen, first catching sight of the visitor, went forward in her bright, impetuous way. "Thank goodness that you came! Isn't this war-news exciting? Wasn't that banquet last night, after the Red God appeared, a regular skeleton's feast? Have you heard from Yuki this morning?"

Before Pierre could segregate the necessary replies, Minister Todd was in the room. He walked slowly, studying, with his thin quaint smile, a large visiting card, apparently just received. He nodded all around, and then addressed himself directly to Dodge.

"Prince Haganè has called. Would you advise me to see him alone?"

"No, no, Cy. I won't hear to it!" protested Mrs. Todd. "With this war started, he may be intending you bodily harm!"

"Nonsense, my dear," said her spouse, patting one plump shoulder.

Dodge had been scrutinizing the legend on the pasteboard.

"This is his Highness's most rigidly official card. Yes, sir, you will have to see him alone. But don't commit yourself by the faintest hint. We have as yet received no instructions from Washington."

"Why, what was that great bunch of cables that came this morning?" asked the lady, with childlike eyes.

Todd grinned toward his secretary, who now cast a grinless and apprehensive look in the direction of Pierre. Dodge answered for the office, "Those related to an entirely different matter, Mrs. Todd, a personal matter. Your husband, Minister Todd, has had no instructions with regard to this war just begun."

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Pierre, reddening slightly, beckoned Gwendolen across the room. They stood staring out across the wide brown lawn. Mr. Todd and his assistant left the room together. Above the Buddhist garment she was desecrating, Mrs. Todd murmured plaintively, "I've known it all along,—though Count Breakitoff in Washington assured me it could not come. I was certain that just as soon as I got over here the horrid thing would break out. Just suppose the Russians capture Tokio! They boast already that they will dictate terms of peace in Tokio before next Christmas day, and the Russian troops are like wild beasts." Here she gave a shudder, and raised her voice. "Oh, Gwendolen, why did we leave Washington, or even our peaceful Western home? I'd give ten thousand dollars to be set down right now in a good Christian wheat-field. This is awful, simply *awful!*"

"And I think it glorious, simply glorious!" sang Gwendolen from the window. "Already the prospect tingles in my veins. It is better than a coming-out party, better than auto-mobiling on a road of green glass! I feel that delicious, tragic, matinée feeling I used to have as a child, just as the curtain starts to rise."

"And you are not afraid something is going to happen?" asked Mrs. Todd.

"I'm only afraid that something isn't going to happen," returned the intrepid one.

Pierre sauntered toward the hearth. "I come of a fighting race, yet now I share Madame's views rather than those of her spirited daughter. This war means a new gulf between Yuki and me."

Gwendolen's face sobered. "I've thought of that. You are right. It means a wider gulf; it ought to mean a wider gulf."

Pierre moved nearer the fire and spread his delicate hands to the flame. "Your tone, Mademoiselle," he began with a most pathetic attempt at lightness, "might imply that the gulf is already of sufficient width to admit despair."

Gwendolen threw back her head and looked at him from under long lashes. "I didn't say so," returned she. [pg 17]

"Speech is the least satisfactory form of intelligent communication," answered Pierre, still trying to smile himself and her into the delusion that he was but partly in earnest.

"Did you see the way that Yuki's father watched us all last night?" asked the girl, irrelevantly.

"No, I cannot say I bestowed much attention. Whenever possible, I keep my eyes from unpleasing objects."

"You do well, Pierre," asserted Mrs. Todd; "especially in this case. I was next him most of the time, and though I did not look, I have acquired neuralgia in the shoulder which was nearest him."

"He wasn't what one would call exactly—gushing," mused Gwendolen. She seated herself now, and fell into a sort of reverie, dropping her chin and catching it in one hand,—a gesture ludicrously like Mr. Todd. Pierre's glance into her face added, it would seem, to his uneasiness.

"I presume it is only war that has brought Prince Haganè to call so promptly," said he, tentatively, with a note of challenge in his voice.

Gwendolen gave a small sniff. "War! He may call it war,—but it is Yuki! Prince Haganè stands behind that old pickled samurai, Onda; I felt it last night. I tried to hint it to you then, but you were determined not to see." She rose to her feet again, and began to flutter near, in the fashion most disastrous to Mrs. Todd's always sensitive nerves.

"Do sit down, Gwendolen, or you will have my brains as tangled as this knot of silk," cried the matron. She began now to jerk at the shining strands, as if they were partly the cause of her irritation. In an instant they were reduced to the condition of a small demented rainbow. Pierre took a low stool, seated himself near the knee of his hostess, and began deftly to unravel the tangle.

He had not tried to answer Gwendolen's last remark; perhaps he could not. Something in his face smote the girl's generous heart. She knelt at the other side of Mrs. Todd's ample knee-space, crying, "Pierre, I have hurt you! I am a horrid, brusque girl. I ought to be a telephone 'central.' I didn't mean to hurt." [pg 17]

"That's just your way, Gwendolen," admonished Mrs. Todd. "You will do things first, and repent them after. How often have I told you that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure?"

"Nay, Madame," entreated Pierre, "speak not so harshly. Miss Gwendolen is merely impulsive. I know her for a good friend of my Yuki, and, I hope, of myself. Such candor may smart a little, but it is beneficial. The truth is, I am sore, wounded, aching, from a talk just held with his Excellency Count Ronsard. I think I came here for balm."

"You told him of your—attachment?" questioned Mrs. Todd, eagerly. Gwendolen rose slowly, went over to a divan and seated herself.

"Yes," said Pierre, "I told him. And for reasons quite different, quite apart from any that Yuki's friends or relatives might urge, he is antagonistic to the idea of my marriage. Of course his opposition means nothing to me. I care not if the whole of France sailed East to prevent me. My faith is bound to Yuki, and I shall not give her up. But in the matter of official appointment Count Ronsard can make difficulties. Indeed I am convinced that he has been holding my credentials all along, and, for his own whim, will not give them."

Gwendolen had listened quietly to the full speech, though her eyes were shining with anger. "The old sinner!" she exclaimed; "the idea of his daring to object to Yuki! What were his reasons, I would like to know!"

Pierre flushed. "To put it delicately,—that Yuki is not of French descent."

Gwendolen bridled. "Oh, I see! You needn't say any more. Probably he would object to me for the same reason, thinking me an alloy of red Indian and buffalo. For sheer, crass ignorance, commend me to the European savant! Well, I would like to go to Mr. Ronsard and just inform him

that there is no king nor emperor of Europe who need not be proud to win my Yuki-ko!"

"You may be sure I told him, with enough of vehemence to suit even you, Mademoiselle."

"The miserable old wretch!" murmured Mrs. Todd, above the kesa.

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Gwendolen's gaze, now that the anger died, went moodily to Pierre. He met the look with a smile no less winning for its sadness.

"Pierre, you are a dear boy," she said, her own eyes suddenly stung by tears; "I know Yuki loves you, and I can't blame her. I wish—oh, I wish you could be happy together; but—"

"Can you not omit that last small word?"

The girl sighed deeply, then leaned forward, her elbows on her knees. "Pierre," she was beginning in great seriousness; she had in her mind to ask whether, if once convinced of the impossibility of marriage with Yuki either now or ever, he would still demand from her fidelity, defiance of her parents, and of all the established rules of her class,—still hold her to that promise he had wrung.

Since that banquet of the Red God, only the evening before, and now fleeing with strange rapidity into the past,—since she had seen Pierre's very charm and artistic sensitiveness used as clever traps for his entanglement, he meantime suspecting nothing, Gwendolen felt not only that the marriage would be indefinitely postponed, but that it would be finally prevented. The subtlety, the ideality, the self-sacrificing impulses of a Japanese nature indissolubly bound to Pierre must mean sorrow, if not degeneration to both. As well try to graft a French geranium upon the stem of a young bamboo! Before she could put her question, Mr. Todd, re-entering, diverted all interest to himself.

Mrs. Todd was first to speak. "Oh, Cy, tell me quick! Has war really begun, or were those reports only to frighten us? Did he confess that war had come?"

"He didn't confess, exactly. He admitted war, as he might have admitted that the day was cold or the wind blowing. I never feel quite myself before that man! He charges me with electricity first, and then hypnotizes me afterward. As clearly as I can make out, it was a friendly visit, its particular object being to ascertain correctly the amount of indisposition acquired by each separate guest from last night's revelry."

"Revelry," murmured Gwendolen.

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"I hope you did not tell him that I had nightmare, Cy!" said Mrs. Todd, anxiously.

"I did not."

"I hope you did tell him that I think Japanese food delicious, and would like to live on it," cried Gwendolen.

"I did," said her father. "He looked bored. Evidently charming young American women are nothing to Prince Haganè. His chief concern, it seemed, was Pierre."

"I—Monsieur?" echoed Pierre, with a nervous start.

"Yes, I can't recall now any very direct questions,—he didn't exactly 'pump,' yet in his esoteric way he let me know that all I could tell him of you he would be glad to learn."

Pierre tried to meet Gwendolen's eyes, but she had turned away.

"Did you speak of my Russian mother, Mr. Todd?"

"No; I had the chance, but dodged it. I thought it none of his Highness's business."

"Merci," murmured the other.

"Speaking of Dodging it," put in Gwendolen; "where is your secretary?"

"He got a 'chit' from the Spanish Legation, and asked for an hour's leave of absence."

"That fat Carmen Gil y Niestra," puffed Mrs. Todd. (Mrs. Todd's own weight was over the two hundred mark, yet she was scathing in her scorn of avoirdupois in another.) "These European

women are shameless in the way they run after men. She's shadowing Dodge now. I wonder what she can want of him." The good lady applied herself with renewed diligence to her robe. Gwendolen studied the stucco-work of the ceiling. In the somewhat strained silence Pierre rose. Mr. Todd was close to him. He put a hand affectionately on the boy's shoulder, and looked down into his face. Pierre, in spite of efforts for self-control, shrank back, his lips quivering with a prescience of new pain.

Gwendolen ran to his defence. "We know what you are going to say. It has been spoken already. Spare us, dad. We are all upset this morning, and when one is upset good advice is an insult. I challenge you to a set at tennis, Pierre. Come, come, the court is perfect, though the skies be gray."

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Pierre turned eagerly. "Capital, nothing could be better. But my costume,—I have not the necessary flannels, shoes—" He looked himself over in concern.

"You have your legs and arms, I presume," said Gwendolen, dryly.

Catching up the rackets and a box of balls, she hurried out, leaving the glass door open.

"Shut the door, Pierre," called Mrs. Todd.

Todd watched the slim young figure as he went. Faithful to Mrs. Todd's admonition, he closed the panel with the greatest care, rattling the knob to show that the latch had caught.

Mr. Todd sighed. "I wish that door opened into France, and that I held a St. Peter's key to it," he murmured, as if to himself.

Mrs. Todd wondered above the robe. "What's that pretty thing you're making?" asked her spouse, quickly. "A piano cover? Gwendolen ought to play a regular 'Streets of Cairo' potpourri under that. Aren't you afraid the old priest's ghost will haunt you?"

"You do talk such nonsense for a grown-up, intelligent man," reproved his dame, but her lips and her eyes smiled.

"Those are the times when I make my most sensible remarks," said he, in return.

"I suppose you know," retorted his Susan, with doubt in her voice.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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RETURNING home from the princely banquet side by side in the double jinrikisha, not a word had been spoken between Tetsujo Onda and his child. The master went at once into his little study, banging shoji and fusuma close around him.

Yuki, forcing back her sad thoughts, related to her mother and the eager servants an account of the many beautiful dishes at the feast. For their amusement she even told a few of the queer foreign mistakes. Some of these were received by Maru San in gasping horror.

"Ma-a-a-a!" she cried once. "A foreign lady, rich and educated, leave—one—chopstick—standing on its head in a bowl of rice! Ma-a! But how can I believe that? Miss Yuki must be joking."

"Just think what foolish things you would do at a foreign banquet, with their awkward knives, forks, and spoons," said Yuki, smiling.

Maru shook her head. This revolution of the poles of etiquette was too much for her brain.

Each article of Yuki's attire, beginning with the heavy satin obi (sash), was carefully folded, pressed smooth by the hands, and put away lovingly in a lacquered clothes-chest. Sometimes Iriya performed this service, sometimes Suzumè. Yuki and Maru were both considered too inexperienced for such careful manipulation.

That night it was the old warrior's turn to remain awake, staring at the ceiling, spelling out the future by the andon's dim light, and planning ways to rescue his daughter from her mad attachment without inflicting unnecessary pain. For Yuki was indeed the pride of his heart. It was a

humiliation as well as a sorrow that she should be willing to repudiate her nationality.

With his slow wits and somewhat rigid cast of mind he had not caught the full importance of the evening just passed, or the significance of the test in which the Red God had played so large a part. Yet in his daimyo's eye, as it rested on Yuki, he had seen something that stirred the blood in the old samurai's veins. Surely not even the ladies of the golden Fujiwara age had been more beautiful than Yuki-ko. Then, Haganè was not indifferent to beauty in women. Could it be possible — But no! Tetsujo dared not let this fancy spread. His skull would split with it. Groaning, he turned on his wooden pillow and tried to sleep—but in vain.

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Meanwhile his daughter, not twenty feet away, behind her silver fusuma, lay in dreamless quiet. The certainty of Haganè's implication, and the tremendous opposition it involved, steadied and concentrated her. She knew what she had before her and deliberately willed the sleep that should bring strength.

In the early dawn, within the sound of her father's restless tossing, she crouched against a shoji, and in the faint pink glow wrote an English letter. Every motion showed care. The rustling of the long sheets of Japanese paper would have betrayed her, so she wrote in pencil on a little pad that bore the name of a stationer in Washington. From time to time she consulted an open letter in a man's writing, a wild, illogical, despairing letter,—the one that Gwendolen had brought some days before.

"How will your thoughts be this gray morning, my dear?" she wrote to him. "Last night you were as one stung by happy madness. You would not see nor hear my warnings. Now you will be realizing why I wished to make warnings. Lord Haganè is with my father against us. They wish me not to marry with a foreigner. That terrible painting was a test, and I have betrayed us by my woman's soft heart. Now they are sure that the one I love is in Tokio they will take stronger care against me. Dear Pierre, I do not think there is any hope! We can wait,—or we can die!—just now I believe nothing else is possible. O Pierre! If my weakness offend you, and if already it seem to you far beyond any help,—if you, being the impatience, have not heart to so long wait,—let me go! Forget poor Yuki! Indeed, I should not have promised at all. I belong to my country, as in previous time I said. I must not make sad your bright life. Rather would I be forgotten than bring you to grief. Your Yuki-ko."

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This letter she addressed to Pierre at the French Legation, stamped, sealed it, and slipped it into the long, hanging sleeve of her kimono, intending, at the first opportunity, to get it into the hands of a postman. After this she arranged her hair and obi quickly and went out into the kitchen where already she heard old Suzumè and Maru San at work. Hardly had she entered when the front gate opened and the newspaper-boy ran in, his small copper bell clamoring on his hip. His bovine face was crimson with suppressed joy. Beside the usual morning sheet he held out a printed extra, shaking it toward her.

"Look at this! Honorably read these headlines, o jo san! Banzai Nippon!" he cried.

Yuki reached forward for the hand-bill. "It is war! War! Togo has fired!" she read, in a low, tense voice. "War with that great brutal nation, and we have fired! O Nippon! O my Emperor! The ancient gods be with you!"

"Three ships already sunk! Three!" screamed the boy, wildly, and tossed up his foreign jockey-cap.

"Kwannon preserve us! What has happened—an earthquake?" cried old Suzumè, hastening from the well-curb, and wiping red hands on her apron as she came.

"War! War, nurse! Our country is at war this minute, and three Russian battle-ships are already sunk!"

"We'll teach the bears that we are not to be trampled—Banzai Nippon!" boasted the paper-boy, as he hurried back to the street.

Iriya, not quite dressed, thrust her head from the parted fusuma.

"War, Mistress! War, Master! The honorable Mr. Togo has sunk all the Russian battle-ships and beheaded all the generals with his own hand!" shrieked Suzumè. Maru began to cry.

"War!" faltered Iriya, and shrank back into the dim room.

"Banzai! May our Emperor live a thousand years!" roared Tetsujo. Those outside could hear him hurtling about the narrow room. "Tell them to hang the flags above the gate, woman! Quick! Every moment wasted is a sacrilege! Gods of my Ancestors, at last we fight! Would that I were with Togo!"

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Iriya, after giving orders for the flags, threw herself before the family shrine, where lights burned always in small, steady, pointed flames. "Ancestral spirits of our home, old deities of this land, give strength to our soldiers and sailors!" she whispered.

Tetsujo brushed past her, fully equipped for walking. His old face twitched with eagerness.

"Do you not wait for your worthless breakfast, honorable master?" ventured Suzumè.

Onda gave a loud laugh and tossed the old dame a handful of coin.

"Breakfast! I'm eating and drinking food of the gods! Here! Take this money, and all of you women go to your temple and make offering! I seek the public places where men assemble." Suddenly he halted. Haganè's last words came to his ears. His face turned black, and he slowly walked into the house with bent head. "I had forgotten—I cannot go. Serve the breakfast as usual," he muttered in the voice of an old man. Stumbling into the main room he said under his breath, "Hachiman Sama, help me to endure! On a day like this—I, Onda Tetsujo—I a warrior of Haganè's clan—I must be held here like a tame cock in a bamboo basket! Had I not seen the look in his Highness's eye—I might hurl all aside and take the risk—"

Soft footsteps had been following him. He wheeled, to face Yuki. Her eyes were gleaming and steady, though her face had crimsoned with shame. "Father," she began proudly, "I know the reason of your return. All your heart burns to be with other men, and to hear full news of this mighty event. Go, I entreat you! There is no fear of what—you and Prince Haganè think."

The old warrior himself now showed embarrassment. He would not meet her gaze, but let his eyes move restlessly about the floor as he answered: "Yes, my old heart strains like a bowstring to be gone—and I do not dare! You defied me once,—my blood grows hot at the thought of it."

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"Still, I am your daughter," said Yuki. "And I think you will believe me when I offer you my pledge that, from this moment till your return, even though it be a week hence, I shall not leave this house and garden, shall not admit a foreign guest to it nor listen to foreign speech."

"I believe you," said Tetsujo, with great relief in his face. "You will neither go nor admit a foreign guest—nor write and receive letters?"

Yuki caught up her sleeve. Onda's face darkened. Deliberately drawing forth the letter she offered it to her father, saying, "Here is one I have already written and shall send. Will you not trust me even further and be the one by whose hand it goes?"

"Me post it? Me put it in a box?" he asked in amazement.

"The meaning it bears is not against your desire, father. Rather may it destroy an evil that already lives. I ask you to take it."

"To bargain thus with a mere girl—" the samurai muttered. Then he threw his head back. "My blood is in your veins. I trust you. Give it."

Yuki, choking back a little sob, fell at his feet and touched her forehead to the floor. She heard his quick and heavy tread shiver through the house. Then followed, coming in her direction, the gentler steps of Iriya.

Yuki lifted her arms. "Mother, mother!" she cried passionately, "why could I not have been born a man? To die for one's country, in battle, with the thought of the Emperor like a cooling draught at the lips! To stand on the great black ship, smiling in storm and snow and fog, driven in like fate itself to glorious chances! Oh, that is to *live!* But to be a woman—"

"Yes," said Iriya, quietly seating herself. "The fortunate are those who know, in this incarnation, full expression of a burning heart."

"Do you feel so too, mother?—you, who are always so tranquil and so dear?"

"I too am a samurai's daughter. In the strife of Restoration days I saw my father and my brother die—I saw my mother live."

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"Oh, dearest one, how selfish we young souls are. We are like green fruit that has no mellowness. You have suffered so deeply—and I never guessed."

Iriya, with half-closed eyes on the garden, uttered words which until the hour of her death never quite loosed their echoes from the girl's heart. "Young souls are indeed unripe in the ways of love. That suffering of mine was mere indifference to the grief I shall know if, at an hour like this,

with Nippon in the throes of re-birth, my only child should become the wife of her enemy."

Yuki cowered back. She could not look her mother in the face. Up to this moment she had never dreamed that Iriya had been told anything. The sense of comradeship and of interdependence between a Japanese husband and wife is very strong; but in this case, where Tetsujo's angry violence had been so out of keeping with the whole tenor of his life, Yuki was perhaps justified in feeling that he would prefer to maintain a sullen reticence.

Iriya's words, and the way she spoke them, showed not only that she was conversant with the whole threatening situation, but that she had thought and prayed deeply. It did not seem at all the every-day domestic Iriya that spoke, but an older and more impersonal spirit, issuing from borrowed human, lips.

An uncomfortable silence fell between them. Iriya sat rigid and upright, as a silver image in a Buddhist niche. Little Yuki, feeling very small and young and human, crept noiselessly to her own room.

Tetsujo did not return until the following day. He showed evidences of strong excitement, and could not for a while be seated, but strode up and down the matted floor of the house, throwing off ejaculations and phrases of war-news. He had much to tell in his irritating, disjointed way. But Japanese women do not show impatience. They knelt out of range of his feet, but within good hearing, following his motions with feverish eagerness, and snatching at his words as at whizzing fireflies. Names of those killed, quotations from foreign newspapers, reports from the Tokio war-office, maledictions upon himself that he was too old to go,—all came in a scurrying swarm from the samurai's lips.

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"Refused me—they refused me,—those grinning, foreignized apes at the war-office. Even my daimyo will not help me. An age limit? Gods! Trained men must twirl their thumbs while boys with soft hearts and flabby muscles defend the Emperor! Would that I had ten thousand lives to give, and that each life in passing held the agonies of ten thousand deaths. Even that would be but a handful of blown petals to the whirling majesty of Nippon in the breath of the Eternal.—But wait! There are many young men now, there are hills of powder and river-beds of shot; but when that powder melts like snow in a spring rain, when the last shot stings the air, then may the sword-arm leap to usefulness. The Cossacks cut and slay like demons,—why not we? For whom then will be the cry but for old Onda? Onda Tetsujo! who has cut three bodies through with one slow, steady stroke; who has bared a living bone so swiftly that the slain creature turned inquisitive eyes on death! Bah, I babble and rave like a Meiji actor."

"Yet, Lord, it may come,—it may come," whispered Iriya, aloud. "Daily I shall pray and sacrifice that this desire of our hearts be granted." Yuki looked upon these heroic beings that had given her life, and knew the pangs of self loathing. What was she, their only child, now doing for the land they loved? Planning ways of remaining faithful to a foreign lover! She drooped her head still lower. Alas! Had Pierre not taken that promise from her unguarded soul! If Pierre even now would give her up—would understand.

Tetsujo, still fuming in a noble rage, cut the floor in cross-lines of hasty striding. He turned at intervals, catching back his flight, raising himself up to silence as if he heard a bugle-note, staring, unseeing, into the garden, then clenching his fists, muttering new imprecations, and throwing himself again into his restless walk. The essence of Yamato Damashii breathed from him. One listened for the clank of steel and shark's-skin armor. His right hand felt incessantly for the vanished sword-hilts. All at once he stopped directly before Yuki, transfixed her with fierce, tormented eyes and cried, "Onda Yuki, you are a samurai's daughter."

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Yuki met his look. "I am a samurai's daughter."

"See that you forget it not."

For an instant longer he glared into her upraised face, then flinging himself away he muttered, "Oh, that I had a son to offer,—one son only to serve my land! They would not let me go." He seated himself at last; folded his arms within the short, blue, cotton sleeves; and sank into a brooding revery.

With a few days the first frenzy and tumult of the war were over. The nation settled into a state of watchful and sober patriotism. Men turned to practical work, raising money for the war fund, for all knew that it was indeed a struggle for life or death.

Yuki had received by mail another letter. Tetsujo was present when it came. She read and re-

read it slowly, under his very eyes, and then tore it into scraps, letting them fall in small white flecks upon the red coals of the hibachi. Onda stared at her, fascinated, but found nothing to say.

The note was in Pierre's most appealing vein. He urged her, for the sake of both, to be a heroine. He forgave her, a thousand times over, her hint of betrayal of the night before. Again he congratulated himself and her on his foresight in compelling the stricter pledge. "You must see now, my poor, sorrowful darling, that it is the only thing to hold us back from despair." Yuki's heart sagged within her. She attempted no reply. She wondered dully how so flaming a love failed to illuminate reason. Pierre simply could not understand. Well, she must be calm and clear enough for both. Her deepest fear, but half admitted, was that Tetsujo, with Prince Haganè behind, would now attempt to end the matter by marrying her to some young noble of their acquaintance. She hardly dared face the thought of what her home life might become after her repudiation of such an offer.

Gwendolen remained apart, and Yuki rightly guessed that it was at Minister Todd's instigation. She never for a moment doubted Gwendolen's loyal affection. This restraint was a proof of it, as also of Mr. Todd's clear judgment.

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Pierre began now, in his restless misery, to haunt the streets immediately surrounding Yuki's home. Apparently he wished to establish, as a signal, a certain little quaint air from Carmen that he loved. He would whistle a phrase and pause, evidently expecting her to continue with the answering melody. At twilight, one day nearly a week after "the banquet of the Red God" (as she always thought of it), she was standing alone beside her plum-tree, now almost bare of flowers. The sky stretched low and heavy, as a giant tent hung with unspilled rain. No sunlight had come with the day. The wind pinched and stung with dampness. As she stared mournfully upon the falling petals, holding out a languid hand to stay their flight, a few large flakes of snow came down.

"I gathered petals, to show thee, love.

But now, in my hands they have melted—"

she quoted aloud from a classic.

Her parents had been talking together in the main corner-room, where now a servant brought lights. On the closed paper shoji, just beside her, the silhouettes of two beloved forms sprang into sudden vivid blackness. Tetsujo's stern, Indian-like profile was turned, while Iriya showed only the outlines of her coiffure, with the droop of slender shoulders and the flower-like poise of a delicate throat. His attitude,—all dignity, self-assertion, manliness; and hers, concessive, yielding, and full of feminine grace,—symbolized to the girl the true relations, in Japan, of man and wife. "And is it not better?" she thought to herself. "Are the aggressive American women happier or more beloved?" She thought of the domestic scandals, the unhappy marriages openly discussed at Mrs. Todd's table. Here, at least, though such sad things did sometimes occur, they seldom became topics of general conversation.

The bell of the front gate rang out through the gray air. Yuki, with a sudden leap of the heart she could not account for, threw an arm about the tree and clung to it, listening breathlessly. Through the paper-walled house came clearly the sounds of old Suzumè as she opened the door. "Hai! Hai! Sayo de gozaimasu. Hai, danna!" (Yes, yes. It is augustly so! Yes, master.) Even the sharp indrawn breath was audible. Surely it was a visitor of importance,—and not a foreigner. In an instant a third silhouette was added to the two in the room. This bore a small parcel in its hands, and bowed very deeply before Tetsujo.

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"A messenger direct from the august Prince Haganè!" said Suzumè's proud voice.

Yuki saw the shadow of her father snatch the package and toss aside the cloth furoshiki in which it was wrapped. She saw the shadow open a letter, start, bend his head nearer. She saw strong shadow-hands tremble, and heard a voice, which strove in vain for steadiness, give the orders: "Fold the furoshiki carefully, and return it done up in clean paper. Give to the messenger my respects. There is no immediate reply. Offer him fresh tobacco, tea, and cakes—the best we have."

"Hai! Hai! Kashikomarimasu" (Yes, yes! I hear and respectfully obey), murmured Suzumè's voice. Her shadow bobbed once, twice, to the matting, and vanished.

Yuki gripped the tree hard. A messenger from Prince Haganè! and that deep, triumphant note in her father's voice! What could it mean?

The shadow of Iriya was now reading the note. A cry came. "O my husband! It is too wonderful—too splendid. It will solve all difficulties. I must not believe—"

On the cowering girl white snowflakes, her namesakes, fell now quickly, dotting her dark hair.

One, falling on a cheek as white, melted slowly, and pretended that it was a tear.

"Call the girl!" said Tetsujo. Iriya rose in haste. Yuki sped back along the narrow veranda to her own room. "And summon the two serving-women also!" came Tetsujo's voice, on a higher note.

Yuki entered with what calmness she could. The two servants already squatted like bright-eyed toads in the doorway.

"Here, girl! Read this letter from his Highness, Prince Haganè," said Onda. "Bow, as you receive it into your unworthy hands."

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The girl bowed obediently. She read the letter through without a flicker of change on her downcast face. Folding it with scrupulous care she returned it, again bowing, to her wondering father.

"Well," he cried, "are your wits gone? What have you to say?"

"His Highness does our house too much honor," answered Yuki, quietly.

Iriya, watching breathlessly, saw what the puzzled Onda did not see, that, in spite of superb self-control, a slow, sick pallor was stealing into the girl's face. Behind Iriya the two servants, drawn closer as by a magnet, vibrated to suppressed excitement.

Onda caught the look of their faces. "Suzumè!" he said, "your young mistress has just been asked in marriage by his Augustness, Prince Haganè, daimyo of our clan."

"Ma-a-a!" breathed the women in unison, and fell forward on their faces.

"You see what *they* think of it," said Tetsujo, with a half-contemptuous wave of his hand.

"Oh, my daughter," cried Iriya, "it is an honor so great that I cannot yet meet the thought of it. You will be like a Princess of the Blood. Our sacred Empress will meet you face to face as a friend."

Tetsujo broke in. "You can serve your country, girl! That's the best of it. The opportunity is incredible. It does not need argument. Well, Yuki! Will you write your humble and grateful acceptance in person, or shall I convey it for you?"

"I have not accepted yet."

Tetsujo bounded in his place. Iriya caught her breath, and stretched forth two pleading hands, one to each.

"Do not anger me, girl!" muttered the father, with visible effort to contain himself. "I am in no mood for violence."

"Nor I, father, being already spent with much contention," answered Yuki, wearily. "Indeed, I should attempt no speech at all, but that I see his Highness shields me by commands against rough argument, and the condition that I be given full time to decide."

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"Bah," cried Tetsujo. "Even a god must have some small weaknesses. Pity to women has always been his.—Well, when shall your answer go—to-night, in the morning, on the first rays of the sun? Speak! for my choler trains me hard!"

But Yuki did not hasten to reply. Behind her rigid calm a thousand frightened fancies sped. No thought could be followed to a conclusion in this first whirl of atoms. They went by her in a soundless hurricane,—torn bits of hope, filaments of fear, thin flakes of readjustment. She saw that time must be gained—time, and the opportunity to think. An unqualified refusal would bring upon her immediately consequences and new conditions which she was neither physically nor mentally able to combat. She must achieve an armistice.

After an interval that seemed long to her but interminable to the quivering Onda, she raised her face, saying quietly: "After a space of three days, at the hour of twilight, I will myself deliver an answer to Prince Haganè. Will you kindly convey this message?"

"She will answer in three days! Lord of Hell! she will condescend to answer my daimyo in three days! This bit of spoken offal—must I present to a deity who burdens himself with you—that your family may be honored, and your cheap foreign attainments used! His magnanimity is inconceivable. To a lesser man it would seem impossible. To marry you openly,—make you a princess,—you, a shivering wench he could have for the taking!"

"He could *not* have me for the taking, and you know it!" said Yuki's low voice, that held an undercurrent of his own. "You shame yourself and me by such raving. If you insult me further I will refuse at once."

"Come, Yuki! Come quickly!" whispered the terrified Iriya, dragging at her daughter's sleeve. "Your honored father will strangle in his rage. Never, never, in all our married life have I seen his eyes glare thus! Hasten!"

"Yes—hasten—drag her away!" gasped Tetsujo, throwing back his head and clutching his collar. "She is not my daughter! Would that my bones had crumbled—" His words broke off in a gurgle.

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In her little room Yuki stood gazing down moodily upon the convulsed form of her mother. "I know I ought to feel more pain to see you weep so bitterly, my mother," she said at length. "I tell myself that I should feel, but I cannot feel. Somehow I seem to be wearing armor inside instead of outside. Think of it, mother, what it means to me! I love a man who loves me honorably. I do not ask a sudden marriage,—I would wait patiently until the war is over, and perhaps your heart and father's would be softened toward my hope. I will work for you,—I will go out and be a servant, a teacher,—anything to relieve you of my burden. All I ask is to remain uncompelled toward other marriage. Yet here my father, and an old man older than my father, are trapping me,—they condescend to trap me! Prince Haganè cannot possibly wish me for his wife. He has seen me but twice since I was a child. A man like Haganè does not know love in the sense I have been taught it. Oh, I am like a bird ensnared in chains—in chains so heavy—that I can scarcely stir a link! Being a samurai's daughter I cannot even die."

"Yuki! Would you indeed disgrace us by marrying—a Russian?"

"Not so long as it seems to you a disgrace. But that will not last forever, mother. This war is to change many things. Can I not belong to myself, just for the time of this war, mother? Will you not plead with father for this boon?"

"I dare not! I dare not!" shuddered Iriya. "I fear your father, for the first time in my life.—There! He is calling. I must go." She caught one of the girl's dangling hands and pressed it convulsively against a tear-wet cheek. "May Kwannon soothe your bewildered heart, my loved one!" she murmured, and was gone.

"I prefer you to have as little as possible to do with that hardened and ungrateful wretch!" came Tetsujo's voice, as Iriya entered to him. Yuki knew that it was raised purposely for her to hear. Iriya evidently attempted some conciliatory reply, for he burst out angrily, "Don't defend her, woman! It is disrespect to me. I tell you she shall consent, whether she wishes it or not!"

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Yuki smiled the smile that leaves a taint upon the soul. "There are a few things that even a father—even a Japanese father—cannot do!" she said aloud.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

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IF previous days in the Onda household had been tense, those following were to reach the ultimate limit of nerve-endurance. Immediately after his last tempestuous scene with Yuki, Tetsujo had left the house. Yuki was minded to call after him, protesting that her promise given him on the first day of war did not hold indefinitely. She moved forward, the words nearly sped, when he turned on her a look and gesture so repellent that she cowered, and let him pass. It did not seem at all her father who now looked at her, but rather some angry Spirit of War, in temporary assumption of Onda's body.

War! War! War! The streets thrilled to it. The sparrows chirped it. The jinrikisha wheels rattled a pygmy fusillade. In this flare of national ardor all passions burned more hotly, and among them, Tetsujo's indignation against his only child. Iriya, being more inexperienced than Yuki herself in interpretation of men's fiercer moods, could not tell her that such caloric outbursts would die the sooner from their own exaggeration. Yuki moaned, and shut her hot eyes from a future where her father should always be angry, and her mother always trembling.

Early next day, after the reading of Haganè's letter, the women of Onda's house were surprised to find their domestic retinue silently increased by the addition of two grim, middle-aged men who called themselves gardeners. From their reading of all "War Extras" that the jangling bell of the newsboy announced, and from their sporadic and often devastating attacks on harmless shrubs, one might have doubted their skill in the professed art. Tetsujo disdained explanation, and gave

the one order that they were to be suitably fed at meal-times in the kitchen, and treated with the consideration due to servants hired specially by himself. Iriya had not the heart, scarcely the curiosity, to question. All that day she moved about, a silent, timid figure of protesting obedience. Yuki understood at once that her mother had been told to ignore her. She understood, also, the meaning of the so-called "gardeners," and turned to her father slow, scornful eyes, which he refused to meet.

What the young seldom realize, in a case like this, is the suffering of those in authority, who, according to adolescent eyes, delight in imparting sorrow. Yuki was convinced that this strange changeling of a father revelled in his cruelty. She forced herself into defiant composure, chiefly in the hope of detracting from his supposed enjoyment. Her mother's white face was another matter. She looked on that just as little as possible. Old Suzumè and Maru grew to partake of their master's elfish obsession. Their peering faces and bright eyes, quickly withdrawn, maddened her.

No hope or thought of solution had come through the troubled night, nor, as yet, with the gray day. Tetsujo had gone, presumably, to convey the detested message to his prince. Yuki's one conscious determination was to send another message to Pierre, which should state clearly and comprehensively the new difficulty that had assailed her. Almost certainly her father had arranged that no more letters should go forth or be received. The gardeners and Suzumè would see to that. At times she had a wild fancy of attempting flight, urging Pierre to rescue her in the fashion of mediæval romance, and to take her to the Todds, or to some Christian missionary, where they could be married and so set beyond the reach of Haganè and her father. But would it set her beyond the black tide of her own remorse? How then should she reconcile her fondest belief, that in a union with Pierre she might serve to bring closer French and Japanese friendship? This would be outrage, anarchy, at the start. Yet something must be done,—something at least to remove her, temporarily, from her father's loathing sight after she should have refused Haganè's proposition. In this, perhaps, Pierre himself could assist, or Gwendolen,—if she could only see Gwendolen. "Gwendolen!" She stretched out her arms to the sunless, vacant sky, and called her friend's name aloud.

Whether telepathy is a fact, or merely a pet child of some philosophers, whether or not the ether of the East holds subtler vibrations than our own, it is certain that exactly at this moment Gwendolen awoke in her foreign bed from hurrying dreams of Yuki, and lay awake, staring, a sudden weight of apprehension full upon her. The excitement of war may have sharpened American senses also. Gwendolen's mind ran back for the hundredth time to that strange, memorable banquet. Its meaning grew now more sharp and sinister. Something had taken place there, something intangible, but very real, something decisive, fatal, the effect of which would first appear in Yuki. Gwendolen had as her birthright some of her father's intuitive judgment of character. She had read that night the hatred of foreigners in Tetsujo's sullen face, and did not dislike him for it. Haganè baffled her; but she had noted how deep were the eyes fixed now on Yuki, now on Pierre. Neither of them would wish for Yuki to become the wife of Pierre, and neither did Gwendolen wish it. The girl smiled curiously at her feeling of distaste. It did not seem right for Yuki to marry a foreigner, even an utterly charming and immorally beautiful foreigner like Pierre Le Beau.

"I guess I must have been a Japanese in lots of my former incarnations," she said to herself. "Yuki declares it's so, and she should know. But—" here she stopped and drew out her long, unbound yellow hair in two diaphanous, glittering wings. "The fates certainly have put my Oriental soul, this time, into a misleading body!" She was dressing now, and stood before her pretty silver-laden bureau by a sunny south window of the Legation.

About two hours later of the same day Minister Todd and his secretary, sitting alone in the thrice-guarded sanctum of the former's private office, looked up in incredulous astonishment as a dainty tapping betrayed a feminine guest. Then Todd's thin smile widened. "Gwennie, I'll bet!—and on the war-path! Only that little rascal would have the cheek."

Dodge turned away to hide the glow in his brown face. Gwennie it proved to be. She entered, dainty, perfumed, exquisite, in tan-cloth dress and seal-skins that exactly matched her brows and lashes.

"I don't expect to be welcomed," she said aggressively, her little white chin high in air. "But I simply had to come."

"Well?" This was from the minister.

Before stating her plea, Gwendolen threw a bewildering look of entreaty upon the gloating Dodge. "Dad, I can't stand it! I haven't seen or heard anything from Yuki for a week. Pierre Le Beau is driving me mad; and last night I had the scariest dream about Yuki. I feel in my bones that

she needs me. Let me go to her, dad! Dearest, darlingest diddy-daddy, say I can go!"

Todd put a loving arm about the supplicant, but at the same time he shook his head. "Can't you be patient just a little longer, girlie? Something is bound to turn up soon."

"If Prince Haganè is in it, it will be worse than a turn-up; it will be a heave," said Dodge, shaking his head also.

"But, dad, I *have* been patient. You know how I hate being patient. I'm perfectly on edge when I have to wait. Every little bit of me begs to be cut off, and allowed to run in scraps. Oh, don't look so solemn! I'm only a girl. I can't upset the earth. Everything has gone wrong this morning from the minute I stepped out of bed on a tailless cat. You can make it well, daddy. My heart simply tugs in me toward Yuki."

At mention of her heart Dodge gave a prolonged and envious sigh. Todd smiled, but Gwendolen only looked indignant. Tears stood in her pretty eyes, and Dodge felt himself to be a brute.

"Your Excellency," he said, "if I might be allowed to suggest, why not let me be Miss Todd's escort? If I am along, I think, perhaps—" He broke off with a significant intonation. The two men exchanged glances, and the elder, catching his chin with a characteristic gesture, walked away thoughtfully.

"Oh, when dad looks like that, he is going over the entire American Constitution before he answers," cried Gwendolen, in despair. "May I not sit somewhere, Mr. Dodge?"

There were but three chairs in the room, the two revolving desk-chairs, and one suggestively rigid and slippery, meant for visitors. Generally, as now, it was heaped with a tottering mass of papers. Dodge, with suspicious alacrity, leaned forward to wheel the minister's chair. Before he could reach it, Gwendolen had thrown herself into the other, and faced the open vitals of his private desk.

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In the very centre, just out of range of the minister's eye, stood an unframed photograph of Carmen Gil y Niestra, a languorous Spanish beauty lately arrived in Tokio. The picture had come that morning by mail, and was only waiting to be carried to Dodge's rooms; but Gwendolen could not know that. She was humiliated and annoyed to feel a deep, dry sob rise to her throat. At another time, when her best friend was not in trouble, and she hadn't stepped on the cat, she would have made some bright remark about it; but now she dared not trust her voice.

Dodge, carefully removing the papers to the floor, seated himself on the visitor's chair, and let his eyes rest with a curious, half-triumphant look upon Gwendolen's downcast face. This young man, unlike others to whom she had chosen to show favor, had not hastened to throw himself at her feet, pleading to be sat upon, trod upon, built upon, anything but the one obvious suggestion that he rise and walk away. He had never tried to take her hand; never once said that he loved her, though the girl until this moment had felt certain of it. Sometimes she had tried to flatter him into the declaration; again she would pique and goad him. The result had been the same. Dodge followed her everywhere, paid her all possible attentions, and said everything but the one thing she had determined to hear. With an instinctive coquette, the desire is not so much to overcome her quarry, as to feel that there is no quarry she cannot overcome. But even from the seductive moonlit decks of the steamship Dodge had escaped, uncommitted. The situation was both piquant and exciting.

"Well, Dodge," said the ambassador, at length. "I am willing to take your suggestion. Is the carriage ready, Gwen?"

"It's been at your door for hours."

"I'll let you go, since you seem to feel so set on it. But be careful of what you say or do, and don't promise anything. Give little Snowflake my love, and tell her I miss her about the house."

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Gwendolen, without a word of thanks, walked toward the door. "Now, Dodge, remember," warned her father, in a semi-whisper.

"If Mr. Dodge is being sent along as a sort of diplomatic nurse, or a keeper to an idiot, I won't have him," flashed the girl.

"Nonsense, child!" said her father. "You'd better run along in a hurry before I change my mind. I don't know but as I'm weak—"

Without waiting for more, the girl literally ran from the room. Clerks and visitors in the outside offices looked up in wonder. That dry sob in her throat had stirred again. Even her dad, on this horrid day, was cross.

Outside the sun had begun to shine brilliantly. The high winds, those scourges of the Tokio winter, were, for the time, at rest. The people in the streets appeared contented and happy enough, trudging along on wooden clogs, or trotting with noiseless, straw-sandalled feet between the shafts of vehicles. The small boys wore miniature flags in their caps.

When again she felt mistress of her voice, she said, with an attempt at her usual gay levity, "Now, Mr. Dodge, I intend to know what all that mysterious interchange of glances in the office was supposed to convey."

Dodge seemed to think. "I should fancy you'd know by instinct," he answered. "Japan and Russia are at war. America is neutral."

"Yes," challenged Gwendolen, "and the earth goes around the sun, and the moon around the earth. But what is that to Yuki and to me?"

"You are the daughter of the American minister, and Miss Yuki is under the protection of Prince Haganè. It's the bother of marriage. You must see that she can never marry Le Beau. The worst of it all is that Le Beau's such an ass!"

"I don't consider my friend, Mr. Le Beau, an—er—animal," said Gwendolen, all the more stiffly that her statement was not quite true.

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"I beg your pardon," said her companion, meekly, and relapsed into careful silence.

Gwendolen fidgeted. This did not suit her mood at all. She wanted to quarrel. "Yuki and Pierre are frantically in love, poor things! But of course an incipient diplomat doesn't take into consideration anything so trivial as—love."

Dodge smiled into her petulant eyes, a sort of elder-brother smile that stung her. "If I am the incipient referred to, you have missed your mark."

"You pretend to be Pierre's friend, but you never did like him."

"When have I pretended?"

"You are jealous because he is so good-looking. All men are that way."

"Aren't girls sometimes that way too?" asked he, with elaborate innocence.

The shot told. She reddened angrily. "You are very disagreeable this morning, Mr. Dodge."

Again fell silence.

"Come," said the girl, changing her tactics swiftly. "It is I who am beastly, I know it. I'm going to try now to be good. Tell me honestly, as a friend, do you think that Pierre has absolutely no chance of marrying Yuki?"

Dodge studied the restless eyes for sincerity before he answered. "He has a chance. If she is willing to throw over her parents, her Emperor, and her native land, in order to run away to him,—they may find protection. But if I know Japanese character at all, Miss Yuki would die first—and she ought to. The one decent thing for Le Beau is to release her."

"But to run away, by night perhaps, in actual danger of her life—oh, how romantic!" sighed Gwendolen, clasping her hands. It was done to irritate, and it succeeded.

"Romantic? Damfoolic!" sniffed Dodge, before he could stop himself.

"Mr. Dodge!"

"By George, it slipped out! I beg your pardon, Miss Todd, I should not have said it."

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"For what do you ask pardon—the expression, or the thought?"

"The expression, of course. I was a mucker to use it in your presence."

"Am I to understand that the thought underlying your remarkable utterance is unchanged?"

"Why, er—that such a step would be foolish, and—er—unworthy?" stammered the wretched youth, now as greatly disconcerted as even Gwendolen could wish; "why, of course I still think it. I

have to think it!"

"I approved of it openly. I demand retraction of the thought also."

Gwendolen's chance had come. Here was a bone,—a flimsy cartilage, it is true, but still a thing to pick her quarrel over. In the making-up she might find compensation for other recent chagrins. Gwendolen liked to make up. The magnanimous yielding, the condescension on her part, added to the humble gratitude of the recipient, brought a sense of pleasant power.

"You demand retraction of the thought," repeated Dodge. He faced her slowly. She was deliberately studying the two American flags embroidered between the blue cotton shoulders of the carriage-driver, high on the box. The delicate profile, uplifted in sunlight, had a translucency in the outline like the petal of a rose. Dodge gazed with hungry heart, but deepening frown. "You didn't mean that." He said it soothingly. "You couldn't insist on anything so utterly childish as the retraction of a personal thought. I've apologized for the words."

"Do you refuse, then?" said Gwendolen, with a toss of the head she had seen Julia Marlowe give.

"You really mean such a thing?"

"I mean it."

"Then—I refuse."

The girl turned. This time it was Dodge's somewhat ragged profile held against the sky. "You dare to refuse me?" she gasped. Her hazel eyes grew inky; they seemed to shoot off sparkles of jet.

"I am at your service for everything else," he said steadily.

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No other word was spoken until they reached the foot of Kobinata Hill, where the betto, springing lightly to earth, preceded the galloping horses up the slope.

"You know," said Dodge, slowly, "this may mean to me giving up every hope of happiness. And it's such a nasty little cause,—like having one's eye put out by a spitball."

"Yet you prefer it to retracting one rude, silly thought!"

"For God's sake!" cried the badgered youth, "how can a man retract what he still thinks? Do you want me to lie, and say I don't think a thing when I do think it."

"Yes," said Gwendolen, with a strange glint in her face. "Lie! Say that you do not think it. I shall be satisfied with that."

"I'll be damned if I do!" said Dodge. "I'll lie to please myself, but I won't lie at the bidding of another,—not even you! Shall I stop the carriage and get out?"

Gwendolen, with a little choking sound in her throat, turned away. Her gesture seemed an assent. Miserably the young man realized that he was bound by Mr. Todd to remain with her, and overhear the conversation that might ensue. In a moment more he helped her from the carriage in silence, allowing her to precede him to the Onda gate, and up the garden stones to the door.

Old Suzumè answered the knock. She parted the entrance shoji very craftily, one bent eye to the crack. Her left cheek could not have been two inches from the floor. This gave an uncanny look, as if a severed head, or one of those long gourd-necked ghosts of Japanese mountains, had appeared to receive them.

Gwendolen said, "Oh!" and retreated. Dodge stepped forward boldly, and put one gloved hand into the crack. The old dame shivered at this, and seemed to cower for a spring. A swift, soft rush of feet came through the house, and Yuki, flinging both doors wide, sent a crooked smile toward them.

"Come quickly," she panted; "I pray you wait not to remove the shoes. My father is absent. I have prayed for Gwendolen; there is great thing to be said."

Dodge shut his teeth together. He was to be needed. Without a look for him, Gwendolen, obeying Yuki's injunction as to shoes, sprang up the one stone doorstep and followed Yuki along a dim corridor. Dodge, more deliberately, motioned Suzumè to remove his shoes, standing first on one foot, then on the other, and balancing himself by the aid of a shoji frame. The untying of shoestrings was a difficult task for excited old fingers. Her beady eyes darted incessantly back into

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the house.

"No harm can be done. I am from the American Legation, and was sent to accompany Miss Todd," said he, in Japanese, pitying the old dame's nervousness.

"Hai! hai! Sayo de gozaimasuka?" mumbled she, greatly relieved. She loved and was proud of Yuki; she adored her mistress; but there was a single voice in that house, and it belonged to Tetsujo.

Dodge went alone into the house, guiding himself by the voices. They had reached the guest-room. All fusuma and shoji had been closed. Without knocking Dodge pushed aside a silver panel painted with birds. At the same moment Iriya entered by the opposite wall of the room, a mere white ghost of propriety.

Yuki, almost in Gwendolen's arms, was pouring out rapid, disjointed, incorrect phrases of English,—sometimes with a whole sentence in her own tongue,—so that the listener could catch the meaning only in fragments.

Dodge, after a bow to Mrs. Onda, walked straight to Yuki, took a seat near her, and by his quiet eyes compelled her attention. He began to speak in slow, deliberate Japanese that the mother also might understand. Whether interpreting through his careful pronouncing or divining from his emphasis, Gwendolen, too, seemed to follow him.

"In allowing Miss Todd to call this morning, Miss Onda, her father, Minister Todd, has commissioned me to say to you—"

"Don't you believe him!" cried Gwendolen, flinging herself bodily before Yuki. She turned flashing eyes upon the speaker. "The poor child has enough to bear already, without your giving more!"

"I must deliver your father's message, Miss Todd. And I shall do so, though I have to wait until Miss Onda's father comes."

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At sound of that dreaded name Gwendolen's courage for the moment fell. Dodge quietly resumed, in Japanese, "While Mr. and Mrs. Todd have only the most affectionate feelings toward Miss Onda, they beg to recall the very delicate international questions raised by the present war. America being neutral—er—Miss Todd's official position—"

"Miss Todd's official fiddlestrings," interrupted Gwendolen. "There, Yuki! He's through! That's all he had to say! Now can't we go into your bedroom, or out to the garden, and finish our conversation in peace?"

"Gwendolen, dear,—no!" said Yuki, pressing her hand. "It is most terribly serious time with all. I am glad to have Mr. Dodge here; he will not prevent any help,—he will give it. I must now relate, Mr. Dodge," she went on, very brave and self-possessed, "the new, strange circumstance—" Suddenly she flushed the color of a peony, dropped her face in her hands, and murmured to Gwendolen, "Yes, you must say it, Gwendolen. It is such immodest things for Japanese girl to speak! You tell him."

"I'm not sure that I understand very clearly myself," said Gwendolen, with a puzzled frown.

Iriya stared on, white, motionless, unsmiling.

"As far as I can make the trouble out," said Gwendolen, flinging her words to Dodge, rather than speaking them, "Prince Haganè backs Yuki's father, utterly, against Pierre. They won't consider the possibility of her ever marrying him. Worst of all, while her heart is sore with this, they are trying to force her into marriage with some rich old man,—some influential relative, I believe, of Haganè. Isn't he a relative, Yuki?"

"No-o! He is not the relative," said Yuki, from behind sheltering hands. "It is himself—he—the Prince Haganè!"

"Prince Haganè! Prince Sanètomo Haganè?" cried Dodge, in incredulous surprise. "Good Lord! Why, he's the biggest man in this kingdom, next to the Emperor and the Crown Prince! Has—has he made your father a formal offer of marriage for you, Miss Yuki?"

Yuki nodded "Yes."

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"The old sport! So this has been his game," muttered Gwendolen to herself.

At the full name of Haganè, a wintry smile of pride had flashed into Iriya's set face.

"Whe-e-ew!" whistled Dodge, again. He could not get this wonder fixed. "I see now why your family is wound up like a spring, Miss Yuki. It's a superlative opportunity for you!"

Gwendolen sat so still that first Yuki, then Dodge, stared at her.

"What is it you think I can do with Pierre for you, Yuki?" asked the American girl, in a voice as strange as her silence.

Yuki was slightly disconcerted. "Only, dear, that I want to be sure the truth is known to Mr. Le Beau. I would have more peace to feel that he knows correctly. And he then will understand why I cannot write to him, or see him, or answer when he sings the song of Carmen I told you."

"You intend then to hold to Pierre, and throw over Prince Haganè, no matter what the consequences?" asked Gwendolen, curiously.

"I know not about 'throw over.' It sounds a disrespectful word to so great a man. But I am bound to Pierre, as you know, by the promise." Again her face flushed.

"I'll wager your father does not consider that promise binding," put in Dodge.

"No, not my father, and not Prince Haganè," said Yuki, simply. "But then, you know, they is not me!"

"I—er—presume not," answered he, absently.

Now that the conversation was all in English, the pale effigy of Iriya did not even turn its eyes from one face to the other. It was her duty to her husband to be present, and so she remained.

"Miss Yuki!" flashed out the young man, with new animation. "You haven't asked my advice, and you may not desire it. But let me say one thing. It seems awful to me,—even though I am an American, and can't know all the fine points of Japanese feeling,—to throw over a chance like this for a Frenchman! Is he worth it—?"

"How would it seem if you were in the place of Pierre Le Beau?" cried Gwendolen, angrily, before Yuki could speak.

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The Japanese girl evidently was glad of the question. "Yes, yes!" she repeated. "How would you be?" She hung on his answer.

The young man's eyes were cool, his voice crisp and convincing, as he said slowly, "In the first place, I could not imagine myself having forced any binding promise from a girl so far from her home and friends. I might have let her see I loved her,—a fellow can't always help that; but I wouldn't have tied her up in her own words until she had the backing of her own people."

Gwendolen was all ready with a scornful word, but Yuki's small ice-cold hand upon her wrist restrained her. Yuki was leaning toward the young man, an eager gleam in her eyes. "Mr. Dodge, what was it that you meant by the su-per-lative opportunity—?"

"I seem to be turned into a sort of Information Bureau on other people's morals to-day," smiled Dodge. "But this is an easy one. I meant just what a Japanese would mean,—a rousing good chance for patriotism. Isn't that what you thought?"

Yuki's face fell, and her lips trembled. "Yes," she whispered like a child. "That is Japanese thought."

"How lofty and superior! A Confucius come to judgment!" cried Gwendolen to Dodge. His calmness, his power of thought, so soon after their fatal quarrel, irritated her. It almost seemed to make light of her influence. Since she could not command, she wished at least to sting him.

"And, Yuki, now *I* have advice to give. If I loved Pierre as you do,—if I loved any man so that the thought of another turned me sick,—I'd be faithful to him until those old moat pines turned somersaults and came up again as grass! I'd marry him, though Jimmu Tenno, with a new sword and mirror, came down to prevent! You say that Pierre goes by here whistling. What's to hinder you from going to him? The women here would not prevent. Some time like this, when your father is absent,—mind, I don't advise the doing it,—only, I say, if you were tortured and driven to despair —"

Yuki stopped her by a gesture. "Even that terrible thought has been thought by me. But even if

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I wished it,—go to those garden shoji, Gwendolen. Open with some noisiness, and see what occurs."

Gwendolen obeyed with vehemence, placing one still booted foot defiantly upon the veranda. Instantly, as if by magic, the two blue-clad gardeners crouched, in threatening attitudes, on the gravelled path below. At sight of the tall blonde girl the men literally froze into grizzled gargoyles. Gwendolen drew back with a cry, then instantly realized the situation.

"Vile spies!" she exclaimed. "Hired assassins! If there were a man here, he would drown you in that pond! Go away! Shoo!" she shrieked at the astonished natives. Without a word, they exchanged slow, wondering glances, nodded, and withdrew.

Gwendolen slammed the shoji together again. "No wonder you are pale, Yuki," she said, her voice trembling with excitement and indignation; "I never dreamed anybody would dare a thing like this!"

"But how intensely romantic!" remarked Dodge, in a low voice, to the ceiling.

Yuki did not try to answer. Her head drooped lower, lower, with each instant. Tears were coming in uncontrollable throbs to eyes that had, through deeper troubles, remained dry. This humiliation before friends of another world touched some secret personal spring of pride. She lifted first one gray sleeve, then the other, apologizing in low, broken sentences for the vulgarity of thus displaying grief. Gwendolen threw herself to the floor beside her friend, her own bright eyes becoming springs of sorrow. Dodge rose, standing helplessly near, and wishing himself somewhere else.

Upon this lachrymosal tableau entered Tetsujo Onda, and stood for a moment incredulous, in the parted fusuma, like some image of Ojin Tenno, the God of War, a scowl carved deep in his brow. Gwendolen first caught sight of him. Rising to her knees, she tried by looks to wither him away. She might as well have blown seed-arrows from an iron dandelion. Dodge, the diplomat, rushed gallantly to the fore.

"Good-morning, Mr. Onda," he began, bowing spasmodically. "Fine morning, isn't it? We were just making a little call in the neighborhood, and ran in to see your wife and daughter,—foreign custom, you know!—and the young ladies have to talk and weep sometimes over their happy, vanished school days!"

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"Ugh!" grunted the unwilling host, scantily returning one of the many bows.

"Just so—just so," said Dodge, with increasing cordiality. "And now we must bid you good day. Miss Todd and I were just on the point of starting. This is the daughter—the only child, you know—of the new American minister to Japan."

"I know of her, and you, and the Frenchman, and much else," said Onda, with a disconcerting warp of the lips meant for a smile.

"Go! If you love me, make quick goings," whispered Yuki, with her arms around Gwendolen's neck.

"With nothing settled—no appointment for you and—"

"It is hopeless," put in Yuki, instantly. "Mention no name! They will guard me now much closer. Oh, it's my father's doing, not Haganè; he is noble!"

"Then I will see—the other, and tell him clearly. How shall I let you know?"

"A telegram. No one will keep that from me. Send it in English,—in hard words, you understand! And, oh, Gwendolen, send it to-morrow before twilight. Pray for me!"

Ignoring Tetsujo's increasing rage, Yuki followed her friend to the very door, pausing for a last embrace. "You are my good friend—my golden friend! Nothing between our hearts can ever come. Ne?"

"Never! Never! Ne?" answered Gwendolen, trying to smile.

Yuki turned, and went back as a prisoner to an inky cell.

Out on the street, at the carriage-step, two pleasing Americans paused, and eyed each other much with the expression of a pair of young game-cocks.

"Well!" said the tan-colored fowl, superbly, "why do you hesitate? Is it to beg paw-don of some one?"

"I beg paw-don?" echoed the other, in mild surprise. "No, certainly not! How could you fawncy such a thing? Do *you*?"

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Gwendolen, with a muffled exclamation, sprang unaided into the carriage. "Go on! Hurry up! American Legation—Koshikwan, I mean! This beastly lingo—" she cried to the driver, and so far forgot herself as to prod him in the American flags.

The startled servant looked down and over her, to Dodge, for confirmation.

"It's all right, betto!" said Dodge, airily, in Japanese. "I prefer walking back. Take the august young lady home by a long, long road! She has become honorably overheated!"

Gwendolen gave the speaker one helpless glare, threw herself back in the seat, and was gone.

Dodge stood in the middle of the road, looking after the carriage until bamboo hedges closed in upon it, and the noises of its rattling wheels faded into the myriad sounds of the city below him.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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THE month of March was at hand. Tempestuous winds howled and whirled in the pine and camphor trees, in the flame-like, springing bamboo groves, and under temple eaves. The air was full of petals and scraps of green. Sometimes a tiny flake of flint stung the face, and between the teeth an uncomfortable grit blew in. Angry gray clouds piled high from the north, westward from the Atlantic, eastward from that "rough and black" water we call the Yellow Sea. The very firmament was in torment. The wind, combated at once by many currents, tore at times great eddies in the gray, letting the sun down in avalanches of light. Yuki saw the shadow and the sun pass, like fleeting ghosts, across the garden; felt the chill and warmth alternating in their wakes. The wind tossed cruelly the branches of cherry-trees, where sharp-pointed buds in clusters, just showing a first hint of pink, were set. The plum-tree was bare but for a few timid green leaves. Now and then a twig or branch snapped, and fell sharply on the gravelled pathway, where instantly one of the blue-robed gardeners advanced to pick it up.

In the cowed house Yuki moved like some waxen automaton, living only in the one sense of hearing. Every cry from the street, every wind-jangle of the gate-bell, sent her currents of hope and apprehension. Tetsujo grimly ignored the intensifying strain, but Iriya's pitying eyes turned more often to her child. The servants kept to themselves, whispering and exchanging glances.

Now the bamboo hedges which shut out the main street-line bent over, at times almost to the earth, writhing, stretching, and squeaking at the confining strips of wood that sought to hold them erect. Besides the hedge-bamboo, "sa-sa," the fence had an inner line of cruel orange-thorn.

Yuki had watched the elemental conflict greedily. Suddenly a snatch of Carmen's love-song rode the wind. It was the sound she had expected. Her little hands sought each other within the silken sleeves, and clutched so fiercely that a nail snapped. Again came the song, nearer this time, just without the gate. It was a strange, incongruous note, as if an English lark should rise from the bruised and battered hedge. Yuki heard a movement in the next room, where Tetsujo sat among his books. Perhaps it was coincidence that Suzumè brought her, exactly at this moment, a fresh tray of tea. The blue gardeners strolled together into full view, and stooped, as if to discuss the condition of a botan bush, now beaten down.

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Square upon the back of one of them fell a queer winged missive, a scrap of foreign paper weighted with a pebble. Yuki saw it clearly. Old Suzumè, with a stifled gasp, crouched in her place. The girl poured tea for herself, and drank it calmly. The pelted gardener, without so much as a look around, lifted the scrap of paper as if it had been a broken bud, and slipped it, weight and all, into his sleeve.

The Carmen song stopped. Suzumè, with a last sly glance, slipped from the room. Yuki pressed one hand to her throat. It would be no harm to sing the answering strain. What though her father and her jailers heard? If once the song sped forth, not even their craft could recall it. Pierre would

understand, then, that she heard, but was a prisoner; that even the written note he threw could not be received. Once, twice, the white lips parted, and the slender throat stiffened for an answering phrase; but no sound came. It was as in nightmare dreams, where one seeks to cry aloud, and finds that the voice is gone.

Now her father was on his feet. She heard his long, swinging stride go through the house. At the door she heard him kick his wooden clogs, and give a gruff order to O Maru San. Then the harsh scraping feet passed along the garden stones, the little bell clamored, and the gate-panel closed with a bang.

"Ma-a-a!" she heard old Suzumè cry. "This is not the master I have known for fifty years. He must be bewitched by a fox." Maru gave a little giggle, which the elder woman quickly suppressed. Iriya, in the guest-room, moved like a cat. Yuki knew that all were against her,—spies, enemies. Passages from the Psalms of her Christian Bible came to the girl. "They compass me round about on every side. I am set in the midst of snares." She ran out into the garden, now, listening for sounds of violence from the street. Nothing came but the wailing of wind. Tetsujo returned as abruptly as he had gone. Yuki, steeling herself against the look of aversion certain to be met, went before him, not questioning, but searching his face with haggard eyes for some possible sign of at least a will-conflict between him and Pierre. She fancied, in her abnormal state of mind, that something of Pierre's thought must cling to his enemy, and so be transmitted to her. But Tetsujo's face was as blank and expressionless as the glazed side of one of Suzumè's tea-jars on the kitchen shelf.

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Unable to breathe longer that overweighted air, Yuki caught up a gray shawl from her room, and went boldly out again into the garden. The rain had ceased entirely. The wind, though fiercer when it came, came at increasing intervals. Through one of these temporary lulls Yuki reached the bleak little pond. The encircling rocks appeared older, grimmer, and more shrunken. A few of the bordering plants had been twisted and split. One was overturned, its ochre roots clutching at the unfriendly air, the evergreen branches plunged deep into quivering gray water.

As if in wonder that so frail a creature as a girl should dare its strength, the storm, crouching and growling for a last effort, hurled the full bulk of its viewless majesty upon her. She was beaten bodily upon the rocks. But for the protecting shawl she might have been blinded, or the long black hair torn from her. For an instant breath stopped; but in the wake of it came exultation. Lifting her head, she smiled a challenge to the storm to snatch her faint soul from her lips, and bear it far, like a petal, on that streaming tide of heaven. The blue-robed gardeners, crouching in the shelter of a rock, stared at her in wonder. Iriya's face came for one white instant to the veranda and vanished. Yuki could hear the very timbers groan. The bands of dead bamboo, lashed in horizontal strips to the living hedge, squeaked and buckled, and squeaked again, in absurd imitation of animate torture. In the pond the pear-shaped water was smitten into one gelatinous, cowering mass.

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Suddenly the wind went. Sounds all about her of stress and terror changed into whimpers, whispers, moans, and small complainings. The pond-water sprang up in small simultaneous waves which all pawed and clamored at the rocks for explanation. Yuki stood upright, realizing dully her slow return to sanity and poise. The storm had swept her, for a moment, out of her own reach. In the recoil she grudged her soul its habitation.

Now the nonchalant gardeners crossed her path, making respectful salutation in transit. Her eyes followed them absently, but all at once became glued to a small sagging point in the left sleeve of the shorter man. As they disappeared around the corner plum-tree, she sank to one of the rocks. As if she had not enough to bear already, without the torture of speculation on the purport of those written words she was never to see! Her hands fell limp, her head sank. The gray shawl crept by unnoticed inches to the earth.

Wearily the girl opened the portals of her thought to the same hopeless throng of shrouded visitors,—conjectures, all of them, moving solemnly one behind the other,—creatures without a face,—half-animate forms with no clear direction or purpose except to move on. What was to be the end of it all, for her? There was no answer to that. Tetsujo apparently would neither disown her nor relinquish his determination to marry her quickly. It did not seem much to ask, only to be let alone; and yet in some strange way this had come to be a priceless, impossible boon. Pierre's note she would never see. She had not been able to answer his Carmen song. One way alone remained open for communication, and that was Gwendolen's telegram. She had faith that, in some way, this would get to her. At the cry, "Dempo!" she had determined to rush out in person and demand it. Even though this succeeded, she could not fix great hope on its content. Surely no thought would come to Pierre but the old loving, desperate, appealing cry, "Be true, be faithful, and we may yet find happiness!" How the foreigners harped upon that thought of personal happiness! It was, to most of them, the one definite aim in life. To Pierre—dear, beautiful, joyous Pierre—it was life itself. A Japanese is taught from childhood to look upon happiness as the casual flower of his evergreen garden,—the lotos on a still pond of duty. It is never an incentive, never in itself a conscious reward. She had tried to teach Pierre this, but he had laughed at her, and said it was because Japanese did not know how to love.

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Yuki fixed thoughtful eyes on a small shrivelled tuft of fern near her feet. Its once graceful fronds were cruelly bruised and twisted, first by frost, and now by this pitiless storm. "I know how

it feels," thought Yuki. "My father's harshness, my mother's suffering, and my own desire to be faithful have so wrung and bruised my heart." After a pause she said aloud, "I wonder if it thinks itself really dead?" She stooped down slowly, and parted the sodden, clinging scraps of brown. In the heart a nest of tiny leaflets curled, like baby glow-worms, close wrapped in silky filaments of down. They seemed to shrink from her icy fingers, as if to say: "Let us be still! We are only asleep. Those tattered brown bed-curtains keep us warm."

Yuki stood upright again. The expression of her face was altered, and her eyes now slowly softened into tears. "My poor Pierre! my poor Pierre!" she whispered. "If he were just a little more noble, if he were a Japanese, he would say, 'It is best that you should obey your parents, and serve at once your native land.' But he will not say it! And I have promised!" She leaned over for another moment, heaping the dead fern-leaves above their sleeping youth, then walked slowly to the house.

One star, at least, shone clear in her troubled firmament. If Pierre should, through Gwendolen's intercession, or through some awakened vision of his own, telegraph, urging her to be true to her better self, no matter what the grief to her plighted love,—then she could wish to marry that great man, Haganè, to pay her filial debt to the now stricken parents, to show her love and loyalty to Nippon! Of course there was no hope that Pierre would do this; but if he should,—if he should—!

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The wind came again and again, but never so terribly as for that one moment by the pond. Ordinary sounds of domestic life arose from the Onda household, and from the neighbors around it. Cocks began to crow, as if the storm-clearing was of their own contrivance; sparrows chirped. The white tailless cat picked a dainty way along the outer edges of bamboo gutters. Cries of belated peddlers came cheerily from the street.

"To-o-fu-u! To-o-fu-u-u!" called the bean-curd man, with his characteristic upward inflection on the last syllable.

"Chi-chee! Ichiban chi-chee!" cried the milk-peddler, trotting between the shafts of his small, closed cart. He was very proud of this cart, and because of it considered himself the most aristocratic kitchen-visitor on the hill. Its color was a loud, blasphemous blue. On the sides, in letters of yellow edged with black, were two inscriptions. The first, in Chinese ideographs, announced prompt delivery of the richest and freshest milk. Below it, in English, glowed the startling line, "Fresh Ox-Milk Every Hours." Suzumè had long been a patron of the blue cart. A little thin-necked milk-bottle dangled, now empty, by a bit of white cord, just without the gate. This the milk-boy removed, substituting one that was full, though equally stopperless.

The soba-ya (buckwheat-man), lurching and skimming along under a bent kiri-wood pole that bore at one end a chest of drawers and at the other a steaming furnace with bowls, copper-pots, and a ladle, naturally had little voice left for vociferous proclamation. His coming was indicated, at long range, by the click and shiver of copper drawer-handles beating in unison against half-filled boxes. According to the quantity of dry buckwheat in each drawer, the handle uttered a different note. Needless to say, this burdened hawker loitered long at each gate; but at the Onda entrance he stayed longest of all. It was Maru's happy privilege to bargain with these several venders. Her heart found an answering thump and shiver as the soba-ya drew near.

"Honorably steamed, or augustly raw, O maiden of the lovely countenance?" asked he of the blushing one.

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"Augustly boiled, to-day, kind sir,—if you can graciously condescend to bestow the amount of two sens' worth," rejoined Maru, sucking in her breath with ceremonious emphasis as she presented a small green bowl.

This flirtation was already becoming talked of in the neighborhood. More than one curious "ba-san" (old woman), relieved by age from personal domestic cares, sought peepholes and crannies in neighboring hedges when the smell of buckwheat warmed the air.

The buckwheat man bestowed an encouraging smile. "The noblest of my customers invariably prefer my worthless viands honorably boiled," said he, with a side glance from under the brim of his malachite Derby.

"As for that, you, by preparing so deliciously the delectable food, make buying necessary," simpered the purchaser with a rosier glow.

A slim and seemingly boneless cur, who also had nostrils for hot buckwheat, scraped a stealthy way along the hedge toward them. He felt that the flirtation might have possibilities for him.

"Dō-mo!" said the peddler, with deprecating nods. "The stuff is poor, I fear. It is but your divine condescension and pitying heart that make you encourage me." He lifted the copper lid of his cauldron, and began ladling out a goodly portion of the slippery ware.

"Who is the mad young foreigner with yellow hair who now haunts the foot of this hill?" asked the peddler, during his precarious occupation.

"Ma-a!" cried Maru under her breath. She craned her neck to look furtively up and down the street, and then asked in a confidential whisper, "Is there indeed such a person at the foot of this august hill?"

"I speak simple truth. Surely you know of him. In all the roads he is to be seen. He moves so quickly the children say there are two of him. They cry at his approach, though he flings them many rin and sen, and hide faces in their mothers' sleeves."

"Repeat it not from me," cautioned Maru. "Aunt Suzumè would surely scorch me with her pipe, should she hear me gossiping. But he is a grand foreigner, son of a king, who is wild with love to marry our Miss Yuki; but she repels him, for she is asked in marriage by a much greater person, of Japan,—a very, very great prince!" Maru swelled her fat chest like a pigeon. The interest in her auditor's face thrilled her. She opened her mouth for further revelations, when a sneeze from the kitchen brought her caution. "I—I dare not tell his name," she added weakly.

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"You are honorably to be commended for your prudence," gravely declared the soba-ya, though he was swallowing hard this lump of disappointment. "Prudence is an excellent quality, particularly in a wife. Is it true—er—ahem!—is it true, small round one, that the ancient dame who presides over the kitchen of your noble household is, indeed, your one surviving relative?"

"Te-he-he!" giggled little Maru in blissful discomfort. "She truly is, O most worthy sir,—but why should you wish to know?"

"Much reason is existent," said the other, with such meaning that Maru, after an enraptured gasp, let the entire contents of the bowl tilt, and then fall with a wet thud to the earth. The white cur, having well calculated his chances, reaped the reward of intelligence if not of virtue, and went down the hill with a yelp of joy.

"Kwannon help me!" cried the girl at this catastrophe. "For this a great beating may be honorably bestowed upon me!"

"Nay, maiden, be calm!" said the gallant youth. "Free of charge will I restore it. Give me the bowl!" Tremblingly she did so. Their fingers met beneath the sage-green rim. Maru's round face glowed more like a peony than ever.

"Maru! Ma-*roo*!" came a voice from within. "Is the buckwheat-man boiling you, that so long you remain? Worthless vagabond! Let him leave at once!"

"It is Aunt Suzumè! I must go! Again to-morrow you will augustly pause at our broken-down step, will you not?"

"Though in the night I should make divine retirement, yet to-morrow at this hour would my ghost return to bring your buckwheat!" protested the swain. With one more gasp of ecstasy, and the crossing of two pairs of small slanting eyes, the lovers separated. A moment later the peculiar click and chitter of the metal handles came back through dying gusts of wind.

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Tetsujo, immediately after luncheon, returned to his book-room, where now he spent all his waking hours. After some indeterminate search among his well-worn favorites, he took down a volume of Toemmei's poems, a venerable old Chinese classic, and began to read aloud. Iriya, in the kitchen, had already begun to discuss the evening meal. Yuki sat, listlessly, with folded hands, in her own room, next to the library. Her one thought now was to hear the cry "Dempo!" which should announce the coming of Gwendolen's telegram. To look out upon an indefinite period of such days as these was almost more than the girl's brave spirit could endure. Yet, to Pierre she had given an oath. She had let him break the long hairpin. If he commanded her "Be firm and true," she would be true, no matter what came!

Through these dark, monotonous thoughts, her father's voice, low, rich, and sonorous, with the jerky melodic chant and rhythm imposed by long reading aloud of Chinese literature, flowed up and finally compelled her. So had she been taught to read in childhood, before her long sojourn in a foreign land.

"Let me now return, for my farm and garden are growing wild! As the boat skims lightly along the water, the wind plays with my sleeves. O boatman! how far yet to my home? So far, and yet the

hour so late! Now, now at last I see my own loved gate, and enter with joyous rush." The deep tones rose as in triumph, then sank again to infinite tenderness. "The paths to my steps are growing up wild with grass, but the pine and the chrysanthemums still flourish. With my children in my arms I enter the house, drink a refreshing draught, and gaze, and gaze again at the shadows under the garden trees.

"Return! Return! Why should I not return? Let me renounce the intercourse and pleasure of the world! Let me and the world renounce each other! There is nothing more for me to derive from the world!—

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"The farmers come in and tell me that spring is approaching. There are rumors of war in the West. But why should they interfere with my rambles? The trees put on a smile and begin to bud. The streams look busy and begin to flow. What joy to see all things fall due at their season! And yet I am reminded that my season, too, is almost come. Alas! The lodging of man in this Inn of the Universe is but for a single season!"

Yuki's hands were pressed against her breast. In the samurai's slow, fervid utterance one could feel each word fill and thrill the heroic heart before utterance came to the lips. He was deriving strength and comfort from the immortal ode. "Commit then, O soul, thyself upon the current of things!" rose the exulting pæan. "Let me choose my own time. Let me go out for my solitary walk! Let me hobble about the farm on my friendly cane. Let me toil up the Eastern hill, look the clear brook in the face, and sing it my dying songs. So let me end my days as days of themselves may end. So shall my joy flow on with the eternal will of Heaven!"

Yuki sat upright, her wide eyes fixed, as it were, upon the viewless flight of echo. "And they of the Western world say that my people have no true religion, no deep belief. Their souls crawl, where ours take wings! Nippon, Nippon, my country!"

The magnificence of her nation's past, the heroism, self-sacrifice inherent in her countrymen, the passionate craving for what is spiritual and sublime, the belief in watchful spirits of dead ancestors, in the divinity and guidance of dead Emperors manifest in the living flesh, came in a flood and bore up the girl's spirit in a tide of light. What were foreign education, foreign friendship, foreign pledges,—love itself,—to a girl of Yamato Damashii? She was Japanese, one small animate cell in a living tissue of race. To serve her country, that, indeed, should be life's worth. "Pierre, Pierre," she sobbed. "I shall not bring you joy, nor can you give to me the duty that it is my part to bear. Let me go, dear one, let me go, and pray to our Christian God that your kisses fade from me, and your blue eyes be turned away. If I were only myself I would die, or defy for you everything. But I am not myself; I am what my ancestors, my parents and my country have made me; I am only one shivering mote of dust in my country's shining destiny. Let me go, my dear; Kwannon will bless you!"

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Slow, helpful tears began to course, unfelt, along her white cheeks. All at once the physical exhaustion of long, sleepless nights and days unendurable began to tell on her. The glossy head bent over, lower and lower. Tetsujo, after a long pause, had begun an heroic epic of the Heiké clan. The words were indistinct, a sort of splendid blur. She had an impression of horses, arms, war-shouts, and of fluttering banners on distant hills. Then all sounds began to die away. She smiled faintly, and stretched out her slender young limbs upon the soft matting. Soon she was asleep, with the long, regular breaths of childhood.

Without stirring, she remained in the unconscious pose for hours. Iriya, peeping in upon her, choked back a little sob of thanksgiving, and turned away to kneel, in her room, before the ancestral shrine. Lights burned here always, and the pleasant aroma of fresh tea was seldom absent. With hands struck very softly together, that the sleeper should not be disturbed, Iriya supplicated the gods of her home and of her nation that the child should be given clearer vision. A European would have demanded personal happiness for her daughter. The Japanese soul sees deeper, and asks, as the highest boon, power to carry out, in this life, that which has been decreed, and so, for the future, to achieve a nobler attitude.

Just at the hour of twilight Iriya returned, and kneeling, called softly, "Yuki-ko—my heart's treasure—you must awake."

Yuki sat upright instantly. "Has the dempo come?"

"Yes," said Iriya, presenting a pink sealed missive. "And in the guest-room waits Prince Haganè."

Yuki tore the telegram apart, threw open the shoji for more light, and read: "Find it impossible

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to do anything with P no logic or reason pathetic but a child we all think case hopeless forever in your place would accept H whatever happens I am your loving faithful G."

"It is a terribly long message to come in such an expensive way. Surely it is from a foreigner," ventured Iriya.

"How long has it been here, mother?"

Iriya showed embarrassment. "Since about noon, I believe. Suzumè honorably received it and gave it to her master, as she was bid. Your father would not let you have it now, but that Prince Haganè took it from his hands and sent it. He says you are to read and consider it; also that you must not hasten. What marvellous kindness he always shows, that great man!"

Yuki rose slowly. "He is great and kind. Give thanks to him, my mother, and say that I shall enter within a few moments."

Iriya prepared to leave. She had searched her daughter's eyes for a loving recognition, but in vain. On the threshold she wavered. "My baby,—my only one!" she cried aloud brokenly, and held out her arms. In an instant, before Yuki could respond, she closed the fusuma and ran toward the guest-room.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

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PRINCE HAGANÈ sat in the place of honor, his back to the tokonoma, where new flowers bloomed and incense perfumed the space. His robes, of the usual magnificent quality of silk, had to-night a deep bronze color. The candles, placed one on each side of him, threw down a yellow light, which took the wrinkles from his scarred face and some of the sadness from his mouth. To Tetsujo's feasting eyes he appeared as a god; not the meek, forgiving Buddha whom women and children adore, but some splendid old war-god of Shinto tradition, young with the immortality of youth, yet old as the world in wisdom.

The outer shoji stood well apart, letting in the chill, wet sweetness of the night. The storm had now quite died away. The air of the room was so still that the candle-flames stood like balanced flakes of topaz, and the white smoke of the burning incense hung like a silver cord from the gloom above.

The moment that Yuki entered, Haganè, with his trained vision, saw that some great spiritual change had taken place. The look of miserable defiance he feared was not there. Iriya had waited for her. The two women advanced to the great visitor, and bowed before him three times, then went back modestly to the far end of the room. Suzumè brought fresh tea, and two new balls of charcoal for the hibachi. As the servant left, Iriya asked of her husband, "Shall I also withdraw?"

"It is according to our lord's will," answered Tetsujo, his eyes turning to the prince.

"What would you prefer, Yuki-ko?" Haganè's voice was kind.

"I should prefer my mother to remain," answered Yuki, without hesitation.

"Madame Onda, I beg you to honor us with your presence," said Haganè, with a slight bow.

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Onda Tetsujo frowned. If his loyal nature allowed him to make one criticism of his daimyo, it was of a certain lax, foreign politeness toward women. The fault seemed to increase with years. Whether Prince Haganè suspected this disapprobation or not, on this occasion at least he made no attempt to modify it.

"I have come in person, little Yuki-ko, to hear your thought. No, do not speak yet!" he interpolated, with a slight lifting of the right hand. "Wait until I give you questions to answer! At the beginning there must be quiet discussion between us four, with no haste or opposition on the part of—any." He looked, with these last words, directly at his old retainer.

"My Lord, my Lord!" fumed Tetsujo, "shall I be able to contain myself while you condescend to bandy words with a mere girl?"

"If I command it, I think you will contain yourself," said the prince, easily. Tetsujo rocked on the matting, gripped his arms tightly, and was silent.

"The gods seem to have decreed no happiness for me in marriage," said Haganè, impersonally, to all. "Perhaps they have only new mockery in store, if now, in my old age, I dare take to myself this fair flower. Yet am I tempted; by the good for her, as it seems to me; by my friendship for you, Onda Tetsujo; and by the need for an official mistress of my house. I can give her unusual opportunity to serve Nippon, as in my letter I wrote."

Iriya, in her corner, put her face to the floor. "My Lord, even that you have thought it, makes richer the traditions of our house—through ten succeeding generations."

"I would not have the child consent because of family honors, my good dame," said Haganè, a little sadly.

"Shall I speak now, Lord?" asked Yuki, in her sweet, steady voice. Tetsujo ground his teeth, but managed to keep silent.

"Would you speak of the young Frenchman, whose mother is a Russian?"

Yuki's eyes fell and her chin quivered. "Yes, your Highness."

"Speak!—fully!" said he, after a pause.

"He offered me marriage many times, your Highness, and I refused, saying that not without my parents' consent could I answer. Then, at one hour, being weak, I promised. In the foreign land, where you and my father sent me, such promises bind,—even as the oaths of men. I have been bound."

"Gods of my ancestors! Must I listen to this cat-mewing?" groaned Onda.

"Be quiet! The girl shall speak. Yes, Yuki," he continued, his eyes softening as they returned to her white face, "I felt that you had promised. And so, in my letter, if you will recall, I assured you that you were not bound."

"Your Highness!" ventured the girl, at length. "It was your noble thought, your decision, not my own. I am bound."

Haganè looked at her in mild wonder, with the faintest touch of a smile. "And not even your daimyo's word can free your childish promise? You have courage."

"The mad lynx! Let me deal with her!" panted Tetsujo.

"He, my father, so speaks and thinks of me!" broke in the girl, with passionate protest and a wide-flung gesture toward Onda. "In that country no shame is felt for such a promise. Yet my father treats me as an outcast, a blot upon the family name! I ask you, Lord, who are great and strong, to help me!"

"To what shall I help you, little one? To marriage with an alien?—repudiation of a country that I serve?"

"No, Lord; for of myself I could not marry him, now, with my dear land at war. When I first knew him, war had not become even a threat. Only against—misunderstanding—and, Lord,—being forced—!"

Haganè interrupted her with his slight gesture. "You will be forced to nothing!—not now, nor so long as my voice can use the speech of living men! Your decision is valueless unless it be your own. It may be even harmful; for the young branch, held down by force, slashes heaven in its rebound. Nay, child! I would have you bend slowly to my proffered opportunity, weighted by your own ripening desire for loyalty and service. To compel you would be impiety. Believe yourself protected by my word, and by my faith in you! Be calm and think seriously, for upon this hour depends more than you can fathom!"

His deep voice boomed into a silence long maintained. One of the tall candles sputtered and flared. Iriya rose quickly to mend it. Tetsujo's arms, within short blue cotton sleeves, were folded and pressed tightly down upon his chest, as if to keep back straining utterance. Through the stillness his quick breaths ran. The girl gazed out now, motionless, beyond Haganè into the wet blankness of the garden. Familiar outlines of rock and bridge and pine kept there, she knew, their changeless postures. Only a fallen darkness hid them. So in her heart must be immovable shapes and living growths of heroism and selfless devotion. An Occidental training superimposed upon a child's fresh fancy; a foreign love, jealously guarding for its own purpose the tissues of new thought,—these things hid the garden of her heart as night now hid her father's garden. Haganè's look and words were bringing dawn, a dawn perhaps of sorrow, a day dragged up from an heroic past, and trailing its own hung clouds of tears.

Haganè spoke again. His deep voice calmed and satisfied the unstable silence. He changed his position very slightly, facing Yuki more squarely. He raised his massive chin, and a smile played on a mouth that seemed made for stern sadness. Quite irrelevantly, he began to relate to his small audience an incident of his crowded day.

"Do you remember, Tetsujo,—Yuki also may recall from her childhood's impression,—that, as one stands on the jutting corner of my Tabata land, by the large leaning maple,—a corner so steep that it must be upheld by the hewn trunks of pines,—exactly at foot of the cliff stands a very small cottage, with roof patched by the rusted sides of old foreign kerosene cans?" He paused for an answer. Yuki's eyes would not leave the dark mystery of the night.

"I remember most clearly, your august Highness," murmured Onda, with a respectful inclination of his head toward the great man, but an indignant scowl in the direction of Yuki.

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"An aged woman and her only child, a son, live in that house. He is a good son, for though hot with the desire for military service, he has kept steadily to his labor as under-gardener on my place. There seemed to be no one else with whom his mother could find a home. Of late the boy has looked ill. I have overheard the servants say that his soul was attempting to leave the chained body and go off, as it wished, to the battlefield. Such agony as this repression, I believe only our countrymen are capable of experiencing or of enduring."

Now, at last, Yuki turned and fixed her look on Haganè. He did not notice this any more than he had seemed to observe her previous indifference.

"The youth dutifully kept this longing from the old dame. But she questioned, and through her slow round of domestic services she pondered. Then she came to understand. Perhaps the young soldier-husband, dead for thirty years, had returned—to whisper. Whatever the cause, she came—to—understand." He paused an instant, as if to take a firmer hold upon his voice. "To-day,—scarcely an hour ago, Yuki,—the youth, returning from labor, found his mother—dead—before the family shrine. She had used her husband's short sword. It will be buried with her. The smile upon her old face had gained already the youth and glory of a god's. She left no message; the smile told him all.—To-morrow the son takes passage for Manchuria."

Yuki's dawn had come. It hurt her, like the birth of a soul. Haganè saw the same look which, for one fleet instant, he had evoked from her at Washington. His strong heart reeled toward the girl. Iriya was sobbing softly. Tetsujo sat square like a box. He envied the mother and the son. He saw no pathos in the tale, only victory. Those two would be together on the Yalu; while he, Tetsujo, famed warrior, skilled swordsman, must pine at home and listen to the pulings of weak women!

The glory grew on Yuki. Above the flowers of the tokonoma, above Haganè's head, hung a tattered battle-flag of their own clan. She recognized it now. Her hands trembled. She lifted them toward Haganè.

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"Onda Yuki-ko!" he almost whispered, so deep and tense his voice became. "This year, this day, this very hour, may be the pivot of human history upon this planet! And is not the diamond-point on which that mighty turning rests, the Spirit of Japan?"

"Banzai Nippon! Dai Nippon! Banzai! Banzai!" shouted Tetsujo, and beat his fists on the matting.

Haganè, with a smile that seemed to deprecate yet condone his kerai's vehemence, went on directly to Yuki. "Strange that Western minds—the astute American politician, the journalist, even the cleverest of Europe's statesmen—hardly claim to look forward more than a few years,—five, ten, at best half a century! They want results they shall live to see—after them the deluge! As they have forgotten the very names of their grandfathers, so they ignore their descendants. But we of the East count time in other lengths. We do not bound our horizon with personal aim or the catchword of a day. We owe,—we owe ourselves,—all, to a future that we may not comprehend, but have no right, in our ignorance, to cramp. What we are fighting for at this moment will not be fully realized for two hundred years. Then it will be seen as a great landscape in a valley. Your foreigners are like children that play now in that valley. But every Japanese patriot stands lonely on a mountain,—very lonely, very lonely!"

"Is one alone in a shining company of spirits, Lord?" asked Yuki, a wonderful glow now kindling in her long eyes. "Will that youth of whom you told us be lonely, though he stand singly against a squadron of Cossacks? Where is his mother's soul? O Gods of my country! O my dear Christian God! why was it not given to me to be a man?"

"Do you think that the soul of a woman who shirks would be less cowardly if put into the body of a man? Even your Christians could tell you better."

"Lord! Lord!" cried the girl to him in great stress, "am I indeed of the coward's heart? Is this thing I call fidelity but a shirking?"

"A Japanese has no fidelity but to his Emperor!" thundered Onda.

"Be quiet, Tetsujo! Listen, poor wavering little heart; I will try to make you understand. You cannot be allowed to marry this man, not because we wish to thwart you, but—"

"I said I would not marry him, now,—not now!"

"Then what will you do?" asked Haganè. "All are striving to their utmost. What will be your part? Do you intend to sit sullen and inactive here, at home?"

"The wench shall remain no longer under my roof!" raged Tetsujo.

"She will remain under your roof, good Tetsujo, and be treated with courtesy," corrected the prince.

"Let me go as a nurse! Oh, I could never stay with them! Their harsh eyes would flay me! I feel even now their hatred!"

"Not mine, my baby, my only child!" wailed Iriya. "Think not so of your mother's imperishable love!"

Yuki at last hid her face. The note of anguish in her mother's voice overcame her pathetic defiance.

"My official residence is cold and lonely," remarked Haganè, sipping slowly at some tea. "It sorely needs a mistress well acquainted with foreign etiquette. Foreigners are to be met and conciliated. The Emperor himself, and his shining spouse, would receive one who so served her land, and hear from her own lips impressions of America, and the sentiments of the people there toward us. A woman's intuition is keen, and penetrates farther than a man's weightier judgment,—just as the tendrils of a vine creep into lattices which a tree would only darken. It is in such a capacity, Yuki-ko, that you could do immediate good. My disorganized servants would again be set into grooves of usefulness. Another reason, which must not be spoken openly, as yet,—I may soon be called to the front, and the several residences should not be closed."

"Lord! You would trust with such responsibilities a weak, untutored girl like me?"

"Yes, little one, I would trust you."

"And I would be in all respects—your—wife?" asked Yuki, in a very low tone.

"Yes. Why not? What is the human body but a petal drifting in the wind? If, for a moment, the bright tint or the fleeting perfume please, is it not best to grasp the trivial pleasure? Yet it is to great things that I call you, Onda Yuki. Things of service, of the spirit, heroism perhaps, perhaps self-sacrifice,—for the flesh is stubborn. This shall be your proof of loyalty to your Emperor and to this land!"

"I would gladly die for them!" she cried.

Haganè emptied the few dregs of his teacup into the hot ashes of the hibachi, ignoring the ceremonial little bowl put near for the purpose. "It was in Washington, I believe, that once before you made that foolish remark. What use would death be, especially if you seek it as an escape from conditions that do not please you? Cowardice is a crime of the spirit! I see no chance for you to serve but this."

"But to be your wife, your wife—while yet he—that other—holds my pledge!" murmured the girl, piteously, under her breath. "I prayed for freedom, but he would not send it—!" Gwendolen's telegraphic words, "I would accept H." came to her like a little gust of refreshing wind. She looked again squarely into Haganè's noble face. For the first time Pierre's rose before her, a little weak, a little over-delicate, with incipient lines of self-indulgence.

"My child," said Haganè, almost in a pleading tone, "Japan must not lose you. Put your life into my hands, and let me wield it for our country's need. I believe my motives to be selfless. If indeed your young beauty blurs my vision, then will punishment rightly follow. But I take that hazard. Had I a son, you should be, more fitly, his wife."

"If your father's everlasting curse—" Tetsujo began; but Haganè stopped him.

"We need no curses, Tetsujo! You are showing yourself unworthy of this brave child. Be quiet, I say; and let her own soul speak to her!"

Iriya gasped, and Onda bit his thick lip to the blood. Yuki's lifted face had the pathos of dying music. "Will my soul speak, Lord?" she breathed. The sound of her voice was cold and thin, and touched with a mystic fear.

Almost as if gathered in to answer, from the far distance a muffled chorus of a thousand whispering voices quivered in the air,—drawing nearer, nearer,—until the sound seemed to press upon their very hearts. Now over the garden a soft, pale light began to dawn. It grew to a concourse of a thousand spirit-lamps, crossing, recrossing, flickering, then passing on. Feet moving softly, though by the hundred, went by in ghostly rhythm.

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"Lord! Lord!" panted Yuki, wild-eyed. "What is it? Do you hear also? or is it only I?"

Haganè did not answer at once. He watched the girl's face as one watches a changing chemical. When the sound had grown unmistakably human, though of voices kept low and tense with unusual awe, he said quietly, "You have all heard of the brave young Commander Hirosè, who died rescuing his friend, in the second attempt to block Port Arthur. This is a band of Koishikawa students passing down to the railway station to meet him."

He stopped, wondering how much the girl could endure. The glare of the white lanterns, borne aloft, ploughed a great soundless trench of light through the trees and houses that line the steep slope of Kobinata's hill. Light surged over the thorn and bamboo hedges of Onda's home, brimming the garden with a tender radiance, and revealing hillock, shrub, and tree as in a faint unearthly dream. It threw a deeper glow into the face of Haganè, and over the battle-flag above him.

As for Tetsujo, he listened to the passing of countless feet in sullen gloom. He hated the students that they were young. He envied the death of Hirosè. It would be a clear personal joy to die that way, and have one's name blazoned as a new god. A nobler soul might have cared little for such posthumous recognition; but old Onda's generosity did not reach that height. To him, heaven was a place where spirits swaggered, and bore the two swords of the samurai.

Haganè, looking only at Yuki, continued softly: "A hundred thousand lanterns of the dead will be carried this night, for the brave boy. It is but a fragment of his flesh, that was found with a bit of uniform clinging to it; but the precious relic will have—friends, to bear it to the temple. There his young widow, smiling like a statue of Kwannon, awaits it; and his little son, calmly proud that his father has become a great spirit. No heart in Nippon, to-night—but worships—Hirosè!"

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Haganè's voice had been even enough, and calm; but something in it loosened Yuki's soul from the flesh. Again she stared at him, as if mesmerized. Then suddenly she half rose, leaning toward him, and hurled herself face down on the mats, within reach of his hand.

"All that I have to give is dust! The body is nothing! The gods have released me! Take me, great-hearted man, and use me to my country's need!"

The shifting footsteps all had passed. The faint reflected glamour of the lanterns spread far below along the level stone road by the Arsenal. The garden was plunged again into blackness. Onda stared, as if dazed, after the lights, then brought his eyes to Yuki's prostrate body. His slow wits could not seize, at once, the realization of so ineffable a hope. Iriya muffled her sobs in her sleeve.

Haganè, to reassure Yuki, had put a hand lightly upon her thick hair. No one but the spirits—if they were near—saw a dull red tide of passion surge up to his broad face, swelling his neck into purple veins, and twitching at the sinews of the powerful hands. But his voice, when he answered, was that of a high-priest. "In our Emperor's name, my child, I accept the gift. May the gods assist me to use it worthily!"

Tetsujo, half crawling, reached the tea-tray, and drained a stale cup to the dregs. Yuki lay so still that Iriya took fond alarm. The joy and triumph faded from her face. She met Haganè's look with a slight appealing gesture toward her child. Haganè nodded. She crept to Yuki, tugging at her sleeve, and trying to push her up from the floor. Haganè leaned forward, and picked the girl up like a toy. She put out a faltering hand and touched her mother.

"Come, come, my treasure!" whispered Iriya. "Let us go together to your little room, where quiet will best restore you!"

"One moment, dame!" said Haganè. "I must speak with Tetsujo, in your presence." The old kerai was on his knees, bowing, his exultation only exaggerating his humility.

From the impersonal ring of Haganè's orders, he might have been outlining a Manchurian campaign. "Let there be no delay! Since at any hour I may be ordered to the front, I wish the ceremony over, that I may instruct Yuki in certain official duties before I leave. And remember, this is no time for expenditure or display."

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"Your will is mine, Augustness."

"This is Friday. Next Wednesday, then, at my Tabata villa! All shall be in readiness. Is this as you wish, Yuki-ko?"

"Your will is mine, Lord," whispered Yuki, echoing unconsciously her father's words.

"The child trembles. May I not conduct her to her chamber?" asked Iriya of the prince.

"Yes, dame," replied he, kindly. "And, brave little one, farewell! I am overcharged with duties, and may not see you again till Wednesday, at noon. One instant!" The two women paused, Iriya facing him expectantly, Yuki with head hung low. "I want to say, here, in the presence of my too-zealous Tetsujo, that Yuki is to be treated, from this moment, with the respect and dignity that becomes a Princess Haganè. There is to be no espionage; no opposition; no suggestion of restraint of any kind! My entire confidence is with my future wife. Do you understand that, Onda Tetsujo?"

"Yes, Lord," growled Tetsujo, crimson with mortification; but he did not forget to bow.

In her own room Yuki stood staring, dazed, ignoring her mother's frequent suggestion to be seated. "No! Let me breathe! Let me learn to breathe again!" muttered she at last, and caught her mother's arm as she stepped to the tiny veranda. From the guest-room beyond, where the two men talked, a soft light gleamed, throwing the pebbled paths of the garden into little Milky Ways of light. The shrubs lay round and dark, like a flock of little clouds. Beyond all rose the tall black hedge of bamboo and of thorn.

"My child," said the mother, "you have brought to us great happiness and pride. Surely reward will come to you, even in this incarnation. I will pray ceaselessly to Kwannon in your behalf."

Yuki leaned closer to her mother. The cool wet smell of the garden already stole away some of the hot bewilderment from her brain. The angry waves of indecision, girlish longing, and patriotism, which had raged so furiously together, now began to recede, leaving bare at last a small white strip of thought. She was safe now, pledged, not to personal joy, but to heroic service. The greatest of all men was to be her teacher, her helper, her—husband! Well, what of it? Nothing was too great a sacrifice for Nippon. And if Pierre would only not misjudge too cruelly! Even in this first vicarious shudder of Pierre's grief, she could not feel that he would suffer long. His agony might at first be intense and uncontrolled, but, through its very exaggeration, would the more swiftly pass. For her sake, now, he must leave Japan. This was the last boon that love should ask of him.

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From the street, from the other side of that inky bamboo wall, came the low notes of a foreign song,—a strain from Carmen. The girl shivered once, and was still.

"Oh, what is it?" cried Iriya, herself on edge, and looking about in terror.

Again came the song, soft and clear. The singer stood, evidently, just beyond the bamboos. Yuki's lips writhed together. Her fingers tore and twitched, one hand in the other.

"Yuki! My Yuki!" came a voice. "Is it too late?"

Suddenly wrenching herself from Iriya's arms, the girl sprang down the two stone steps and plunged into the shadows of the garden. As one fiend-driven, she sped over paths, shrubs, rocks, and prim garden-stakes, until, at the hedge, she hurled herself upon it, beating at it with frantic hands, and sobbing.

"Oh, go! Go, beloved! Never again come here! Never sing that song again, or—I cannot live at all! I have promised—promised—a new pledge—stronger than the other! It's of my free will I give myself to him! Go home to your native land! Go! go!"

"What sound is that? What do I hear?" cried Tetsujo, from the guest-room balcony.

"It is our Yuki, walking in the garden," came Iriya's placid voice. "Disturb not your honorable spirit, Master! I am with the child."

Tetsujo returned, to be met by a chiding, half-contemptuous remark from his deity. A moment later, Iriya's ashen face was in the kitchen. "Suzumè! Maru! For the love of Kwannon, come quickly! Miss Yuki is in a dead faint, against the thorn hedge! Her hands are bleeding!—Make no noise! The master and Prince Haganè must not know!"

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SPRING storms in Tokio, as in other capitals, sweep clean a wide pathway of days for sunshine and the coming flowers. On the morning after that great tempest which so nearly crushed Yuki against the pond-stones of the garden, scarcely could a shadow be found, so eager was the sun to atone for past misdeeds of her naughty younger brother, the wind. Small crumpled leaves began to straighten. Boughs, mud-soldered to muddy earth, drew slowly upward. The old world stirred like a conscious thing.

Pedestrians sent smiling, answering looks of brightness to the sky, as they hurried along to daily work. All over the great city, housewives were busy hanging out bed-clothing, and standing the removable wadded straw mats (tatami) slanting-wise against veranda posts, to get the full strength of the sun.

In that vast, merry hive there was one soul, at least, that neither saw the sunshine nor thrilled to the glory of a re-created earth. Pierre Le Beau had been sitting for many moments before an untasted breakfast, his body slouched forward under the table, his eyes fixed vacantly on a square of light slowly pushing its way through an opened window into the room. Count Ronsard, already in his easy-chair, with letters, papers, cigarettes, and an extra cup of coffee on a low stand beside him, lifted, just before opening each fresh missive, a look partly amused, partly irritated upon his sullen compatriot.

Tsuna, the butler, cautiously approached, and substituted a fresh cup of coffee for the forgotten cold one. Pierre caught at the edge of the saucer. "Merci, Tsuna," he said with a smile which all his abstraction could not keep from being sweet, "but take all else away. I want nothing—or, at least, I have eaten sufficiently."

"Yes, Tsuna," supplemented the minister. "Clear the table, and admit no guests. If a 'chit' comes, bring it in yourself."

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Pierre would have sunk back into his lethargy, but the count, having by this time finished his mail, deliberately set himself to learn the secret of this new dejection.

"What have we here, young lover?" he cried gayly. "Why do you affront the fair morning with your sighs? La, la, I know the symptoms,—the rueful mouth, set eyes, loathed viands,—all speak the distemper of love. Come, now, unburden thyself, mon fils. I have a leisure hour. I see in thee need for brisk philosophy."

Pierre shook himself free with difficulty from his haunting visions,—Tetsujo's black face and burning eyes; a windswept hedge, bowing and straining in storm until at the next gust of tempest it must lie flat, like the cover of a book, showing clear her home; the white, strained, watching face; and, later, in a stiller, denser blackness, faint chinks through upright hedge-stems of bamboo falling from a broadly lighted house; his own last desperate song of Carmen; the terrible answering cry; the sound of feet on gravel; the sound of tender hands beating on thorn; a mother's sob; and then,—devouring silence. How had the sun such callousness that it could shine to-day after such a blackness?

Ronsard watched him until he turned slow, haggard, miserable eyes. Then the count lowered his own. At this critical point Pierre need not perceive the glimmer of pleased hope. "I am not unacquainted with sorrow,—and of this sort, Pierre," he murmured gently. His voice might have poured from an alabaster jar. Pierre felt the soothing, and still he hesitated to reveal this deepest wound. In their one previous discussion Ronsard's words had been drops of acid. The boy shuddered anew at the remembered sting.

And yet he must speak to some one. This anguish could not be borne alone. Later on, Mrs. Todd would purr platitudes above him. He did not wish them yet. Now, in his bewilderment, he needed the advice of a man,—a man's supplementary thought. "I should be glad to speak," he burst out impulsively, "only, dear sir, if you love me, give not that tonic of your worldliness at full strength. I am hurt with life almost to the point of flinging it aside!"

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Ronsard kept himself from shrugging. "Tut, tut," he said humorously. "Had perplexed lovers the modicum of existences attributed to that interesting animal, the cat, then might they listen to all these small gusty impulses to suicide. And, by the way, where is my Zulika, my soft, blue-tinted amorette? Fast in the sun, I'll wager. Ah, Zulika, core of my heart, come, warm me, while I hear of love!"

At his words the great blue Persian who was sleeping near the fire in a spot further cheered by the full light of the morning sun, stirred drowsily, opened a reluctant eye, and closed it. She moved again, with a shrug not unlike her master, gained her feet, stretched her back upward, opened a mouth lined with pink coral, and, with a last reluctant gaze toward the warm spot she was quitting, approached her smiling master. He drew her into the chair by his side, touched her whiskered lips with a finger first dipped into sweetened coffee, shook himself and her into smoother lines of

placidity, and turning again directly to Pierre, said, "Now, my son, thy father confessor is at peace. Speak what you will."

The episode of the cat did not please Le Beau. Indeed, he loathed all cats, but this one in particular, in spite of its beauty.

"Your Excellency," he began in an uncertain tone, "I find the thing difficult, perhaps unnecessary to impart. It has become already beyond the power of any one in office to advise."

Ronsard showed interest. He tucked the cat farther out of sight, and said, "If you cannot tell, permit me to hazard a guess. Already Mamselle Onda has received important propositions?"

Pierre nodded. He rose to his feet and began a restless walking. "You are far-seeing, your Excellency," he cried bitterly. "It is marriage offered from the worn voluptuary of your suggestion, —from Prince Sanètomo Haganè!"

"Haganè!" echoed the other in a low, tense voice. "Though I said that name, Pierre, I scarcely thought it. He is no voluptuary—Mon Dieu!—but a cone of granite! As a parti for that girl, the mere daughter of a rusty samurai, the offer is brilliant, unprecedented! Of course the Onda family—"

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He paused in a sustained note of interrogation.

"As you remark—her family!" sneered the other. "They will coerce her to the point of torture."

Ronsard drew his fat lids closer about the brightening eyes. "How long has this been known to you?"

"Since yesterday morning. I receive messages from my betrothed through Miss Todd."

"Your betrothed is broken-hearted, of course, at the thought of severance from you?"

"My betrothed assures me of her *faith*," said Pierre, with a defiant glance.

"Ah, she will try it! Poor little devil!"

"Monsieur, do not make me repent already." Pierre was angrily beginning, when Tsuna's voice at the door announced, "A letter for M. Le Beau."

Ronsard answered. "Bring it in. Shut the door. Where is the chit-book?"

"No chit-book or messenger came, your Excellency. It was brought in person by Sir Onda Tetsujo."

"Ah! Does he wait?"

"No, your Excellency. He turned very quickly. There is no answer."

"Give it into the hands of Monsieur Le Beau and depart."

"Brought by Onda, in person. It will throw light," murmured Ronsard.

Pierre was fumbling and fidgeting at the top of the long, thin Japanese envelope. In an excess of childish impatience he tore it with his teeth. The cat lifted its head at the noise, but was pressed down instantly by the firm hand of its master. It sneezed indignantly, and went to sleep.

Pierre, after two flashing readings, burst into a harsh laugh, threw the missive toward Ronsard, and then hurrying to a window, leaned his forehead to the cold glass.

The note was in English, written on very thin Japanese rice-paper, six inches wide and perhaps a yard in length. A Japanese writing brush had evidently been used, for in the slow, painful composition the writer had lingered, sometimes for the following word or letter, and where the brush rested a small round blot had spread. It was dated that morning. It contained but one long sentence, built up of participial and relative clauses, as in all Japanese construction.

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"MR. PIERRE LE BEAU,—My daughter Onda Yuki-ko having last night become by her own will no force the affianced [affianced held three blots] wife of Prince Sanètomo Haganè Minister of War Daimyo of Konda for great honor to her family and service to her native land we respectfully desire you your honorable body from our neighborhood remove entirely or trouble will become,

Ronsard held it out. "Daudet might have done better in phrasing, but even he could have made the meaning no plainer."

Pierre at the window gave a sound of derision, and was still.

The count sipped daintily at his coffee, and offered some to the cat, who, mindful of recent indignity, turned her head. Lifting the diaphanous screed, he read it once more carefully, studying, it would seem, each separate word.

Pierre raised one delicate hand and tapped on the window-frame the rhythm of an air from Carmen. Still Ronsard gave no sign.

"Well, your Excellency, is this all you can remark?" he cried, whirling about as the strain threatened to become unbearable. "Has the father confessor nothing but the husks of literary comparison to offer?"

"Softly, my son. Another written communication will, in a moment, be with you. This time it will be a chit, a legitimate chit, in a bright new leather book."

"You are pleased to be enigmatic."

"Non,—you flatter. There should be no enigmas to a diplomat. This correspondent,—" here he waved the sheet airily,—"has been at work on his creation since the time of dawn. There are full three hours between his first ink and his last. Miss Onda, on the contrary, writes with ease and skill. Her letter of announcement went to Miss Todd. It will soon come to you."

"How, in God's name, do you think such things?" cried Pierre, in reluctant admiration.

"I seldom think them. They are obliging enough to come to me," said Ronsard, with a deprecating gesture, and sank back to an attitude of waiting.

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Pierre stared on, half fascinated. There was something sphinx-like about the man,—a gelatinous sphinx, not quite congealed into certainty. Ronsard did not resent the stare. He met it once or twice, smiling, with slight twinkles, or, to be more accurate, slight blinks, of his small pale eyes. He looked now as if he might soon purr, like the cat.

"Ah," he murmured at length, with a slight upward gesture of one hand. "The servant-bell again. Your chit, Monsieur. A hundred francs upon it."

"Done," said Pierre. He too listened eagerly.

As they wait, in listening silence, the reader may as well be initiated into the mysteries of the "chit."

In all foreign communities of the Far East, but particularly in those where English influence prevails, three hybrid words become part of the daily vocabulary. The first is "tiffin," the second "amah," the third and most important, "chit."

Doubtless there are persons who know the origin of the last. I do not. Literally, it means a written message sent by a native runner. The foreign shops in the Far East abound in chit-books, made, most of them, in Manchester. They can be found in paper, cloth, or leather bindings. The "élite" tend toward Russia leather with a crest or monogram stamped in gold. Chit-books are to social life what check-books are to fiscal. The letter, note, or present comes accompanied by the inevitable "chit-book." The recipient is supposed to sign his name, and the hour, as in a telegram. This duty, in point of fact, is very soon relegated to the head butler, or the ingratiating "amah," a laxity which has produced more than one lawsuit and countless domestic scandals.

Tsuna, in due time, appeared with a large black leather book, aggressively and odorously new, a gold spread-eagle on the back. The envelope it accompanied was large and blue. It bore Pierre's name in the clear handwriting of Miss Todd.

The count signed the book and whispered Tsuna to remain just outside the door.

Before opening the new missive, Pierre threw himself into a chair, his face turned partly away from Ronsard. The latter picked up a rustling Paris newspaper, and over its quivering upper edge watched the smooth cheek of Pierre, his left ear, and the strip of pink neck showing over an immaculate collar.

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Out of the folds of the blue letter fell a smaller one of white. This was addressed to Gwendolen. At sight of it the young man's heart gave a sick throb. He hid this in his coat, until the other should have been read.

"I send you this note of Yuki's in the original, because I want you to see more in the changed handwriting than in the formal words. I am not going to insult you by trying to say anything now, except that I am sorry. I sympathize with your trouble more deeply than you will, perhaps, believe. Come to me when you will. I shall say nothing but kind things. It is a wide gulf of race and of inherited ideals between you and Yuki. No love could hold the arch of a bridge quite so wide. But remember her poor little aching heart! There! I am, as usual, doing just what I vowed I wouldn't do. Oh, Pierre, I am sorry for you,—sorry, sorry! The world doesn't seem a very bright place, this morning, does it? I have been scolding a yama-buki bush that insists upon opening in our garden; but the flowers just laugh in my face. It is an unsympathetic universe! Your friend,

"GWENDOLEN."

Pierre held Yuki's letter long before reading it. A breath of her subtle personality must have clung to the scrap, for he inhaled from it a new bitterness, a new anguish. With a groan as of physical suffering he threw himself forward, put elbows on his knees, and deliberately forced himself to read, in rigid silence, the following note:

"MY DEAR GWENDOLEN, who has been my only sister,—Your telegram having arrived, and Prince Haganè having come to me in person to speak of my duties and the opportunity he could give me at once in this time of trouble and war, I have myself willingly consented to be his wife. I am forced by nobody. You do not think badly of me for this, but some other will think very badly. Oh, please to speak kind and soothing things to that other. His grief is my aching always sorrow. I care not at all for my own, but I care very much for his. He will think me wicked and unfaithful to have broke so solemn pledge, but at the time of breaking I did not seem to myself wicked. We do not know how things sometimes have happened. But this has now happened to me. Ask him to forgive me. The marriage is to be held very soon; in fact, on Wednesday of the coming week. According to Japanese custom I must now be very secluded until that ceremony, not even seeing my sister, which is you. I believe Prince Haganè is to take me after to Kamakura. I do not care where he take me. Oh, Gwendolen, love your Yuki and pray for her to be strong. Always before I have been weak at a crisis. I must not now ever be weak. If pity can be held toward me in Pierre's heart, beseech him to leave Nippon. Your strangely feeling but loving,

"YUKI."

He let the sheet flutter sidewise to the floor, his eyes absently following. When it was quite still, the address being uppermost, he leaned nearer. "Miss Gwendolen Todd, American Legation, Azabu, Tokio," he read, his lips moving as he formed the words. "Miss Gwendolen Todd," he began, directly, reading again and again. A hand fell gently on his shoulder. "Is there to be an answer, Pierre?"

Pierre shook his head.

"You will retain the enclosed letter?"

Pierre nodded.

The count went tip-toeing to the door, and returned to Tsuna the pretentious chit-book. Pierre was apparently fixed in an attitude of melancholy.

"Can these letters have told you anything worse?" questioned the gentle voice.

"Yes," said Pierre, dully. "It is worse. She is to be married next Wednesday,—and with her own consent. She wishes it. Next Wednesday."

Ronsard did not answer. He was trying to look sad.

"Wednesday, I tell you," repeated Pierre, now lifting bloodshot eyes. "Next Wednesday! Five days! This is Friday, is it not? Yes." He stopped now to count the days on shaking fingers. "Five more days and she will be his wife. That woman I love,—that pure flower to whom even my honorable devotion seemed desecration! She will lie in that old man's arms,—she will be his wife! God! *God!* Man!" he screamed, striking the table with one frantic fist, and then rising to hurl himself in torment about the room, "don't stand there screwing into my brain with your fishy eyes! Have you ever known love—do you understand jealousy—have you heard of—hell?"

"At your age I knew all three," said Ronsard, calmly. "I went through all, and I live, I eat, I

intrigue, I am happy. So shall it be with you, madman!"

Pierre threw back his head in a rude clamor, meant for laughter. He was passing near Ronsard at the instant. The elder man reached out and caught his wrist. "Now, Pierre Le Beau, stand still and hear what I have to say!"

At the tone of command, rather than the physical detention, Pierre stood still, wondering.

"This is the best thing that could possibly happen to you. Yes, be quiet. You shall listen. I've endured sufficient childish railing for one day! It is infinitely the best thing for you—for your mother—for me—for France! I have a diplomatic secret to whisper. That old man Haganè—for once in his life a fool—may be sent at any moment to review the campaign in Manchuria. He and his generals may be great, but Kuropatkin is greater. Do you know what that may mean to you? Ah, I thought so; at the hope of some personal reward you flicker back to sanity. What are the honor and glory of France to such effete sensualists as you? Bah,—it sickens me! And yet, since some day you may become men, you must be dealt with. Haganè, in his supreme self-confidence, urged on, doubtless, by Onda, dares marry this young girl, though he knows her to be in love with you! Will you destroy her love, fool, by smothering it in her contempt? Haganè goes to Manchuria. His young wife mourns,—hélas! I see her weeping in his absence. There are secrets spoken in the nuptial chamber,—documents left in charge of the pretty chatelaine. Pierre, Pierre, celestial revenge hangs like ripe fruit to your hand, let her marry Haganè,—let her love you! Do not revile or scorn her. Wait—wait!"

His eyes, twinkling like those of a snake, crawled up Pierre's face to his shrinking gaze. His fat hand still clutched with a grasp that burned. Pierre tried to draw away. Again the repulsion, the fascination in this man battled for his reason. "Wait!" whispered Ronsard once again, and turned.

Pierre felt himself released. He stood motionless. His wrist stung as if a sea nettle had lashed it. He looked helplessly around as though searching for something he could not recall. His eyes fell on Yuki's letter. He staggered toward it, snatched it from the floor, pressed it against parched lips, and then, falling on his knees beside the chair, burst into a passion of grief.

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"Come," whispered Ronsard to the cat. "Come, chérie. We will leave poor Pierre awhile. It is more delicate, n'est-ce pas?"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

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It was inevitable that a lady of Mrs. Todd's social and confidential temperament should already have acquired an inseparable friend. Mrs. Todd had a perpetual thirst for what she called "sympathetic comprehension," by which she meant, in reality, abject flattery. Her husband sometimes treated her deepest emotions with levity. Gwendolen often turned to her complaints a bright indifference more irritating than the husband's soothing smile.

The present incumbent was a Mrs. Stunt, resident in Tsukiji, Tokio, wife of an American merchant who had lived in Japan for nearly twenty years. Naturally, Mrs. Stunt knew everything. She was a little woman, with white hair brushed high from a smooth, pink forehead. Her face was round and youthful. Although not an Englishwoman she exuded odors of pink soap. Her eyes were blue, bright, and hard as glass. Her reputation was that of a model wife and mother, a pattern housekeeper, and an exemplary member of the church. People hastened to speak well of her; they raised loud voices in her praise, yet every one knew that Mrs. Stunt, when mounted upon the perfectly kept bicycle she affected, was a wheeled and leaking reservoir of scandal.

To the new-comer, or the casual observer, she appeared the very incarnation of trustful candor, speaking of her domestic affairs and those of her neighbors with a simplicity and directness that startled while they convinced. Mrs. Stunt, however, had her secrets. One of these, unshared even by the conjugal ear of timid Mr. Stunt, was her connection,—virtually that of foreign editor,—with a Tokio newspaper, called, of course in Japanese terms, "The Hawk's Eye." In addition to voluminous printed sheets of hurrying ideographs this journal dispensed each day a page of excellent English, and for weekly supplement issued a pamphlet entirely in the borrowed tongue. Mrs. Stunt was never seen to enter the shabby gates of the "Hawk's Eye" building. She turned her face away even in passing the place. She often denounced newspaper women, and, more than once in the company of a friend who tingled or wept under the lash of a personal item, joined in indignation against the cowardly villain, and wondered aloud, "Who on earth that man could be!"

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The very brief notice of Lord Haganè's coming marriage, tucked away in important Japanese

papers like a small spark in a chimney, might have been altogether overlooked, for news of war came in daily, and political excerpts from European papers took much space. But "The Hawk's Eye" found that smouldering spark, the mysterious breath of the foreign editor blew it into new heat, piling tinder of comment high about it, fanned it with the wind of gentle persistency, and lo, the social world of Tokio leaped into flames!

Long since, the demure little lady,—having in mind spring clothes for four lanky daughters,—had extracted from her new intimate, saleable particulars concerning Pierre's betrothal, Onda's persecution, and now Yuki's forced acceptance of Prince Haganè. "Nonsense, my dear," had Mrs. Stunt retorted to this concluding bit of romanticism. "Japanese girls don't give a fig who they marry! For a catch like old Haganè your Yuki would have thrown over a dozen spry young Frenchmen, blue eyes and all."

From the first instant of meeting Mrs. Stunt and Gwendolen had been inimical. To herself Gwendolen had called the little lady a "bargain-counter snob." In return Mrs. Stunt, keenly aware of the impression she had produced and resentful of it as people usually are of truth, began assorting items for the coming Saturday "Hawk's Eye." Gwendolen's affair with Dodge, their quarrel, his immediate transfer of outward devotion to the shrine of Carmen Gil y Niestra, and Gwendolen's irritability ever since the disagreement, were as bill-boards to the mental gaze of Mrs. Stunt. Kindly injudicious Mrs. Todd did not betray her daughter. There was no need for it. When she wept above a "Hawk's Eye" paragraph that called her idol a "raw Western heiress, who naturally cultivated her acquaintance with ploughs and harrows," it was the part of Mrs. Stunt to comfort her. That small lady, sitting near some more generous and less judicious female friend, her eyes drooping tenderly over a "pinfore for Nan," or a knitted sock for "Baby Tom," absorbed scandal as a sponge absorbs warm water.

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Yet let us be just. Too much may have been ascribed to Mrs. Stunt. Perhaps even without her thrifty and unfriendly zeal the marriage of so great a lord as Haganè must inevitably have filled the papers and overflowed in irresponsible wide tides of talk. Yet scarcely without her would Pierre's hinted personality have been so openly involved, his parentage stated, and his future course of action philosophized about. The story in its parent "Hawk's Eye" was given with a wealth of imaginative detail possible only to the born "society reporter." In substance it was as follows: Miss Onda had come from America with the Todds. With their approbation she had been openly betrothed, in Washington, to a young Frenchman of pleasing appearance and high connections. (Here a secret marriage, twisted about an interrogation mark, found place.) When asked for his blessing the Japanese father, hitherto unsuspecting of French designs, fell into a fit, out of which three eminent physicians were required to haul him. Yuki was forbidden to hold communication with her lover. The next step was to adorn her in sacrificial and becoming robes and offer her in marriage,—or anything else,—to a certain powerful nobleman, whose third wife,—or was it really his sixth?—had recently, by a fortuitous occurrence, been "returned." Touched by the sorrow of his faithful knight, and influenced perhaps by the lackadaisical beauty of the girl, the nobleman agreed to take her on trial, even going through the form of a legal marriage, that the aspirations of the French lover might be the more certainly destroyed. Pierre, who read and brooded morbidly on these things, was neither soothed nor ennobled thereby. But what of it? Mrs. Stunt's four lanky daughters each had a new spring dress with hats to match!

Japanese of the better class, brushing aside like gnats these stinging personalities, approved openly of the father's conduct and of Yuki's swift acquiescence. It was the only thing conceivable. Their only blame for Yuki was that she had listened to a foreigner without first obtaining her father's approbation, an encouragement that might now urge him to be troublesome. They felt indignant that the rejected one should continue to repine for what a Japanese prince had deigned to accept. Old samurai blood grew warm. The daughter of Onda Tetsujo marry a Frenchman with a Russian mother! The very gods held their Asiatic noses.

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English and American men took, for the most part, the Japanese view. Many Europeans, on the contrary, said openly that they hoped Le Beau would yet "get even" with old Haganè for stealing his sweetheart. With few exceptions, indeed, all women sympathized with Pierre. Pierre was the beau ideal of a despairing lover. His sensitive, beautiful face took on with ease the lines of sleepless grief. His blue eyes, at a moment's warning, could darken from melancholy to tragic anguish. He could sigh in such a manner that his quivering listeners, should Donne happen to be familiar, might have quoted, "When thou so sighest thou sighest not wind, thou sighest my soul away." Pierre's sorrow was genuine enough, but he liked witnesses to his grief. Needless to say that Mrs. Todd and her satellite Stunt were among Pierre's most vociferous supporters. Gwendolen fought many a battle for her school-friend, but the bitterest were pitched under her own roof.

"Now, my very dear Miss Todd," expostulated the "Hawk's Eye," "do you not consider at all the misery of Monsheer Le Beau? Miss Onda is to be a princess, happy, courted, with a position in the highest circles. Life can offer her no more. On the other hand look at the jilted lover. I never saw a face that expressed such patient grief. When he turns to me those slow, beautiful blue eyes I'll declare I feel as if I'd like to kill that girl for making him suffer."

"Pooh!" said Gwendolen, rudely; "and when he slowly turns them round to me I want to open my parasol and say 'Shoo!' thinking it a cow. I like Pierre well enough. A good deal better than you, I think, if the truth were known, but he is among men what Chopin is among musicians. He enjoys

his sufferings and makes music out of them. Of course you wouldn't understand that." Rudely she wheeled and walked away, Mrs. Stunt following with venomous eyes.

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Gwendolen scarcely recognized herself during these days of trial. She, the joyous one, the sun-maid, now wished to quarrel with the whole world. Of course Dodge's defection, and the ridiculous paragraphs appearing in "The Hawk's Eye," had nothing to do with her nervous condition. The causes were obvious,—Yuki's hurried marriage and Pierre's mischievous pose of despair.

Meanwhile the absurdities of gossip increased. Once, stung beyond endurance, the girl threw herself into her father's arms. "Dad, how shall I endure these spreading slanders about my friend? Is there nothing we can do,—nobody to shoot, or challenge, or anything like that?"

"Go fire at those sparrows on the lawn."

"Don't joke. I can't stand it. Oh, father, you don't know what awful things they whisper. They stop when I come near, saying it is because 'I'm not yet married.' Now just think of the pitchy subtlety of that. Why should people talk so?"

Todd held her close. "My little girl," he began, "wherever lonely, sour-hearted women—or men—congregate, there will the cancer-growth of scandal spread. They are the disseminators of half our domestic tragedies. It is a disease like other foul things,—cancer itself, leprosy, diphtheria,—though not so fatal, for the thing they tackle is a man's soul and character, immortal essences, never to be truly tarnished but from within. As I figure it out, scandal is a good deal like fungus. It may be planted anywhere, but it sticks and thrives only where it finds a rotten spot."

"Oh, you help me, dad,—you do help me. Of course these rumors cannot hurt the white heart of my darling,—but she must not hear them. One question more, daddy—"

Todd stopped her. "It is mail-morning, and that means a busy one. You've had a sermon long enough for one day. Come to think of it, why does Dodge get out of the way when you appear? What have you been doing to my secretary?"

Gwendolen gave a small gasp and vanished. Todd looked after her. "I thought that would send her flying." He turned to his desk. His face was very tender. "Poor little one," he murmured, "she's up against her first experiences all in a bunch. God help her! Things hurt worse when we are young. But all will come right, with His help. I know my child was made for happiness. She has the hall-mark of it under her skin. But Yuki—poor little Yuki—!" He shook his head, seated himself, and soon became lost in the voluminous foreign mail.

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Yuki, pale, white, and docile, moved like a determined ghost through vistas of gray hours. In that quiet household came no hint of scandal, and for Yuki's part, had she heard, she would not have greatly cared. The first brief chapter of her life was gone, shut down, like a book, and in its pages was the living flower of her love. She did not suffer now. She felt a dull gladness that she was inevitably committed to her duty. Temptation and further striving had vanished from her days. Except for the sorrow of that dear one there would be no regret. What anguish came personally, through remorse for her broken faith, she would be glad to bear. She had, through faithlessness, won the level of a higher faith. Let her wounds gape and her heart's blood fall like rain! She wished to feel more sorrow than she felt, but nothing came very clearly in these days of preparation. More than once she thought, with a tiny pang of apprehension, "If I have lost the power to feel pain, then are sacrifice and duty alike robbed of their essential oil."

Now, in place of averted faces and blank eyes, those of the Onda household fawned about her. Onda made grim overtures. The giggling of Maru San ceased only with her slumber—that, too, was audible—while old Suzumè, darting about the rooms like a gray ferret, babbled out the many titles that her nursling soon would wear, and made coarse jests and prophecies about the future.

Iriya alone moved in the silence of her daughter's spirit. The two women grew very close, though no spoken word was used to show it.

Wednesday, the marriage day, arrived softly. Yuki neither dreaded nor welcomed it. She had not seen Prince Haganè since the night he took her answer. Quite a number of her parents' relatives, some from distant provinces, came in and gathered in the house to bid the bride farewell, to throw, laughingly, the dried peas after her, to sweep the abandoned dwelling to its farthest corner, and light a bonfire at the gate when she passed through.

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Yuki, in her white bridal robes and concealing veil of white silk, thin in texture but stiffened in

a way that brought it into angular folds about her shoulders, stepped alone into a new jinrikisha. Tetsujo and Iriya, in a double vehicle, followed. These three alone went to Tabata, where they met a corresponding party of the same small number, Prince Haganè, his nearest male relative, the old Duke Shirota, and young Princess Sada-ko, the old duke's granddaughter.

Haganè was unmistakably preoccupied. His thoughts did not attach themselves with ease to things or persons. He had an air of relief when the short ceremony came to an end. Yuki now changed her white robe for a dark-hued silk, superb in texture, the gift, according to Japanese etiquette, of her husband. A hairdresser was in readiness to change forever the wide loops of a girl's coiffure into the more elaborate structure of a young matron. The Princess Sada-ko fluttered near, talking prettily and congratulating herself on the acquisition of a new relative. Yuki scarcely heard her. She felt almost nothing. As the last touch came, the thrusting-in of a great tortoise-shell pin, she shuddered very slightly, thinking of that ivory one broken with Pierre Le Beau on the moonlit prow of a ship.

With a great clattering and stamping the Haganè coach of ceremony drew up to the entrance-door. Magnificent gray horses in new trappings snorted impatience to be off. Haganè stepped in without a word to Yuki, who, at a nudge from the little princess, meekly followed. The domestic retinue fell on its knees in the doorway and along the pebbled drive. Haganè gave the order, "Shimbashi," waved a hand abstractedly, and the equipage dashed away.

The short railway journey was made practically in silence. Haganè said once, as if by way of explanation, "Important and somewhat alarming news has come by secret wire to-day. It is necessary for me to ponder over it."

"Honorably do not concern your august mind with a person so insignificant," said Yuki. Far from resenting his silence, the girl was thankful to be left to herself. She watched the scenes outside with eyes at first vague and unintelligent, but which soon gained a soft, increasing brightness. Earth was waking from its long sleep. Yuki felt what many of her own and other races have in such crises felt,—a gratitude to nature that human grief is given no part in it. The grass still is busy, small waxen blossoms lift the leaves of a fallen year, no matter what men may suffer. In moments of keen personal bereavement, when the soul is dazed and blinded by the wonder of its agony, a certain resentment comes. Like the Ayrshire poet we cry, "How can ye be so fresh and fair?" But such grief was not yet Yuki's. Her emotion still partook more of bewilderment than loss. Pierre was not dead. He might yet be happy, happier than with her. This thought brought no personal sting. Hers was not a nature for jealousy.

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Because of her marriage, through this stern, grave man who sat beside her, she was to be given her opportunity for loyal service. Mistrust of self, apprehensions that mocked and taunted her, a certain shrinking from responsibilities so thickly heaped, rushed inevitably to her mind. On the other hand she had for guidance his great spirit of untarnished patriotism; she had vindicated to her parents all filial obligation, and springtime peeped at her from among the hills.

She saw that a thousand nameless, beloved little flowers traced with bright enamelling the leaden dykes of fields. Seedling rice brimmed with gold-green, small, separate pools. Straw-shod farmers trampled, one by one, the rotting stubs of last year's crop into the slime of fields to be new-planted. On low-thatched huts the old leaves of the roof-lilies fed a springing growth. Everywhere decay passed visibly into re-birth. So, thought little Yuki, "The very sorrow I have endured shall feed my new resolves."

At the small Kamakura station jinrikishas were awaiting them, accompanied by two persons, an old man and a comely woman of the peasant class, whom Yuki rightly took for family servants. They prostrated themselves upon the cement floor in an excess of demonstration, whispering old-fashioned phrases of congratulation and of welcome. Haganè came back for an instant to things around him.

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"These are my faithful servants, Bunshichi and his daughter. I do not now recall her name," said he to Yuki, with his kind smile. "They form our entire domestic retinue at Kamakura, for it is here that I come only when in need of true repose and relaxation."

"Hai! hai! Danna-San," cried the servants in polite corroboration, and began a new series of deep bows.

"Hai!" murmured Yuki, as if in echo of their subservience. The woman, for an instant, met her young mistress's eyes. There was something in the look of wonder, of great kindness, and then,—or so it seemed to Yuki,—of compassion.

Haganè entered his kuruma and started off. Yuki and the two servants followed. And so, on this fair March day, the little Princess Haganè approached the first of her many new homes.



THE Haganè villa at Kamakura possessed its own green niche cut deep into encroaching hills, its own curved scimitar of gray sea-beach, its individual rocks, its blue ocean, and bluer sky. A fence of dead bamboo branches, set up on end like fagots, barred out spying curiosity. The house faced directly to the sand. On the three remaining sides the hill-slopes made retreating walls. Upon them grew spindling, wind-tossed pines and loops of wild white clematis and of rose.

Through the big, fragrant rooms of the villa all day the sea-winds passed, stirring the few kakemono, and making flowers in bronze vases nod like those more securely rooted on the hills. No attempt had been made at an ornamental garden, except for a few great, gray stones spread with a lichen sparkling from its diet of salty dew, three curious small pines, and spaces of white sand. The placing of these trees and stones hinted of more organic beauty than all the convolutions of the average Occidental millionaire's park. It is only fair to add that the millionaire would not agree to this.

The first two hours after arrival were devoted by Prince Haganè to the writing of telegrams and letters. These were sent off by messengers as soon as finished. The statesman strode out alone to the shore and walked there, his head bent in meditation, until telegraphic answers began to arrive. These apparently bore reassuring news. He sought out Yuki, his sleeves quite stiff with crumpled missives, and told her that already he had arranged his affairs so that he could have two days to belong to himself alone. "Unless some unforeseen matter of gravest importance should transpire," he added, "I shall not be disturbed. I shall give orders to Bunshichi to bring me no letters that do not bear the Imperial seal. And now, my child," here he seated himself near her, "I may be permitted to recall the fact that I have a wife."

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For two days Yuki was seldom out of his sight. The shrinking, delicate, humble, exquisite thing, now so entirely his own, fed his stern eyes and heart with ever-deepening satisfaction. Her pallor, her reticence, even the strained smile which she sometimes turned to meet his words, were all as best he liked to have them. An arrogant, self-assertive bride is, to the Japanese, an inhuman monster.

On the third morning Bunshichi brought him with his breakfast the accumulated mail of the two days. At sight of the great heap he sent a quizzical glance to Yuki. "It appears, small sweet one," he remarked, "that I am to have no more hours of happy indolence."

Before the first ten were read Yuki knew herself forgotten. Her bruised soul stirred within her like a wounded thing recalled to animation. She started violently at his next loud words. "I take the earliest train to Tokio. Have my kuruma waiting." His voice was that of a master, not a lover.

Yuki rose swiftly. At the kitchen-step she paused, threw back her head, and took in a few long, long breaths. The servants below waited, open-mouthed, for her orders. Meta's kind voice recalled her.

"What do you wish, August Mistress?"

"Oh, yes, Meta—I was thinking—I forgot. The master takes the next train to Tokio. When does that train start?"

Meta's eye consulted the Waterbury clock. "In twenty minutes, Mistress. Perhaps the Illustrious One will not wish to hasten so swiftly."

"Yes, yes, he desires to go at once. Go quickly, Bunshichi, call a kuruma with two runners. Our master is a heavy man."

Her commission filled, Yuki returned slowly to the room where her husband still sat reading letters. On the way a thought smote her. "Your Highness, the train in twenty minutes honorably departs. Your kuruma will be in readiness. Was it your august intention that I should accompany you?"

Haganè looked up at her in a sort of half-recognition.

"You? Accompany? No, of course not. I would not have the time to give you. In a few days more, perhaps. Put those scattered letters and papers into a leathern portfolio. Bunshichi will know what else I need. How fortunate that a train goes so soon!"

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Between this and the starting moment he had for her neither look nor word. Just as he stepped, however, into the vehicle, he turned as with sudden, loving remembrance, and leaning far down to her said, "These days have been as the heavenly island of Horai set in a sea of raging politics. You are a docile and obedient wife. So shall I inform your father."

When he had really gone, and even the heavy clink of jinrikisha wheels on sand was no longer audible, Yuki lifted her head, brushed back the low fall of hair from her forehead, stared at the quiet sea for a moment, and then turned and walked back slowly into the house. For a few moments she wavered, pausing now, now walking swiftly, now looking about as for something she had lost. In such broken, indeterminate angles of advance she reached a little chamber quite remote from the rest, a closet darkened by nearness of a rising cliff. Here she stopped short. A physical shudder ran through the length of her. She moaned, bit her lips back into silence, pressed suddenly white hands upon her vacant eyes, and then, failing all at once, fell to the matting, and lay, face down, along its pallid surface. At last—at last—for a few hours at least this tortured smile, this self-inflicted strain could be shaken off and she, like a driven beast of burden, could lie still, to die, to moan, or slowly to gather back what remained of endurance. Her thoughts buzzed confusedly like a great swarm of bees whose nest has been taken.

Through the sweet spring day she lay prone, inanimate, stirring only at a passing sting of consciousness. "My country—my Emperor!" once she moaned aloud. "O Kwannon the Merciful! O my Christian God!—must I live, can I endure it? Already I am cowed and broken. Shall I ever again look a flower in the face?"

More than once the kind-hearted maid-servant knelt beside her, urging food and drink, or a walk into the reviving air. Yuki seemed not to hear. After one such unsuccessful excursion, Meta returned to the kitchen, shaking her head. "They have married that beautiful young maiden to our august yet somewhat ancient master, and her heart's love dies within her for another. Oh, I know well enough!" she cried, with a touch of defiance, as her father lifted bleared, protesting eyes; "so was I bartered to the wicked man who beat me and drove me forth. I may be of low estate, but I know a woman's heart."

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"Then you know the seat of folly," grumbled the old man. "When your husband drove you out, I suppose he had reason; I received you, didn't I?—I allow you still to call me father—"

"Yes, and do all your work and mine too for it," muttered the woman.

"As for our young mistress," went on the old man, ignoring this last impertinence, "all know her for the most fortunate young woman in this empire and, therefore, in the world. Is she not lawfully married to the richest and most powerful of lords, to Prince Haganè?"

Meta seated herself on a low bench and began to clean the fish for dinner. "Yes, father," she answered at length, "and this newly snared fish whose honorable insides I am preparing to remove is to be eaten by that same rich and powerful lord. Does that make the knife in its belly less sharp?"

The round sun was bisected by a western hill-top pine when Meta knelt again beside her mistress. "August Lady, you *must* listen. A telegram has arrived."

Yuki sat up instantly. She had begun to tremble. Her hair, now disordered, fell about an ashen face. "Has my master come?" she cried, a wild look flashing into her eyes, but lapsing almost immediately into dulness. She put up both hands and spread wide the night-black wings of her hair. Meta drew down one little hand and thrust the telegram between its fingers. "Oh, a telegram," said Yuki, embarrassed.

"Why did you not mention—perhaps Lord Haganè will not come back to-night." She read the few words carefully. Again that faint, sickening throb of relief passed over her. She lifted her head and met the woman's eyes as she said, trying to seem calm and unconcerned, "It is true,—our master cannot come to-night. He bids me remain until further message."

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Meta bowed. "Condescend to receive my condolence, noble Mistress. You will be honorably lonely, I fear. But such is always the fate of one married to a great statesman like our lord."

"Yes," said Yuki, eagerly, "and, Meta, I wish last of all things to become an obstacle in his illustrious path."

"Mistress," said the servant, in her honest way, with a smile like sunshine dawning upon the broad, fresh-colored face, "all day you have eaten nothing. May I not prepare a little meal to tempt your appetite?"

"You are kind to me, Meta," said the young wife. She put a hand out to the servant's arm. For some reason known only to women, the eyes of both flooded with tears.

"Yes," said Yuki, her own smile dawning, "prepare me the little dinner. I will try very hard to eat. Indeed I think even now I am becoming quite ravenous!"

Meta, laughing outright, hurried back to the kitchen. She was a good cook, and she knew it. In this same villa-kitchen she had served marvellous dishes to prime ministers and princes, but never

before had she worked with a heart so full of love and tender compassion. Never was a meal more daintily served. Slices of tai from the salt waves, embellished with grated daikon and small foreign radishes; lily-bulbs dug from the hills around them and boiled with sugar and wine into balls of crumbling sweetness; lotos roots from the temple pond, sliced thin and served with vinegar, ginger-root and shoyu, salad of yellow chrysanthemums, pickles of coleus, cucumber and egg-plant, the whitest of rice, and tea picked but the week before by the dew-wet hands of little maids at Uji. Yuki was literally betrayed into enjoyment. As she ate, Meta and the old man peeped in at her through the shoji, nudging each other joyously at each new mouthful.

Later in the evening, when lamps were lighted, and the shoji all drawn close, the two servants, with that delicate familiarity, that respectful presumption of which they have made an art, found pretext to enter. At first there was but the usual salutation, and the expressions of gratitude that she had condescended to partake of such badly prepared food. One question led to another. In a few moments the three were chatting and laughing like schoolgirls, the old man bearing, in his double superiorities of age and sex, the greater share of the conversation. Yuki soon found that he had a single theme,—the perfections of Prince Haganè. More from kindness of heart than interest, she encouraged him in these reminiscences; but in a very short time she was listening as Desdemona to her Moor. The tales indeed were marvellous. Once, at the age of six, or so said Bunshichi, the little Sanètomo had gone at night alone to a distant graveyard to bring home, as proof of his courage, the severed head of a criminal that day executed. At eight he had slain with his own hand a monstrous mountain-cat, terror of a cringing village. But the story which most impressed the listener was that of a poor leper, a beggar already eaten away beyond hope of relief, who, having asked alms by the roadway, was questioned, the young prince fixing thoughtful eyes upon him, "You ask for money to buy food, is that the best gift I could offer you?"

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"Nay, Master," answered the thing who once was man, "there is a better."

"Name it," said Haganè.

"Death," sobbed the beggar.

"So think I," cried the boy, and, without further speech, sent his short sword to the leper's heart.

Meta always shuddered at this tale; but Yuki raised her head with so still and white a look that the old man felt uneasy, and began to explain at length. "It was really the best gift, Mistress, and after it our princeling had him buried, and many, many prayers said for the rest of his soul. He even caused search to be made for his family."

"Do you think I wish excuse for it?" said Yuki, with her strange smile. "I know not which most I envy, the beggar or Prince Haganè."

The next day, fair and sweet and practically windless, except in gusts of "pine-wind" from the shore, deepened the balm of her preceding hours. Wild pinks sprang up like a fairy people on the hills. Crows perched and chattered in the garden pines. Little red crabs came out, and all day long drew marvellous maps upon the sand; and the swinging censers of hillside roses burned a little timid incense to the sun. All the forenoon Yuki busied herself about the house. A long letter was written to Iriya filled with descriptions of the day. Frequent excursions to the kitchen kept Meta and old Bunshichi in a condition of expectant smiles. In the afternoon a sudden thought came, bearing to the girl's mind a hint of wonder at her own insensibility. "Why, the Great Buddha is here, not a mile away from me, and not once have I remembered. I will go to him!"

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Meta heard the stirring, and peeped. "Our mistress goes for a walk," she told her father. "Even now she lifts her adzuma-coat. I will get her geta (clogs). Nothing could be better for her than a walk. It is the good food that gives her strength."

"These young things beat their wings like the cliff-birds when the cage first snaps, but soon they come to reason and docility," chuckled the old man over his pipe.

"I go to the Great Buddha, Meta San," said Yuki.

"Will you not take an umbrella—not even a foreign bat-umbrella—to protect your illustrious head?"

"On these short days the sun sinks very early. See, already he becomes entangled, like a boy's red kite, in the branches of those tall hill pines. I need no covering."

"Should the august master deign to arrive before your divine reappearance—" suggested Meta, with deference and a deep bow.

Yuki's face changed utterly. "I—I—did not think of him," she stammered. "I will not be long absent, and, Meta, should he come, send quickly a runner and a kuruma for me. Do you think he

will be angry, Meta, that I went?"

"Nay, little Mistress, he would wish it. There is no kinder man alive than Prince Haganè."

"I suppose he must be very kind," murmured Yuki, and went with downcast looks into the street. The sense of childish anticipation, of vivid expectancy were gone. Meta, in her effort to be dutiful, had clamped more tightly the manacles her mistress had just begun to endure. Why should she wish to go? What matter that the Buddha waited? It was not for her; she could but drag before it Haganè's obedient wife, a cowed white ghost of duty. She moved forward mechanically. Her head sank still further forward, as if the great black orchid of her hair grew heavier. At every step the lacquered bars of her high clogs went deep into sand, so that it was increasingly hard to walk. A group of children, passing, looked up into the pretty lady's face for a smile, then hurried by in a small panic of fear. It is a strange woman who does not smile at children in Japan.

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Now she crossed at right angles the one street of the village, a rough and stony thoroughfare lined with opened booths. The street terminates abruptly at the foot of a hill whereon stands an ancient and famous temple of Kwannon the Merciful. Within a hundred yards of this hill an abrupt turn to the right leads into a country of unfenced fields of egg-plant, peanuts, and sweet potatoes; then comes another bit of hard paved road, and then the towering Red Gate of the temple grounds of Buddha.

Yuki had noted dully that in little gardens the cherry trees, always earlier here than in Tokio, were fashioning their annual robes of pink. The wind from the sea, now rising, threw petals out into the air before her. She watched the fluttering signals eagerly, but for some morbid reason would not lift her eyes to the tree. She had but one thought now,—a hunger for the Buddha's face. She longed to test herself, to find whether, in the gap between the Christian Yuki and the Princess Haganè, a shred of herself still clung. This shred, it must be, that the Buddha would smile upon.

Through the gate she stumbled, her gaze still on the ground. The wide stone pathway stretched soft and pink with fallen bloom. A breeze, entering with her, swept the surface in a mass, as though some one twitched the far end of a long pink rug. Petals filled the air. They came now in a small hurricane, fretting her cheeks with ghostly fingers, burrowing softly in her collar, catching and clinging to the long folds of her robe. A sob stretched in her throat and hurt her. She would not raise her eyes. She reached the two long granite steps leading up to the inner court of the Buddha. Here petals were banked in rosy drifts. She could see the bases of stone lanterns standing before the shrine. An invisible hand seemed pressing on her shoulder.

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"Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu!" sobbed her lost childhood through her trembling lips.

An old priest, old beyond the telling, with a face as of wrinkled silver, glided out from among the flower-laden trees. "You are in great grief, my child?"

"Yes, reverend sir, in great grief; and it is of that kind which, to a stronger heart, might not be called a grief."

"I know; that is a kind hard to endure, but its triumph gives greatest enlightenment. Look to the face of Buddha, and pray for his endurance."

"Pitying sir," sobbed the girl, "I have become, while in the foreign land, a Christian."

The smile on the old priest's face did not alter. "All new religions are but forms of the old. Buddha will not pity thee less that thou dost call him 'Ye-sus,' for He, too, was a Buddha, even as you and I, daughter, even you and I, through long striving, may become."

"I will dare, then, raise my eyes to him," answered the girl. The old man stood very close to her, and as he saw the white face lift, joined his hands and whispered, "Namu Amida Butsu!" A moment later he was gone. Petals eddied and settled where he had stood.

At first the young wife felt little emotion of any sort. She gazed steadily into the marvellous, calm face with a glint of gold under the half-closed lids and in the jewel on the forehead. As she looked, it grew to be a thing not smoothed and fashioned by human hands, but by the eyes and hearts of worshippers,—the apotheosis, the embodiment of a majestic faith, so subtly wrought of faith that should belief be changed, it, too, would vanish like a mist, its vibrant particles loosen and dissipate, to recombine in some new symbol. How still it was and calm and self-assured! Its lines were growing rigid like the formula of its creed; but in that changeless, ever-changing, pitying smile, a deathless truth still trembled. Near it the hills seemed little piles of dust; pines, centuries old, mere fern-leaves of a summer.

"Give me calm, give me endurance, for they are yours to give!" said the girl, aloud. "I am less than the insects which crawl unnoticed in the grass,—I am a blown petal, frail as these I crush. If my life can serve this land, or aid, in infinitesimal good, my Emperor, why can I not be glad and

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desire no more?"

The sun had fallen far below the hills. A crimson light, a more ethereal tide, flowed across the sea, and soaked up into the fibres of blue horizon mist. A cricket with the chill of winter in his little voice woke into querulous chiding. Yuki shivered and rose to her feet, drawing the robe more tightly. She sent a glance about the wide gardens, and saw that, apparently, she was alone. She turned as if to go, but an overpowering instinct made her lift her face again to the brooding face above her. How colossal, how patient, those dark shoulders bent in the deepening twilight! Around the lotos pedestal, the cherry trees, touched now by dull crimson light, changed to great billows of a smouldering sea. Crows darted through them like strange black fish, then flew off, cawing, to homes in the pines. Again Yuki turned to go, when a voice that froze her to the stone said softly, "Ah, Madame Haganè, what felicity to meet!"

Pierre had sprung from some unknown shadow. He must have been watching her and listening to her words. He paused now, debonair, handsome, though a little pale, directly beneath an outcurving granite petal of the Buddha's throne. As she still stared, speechless, he struck a match against the bronze and lighted a cigarette. She could not see, for her own trembling, how his poor hands shook. The red match glare revealed his face as distorted, evil, sinister.

"Well," he remarked once more, "have you nothing to say to me?"

This time she tried to speak, but no sound came. Her power of motion, too, was in abeyance. He moved three deliberate steps nearer. As though the air were glass, and she repelled by its material force, she went backward the answering distance. Her left hand, clutching behind her, found something hard and cold, and fastened to it eagerly. It was the fin of a bronze dragon in full relief, twining upward, about the trunk of a tall lantern. "Yes, go," she whispered. "Do not speak more words. Go!"

Pierre took another stride. She cowered back bodily into the writhing folds.

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"For the love of God!" she panted.

"What if one has ceased to love God?"

"In mercy then—in pity—in human pity—go!"

Pierre laughed. "*You* enjoin pity, Madame Haganè? How quaint!"

"I am more deeply hurted now than you; but never more must I be weak. I am a wife. I shall serve my native country!"

"Does treachery and faithlessness ever serve? You delude yourself. If Haganè is to be your strength, you will fail,—for either Haganè or I must die. I live now only to revenge myself upon him!"

The emptiness of the boast, the impotence of the suffering boy to wreak the harm he wished, did not then come to her. The words rang sombre and terrible. "No—no, Pierre," she cried, "not that! Our Emperor needs him—our country needs. Revenge on me, Pierre! I only was faithless. I deserve all harm you will give."

"Yes, you were faithless, but it came because of weakness, and the low status of your sex in this barbaric land. Haganè and your father forced you. They threatened, cowed you—tortured you, for all I know. Look at your hands! Mon Dieu, your little hands!"

She held them forth to him with a gesture that might have disarmed Beelzebub. "I tore them myself upon that hedge the night you came,—the night I had promised Prince Haganè."

Pierre glared at her an instant longer. Oh, he had meant to be so harsh! Nothing was to have softened his just wrath. Through sleepless nights he had scourged himself with memory until his soul was flayed. Yuki should not appeal to him or move him. He would get from her own lips some faltering explanation of her perfidy. Yet now, for all his armor of resolve, two little torn hands held out silently through deepening gloom pulled at his heart,—drew down the visor from his quivering face.

Above them bent, like a great cloud, the head and stooping shoulders of the Buddha.

"Yuki, Yuki, you have ruined my life! You have killed my soul! I cannot consent to live unless to revenge myself upon the man who has brought us both this agony!"

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"Pierre, if you say such thing, I must—because I am now Japanese wife—warn my master of it."

This new affront to vanity stung Pierre back into some of his assumed relentlessness. "You would defend him,—betray me already? Count Ronsard said it would be so, but I would not listen. Why should you be true to him when you were false as hell to me? I'll kill him, I tell you, and if I cannot kill him in open fight, I will find some way to harm him! I'll have you yet, Madame la Princesse. I do not give you up, even at your own words. You owe me something! Come, come, you owe me reparation,—help me trick him, Yuki. You love me,—ah, I know it! This is my first triumph, that your heart cannot forget. Yes, yes, poor shivering slave, it is Pierre you love. Now, come, deny it! When his arms are around you, do you not think of mine? When his thick lips press you, do you not faint for me? Ah, I have touched you!"

"Go—I say to you again, go, and go quickly! You with your own speech cauterize my wound. You are a coward! Your words are vipers which give their deepest venom first to you!"

In speaking the girl had drawn herself very erect. Her face, through the twilight, gleamed luminous with inner fire. Over her left shoulder the open mouth of the dragon yawned. Pierre could not meet her look. He cowered back, and pressed his eyes with one trembling hand.

"Yuki, Yuki, indeed I scarcely know what I am saying. This misery bewilders me. I cannot eat or sleep. My thoughts surge in my brain like fire in a battened ship. And this is worst of all, that now, so soon, you are tamed,—half reconciled! You have not loved me!"

"If I love or not love, I must not now remember. Pierre, pity me a little. Go from Nippon; help me to be the good woman, and the loyal one."

But to this appeal Pierre could not reach. "I do not give you up," he muttered sullenly. "And I will harm Haganè when and how I can!"

Yuki stepped forward a little, still keeping one hand on the dragon. "Then stand aside, Monsieur Le Beau. I must return."

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Pierre did not move. "You shall not go," he said in the same sullen fashion. Yuki cast a despairing glance over toward the small house where the old priest lived, then down the long stone walk, now white with petals. No one was in sight. She gave a heavy sigh. On the instant the sound of Japanese clogs came, mounting, apparently, the stone steps of the great red gate. A form of a man in Japanese robes, unusually tall for his race, slow and majestic in approach, now became visible.

"Haganè!" she said, with a great repressed cry, and bit her lips to keep from sobbing.

"Diable!" echoed Pierre. He gave a single look, a curse, and pitching his cigarette on the stone flag near her, vanished into the shadows of the lotos throne. Yuki, half-fainting now, hung in the coils of the dragon. As though life itself depended on his coming, she watched her husband's calm advance. His stride was slow, splendid, and imposing, each step eloquent of centuries of rulership. On catching sight of her she felt that he smiled. He moved no faster. "My Lord," she murmured, not knowing that she had said it.

The cigarette blinked as with a single malevolent eye, and sent up an acrid smoke between them. He stepped over it, apparently unobservant, and held out a hand. Yuki clutched at it.

"Why, small sweet one, how white your face gleams through the darkness! And you lie, like a crystal ball of fate, in the old dragon's claws! Well, here is a larger dragon come to bear you home."

Yuki tottered toward him. At first touch of his hand had come the sense of renewed power. "I dreamed not, Lord, that your august returning might be so soon, or I should not have left your house. I left with Meta the message—"

"She gave it carefully, but I preferred to come in person for thee, little one. Here, lean on me. You tremble. Perhaps the walk has been too long. To-morrow we are to leave this quiet place, and you will be Madame Haganè, wife of the Minister of War,—Madame Haganè, official mistress of a huge and unattractive residence. But you will brighten it, and your friends of the American Legation shall aid you."

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"I shall try with all my soul and strength, Lord, to be worthy of you."

"I do not fear, my child. All things are not to be at once expected of a single small flake of maidenhood and snow. How yet you tremble! Here, I will draw your arm in mine. Cling to me. Never mind if the children on the road laugh at us and say that the old prince is mad with love of his young wife. In the great city I must often forget you. But wait one instant—"

He had been standing, half-turned from the great Buddha. Now he faced it, Yuki falling back a

little. He raised both hands, rubbed them softly together in invocation, and Yuki, marvelling at him, heard the reverent words, "Namu Amida Butsu! Namu Amida Butsu!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

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So, without further preparation or experience, was the little Lady Yuki, fresh from her American school, not yet completely readapted to her native environment, installed as mistress of a great, official mansion.

The servants, of course, were strangers. A few of these bore to Prince Haganè the relation of "hangers-on," impoverished families of soldiers and retainers left from feudal days. Others had official connection with the place, and remained unmolested through various administrations.

For the first twenty-four hours the young wife moved in an atmosphere of dazed unreality. Her first conscious interest was in the mail. She began to watch for letters from her mother, or Gwendolen,—perhaps from that one whom she must forget. The thought of their last interview remained with her as the cruelest of all her wounds. No letter came. Pierre would not, in any case, have written, believing that Haganè had given orders to have all letters pass first under his inspection. The silence of Iriya and Gwendolen had another cause. Her new and exalted rank necessitated from Yuki the initial step. She did not know this, and Haganè, plunged deep already into affairs of state, had not thought to tell her.

She lived now almost an isolated existence. Only the head butler dared personally address her. Even he, in requesting orders from "her Highness," bowed and smiled with a sort of deprecating commiseration, as though he recognized her bewilderment. Of her husband she saw little. The longing for her mother and her friend grew poignant. Through the great high-ceiled rooms she wandered. The face of the great dark Buddha often loomed above her. From every shadow she shrank, fearing that Pierre Le Beau might be in hiding. Three miserable days dragged by. On the fourth, Haganè was present at the breakfast-table. News of a great victory had come. The Western world was just beginning to realize the true mettle in the Japanese soul. Haganè read aloud several editorials from English and American papers, and made comment upon them, as though his listener were a man, and his equal. He had ordered a foreign meal, and the coffee and excellent food stimulated the girl. Her husband's companionship and condescension exhilarated her. It was part of a brightening future that, even before their meal was over, the butler should announce, "Madame Onda, mother to her Highness."

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Yuki gave a small cry of pleasure. Haganè lowered his paper, and paused to smile upon his young wife. He did not give a hint that it was through his direct agency that the visitor had come. "Ah, your eyes brighten at this news more even than at victory!" he laughed. To the servant he said briefly, "Conduct Madame Onda to us here."

The servant hesitated, "Your Highness, there is with her also an old attendant, a dame called Suzumè, who—talks."

"Shall we bid the chatterer enter, Yuki?"

"If your Highness permit," laughed Yuki.

"Admit both," said Haganè, and returned to his editorials.

Yuki rose to welcome her guests. As the door was flung back Iriya hesitated for a moment on the threshold. Without a glance toward Yuki she hurried to the Prince, and, prostrating herself, bowed again and again, with audible, indrawn breaths. Suzumè, at her heels, followed suit, excelling her mistress in the rapidity of repeated bows, and the power of audible suction.

"Nay, little mother of my Yuki," said Haganè, reaching down a hand, "rise now, I pray. Such extreme of deference is not seemly in the mother of a princess. Kindly be at ease in greeting your daughter, and converse as freely as if I were not present."

Iriya allowed herself to be persuaded to perch on the very rim of a leather chair and sip at a cup of coffee, while she and Yuki exchanged compliments and inquiries as to the health of the members of their respective families. This is always the first social duty in Japan. It takes the place of "weather."

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No notice whatever was being taken of old Suzumè, who had continued genuflections and

inspiration to the point of vertigo, when Yuki at last came to her assistance. Nothing would induce the old dame to sit on a foreign chair. "She had tried them once," she protested. "They felt like a pile of dead fish on a kitchen bench." Her post, self-assigned, was the extreme corner of the red and green Axminster carpet. While her superiors conversed, she let her keen, sunken eyes dart like dragon-flies from one piece of furniture to the other, from ceiling to floor, from curtain to framed oil-painting, until the very texture of these things must have been photographed on her busy retina.

After a few pleasant if perfunctory questions and replies, Prince Haganè rose, saying that he had work in his private office, and afterward must leave the house. "I hope you will remain with Yuki just as long as your domestic duties permit," he had said last of all. Immediately upon his closing of the door, Iriya began congratulating her daughter upon her splendid fortune, and retailing congratulatory messages from relatives and old friends. The little lady's feet, as she sat on the high dining-room chair, did not quite reach to the floor. The draught on her bare ankles just above the tabi (digitated socks) sawed like ice. With a little gesture of entreaty to Yuki, she hurried over to a comfortable sofa, where she nestled, and drew her feet up under her. Yuki smiled at the naïveté of it. Already she felt years older than her mother. She took her place on a chair, drawing forward a tabouret with smoking outfit, and urged her willing guest to the luxury of a small pipe. A sense of freedom, of delight in this sweet companionship, swept for the moment Yuki's hovering responsibilities.

"Okkasan, dear Okkasan (honorable mother), I am so happy to be with you! But why did you wait so long?" Her voice was rich with tender reproving. "Three long days! Long as the castle moats when the mud is showing. The prince is in this house but seldom. I have been lonely, mother."

"Your father forbade me to write or visit you until official request was made us. Now you are a princess, dear, and far outrank Sir Onda's wife."

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Yuki flushed. Her eyes sank in embarrassment. "Oh, I had not heard of the strange fact. I beg your pardon, my mother. I am ashamed that it is so."

Iriya laughed. "Do you beg my pardon for being a princess, for making your father proud and happy, when—when—he was threatened by such disappointment?"

Now Iriya, too, became embarrassed. She had intended not to refer to unhappy topics of the past. Yuki was thinking deeply. "It must be honorably the same cause which keeps my Gwendolen away." A great relief followed the thought. The fear of coldness, of censure, was gone. She smiled into the air before her, thinking of the letter she soon should write.

At first, unnoticed by her companions, old Suzumè had risen from her corner and was trotting stealthily about the room. She touched now, softly, each marvellous object within her reach, and talked to herself, the while, in a queer little sing-song monologue. "Ma-a-a! the honorable, huge room, and the wonderful things, all belonging to our Yuki-ko! Foreign carpets with many-colored vegetables painted on them. Strange, puffy beds, high up on legs, like horses (here she patted a French sofa). High tables,—Ma-a-a! with little carpets on them, too, all ravelled at the edges. Big glass wine-cups (here she lifted an iridescent flower-vase)—merciful Buddha! No wonder the august foreigners are so often drunk! Gold is all about, on walls and furniture,—even the pictures have little fences of gold around them! I see a big singing-box (piano) over in the corner. That alone costs hundreds and hundreds of yen. How rich our o jo san must be!"

Iriya and Yuki, by this time, had begun to notice the antics and to smile at the crooning of the old woman. She saw it,—nothing escaped the arrow of those jetty orbs,—but it pleased her now to pretend unconsciousness of observation. She placed herself in front of Yuki, as if the young wife were a large dressed doll, and could not listen. "Ma-a-a! Our o jo san, last of the Onda race. There she sits, straight and slim in her foreign chair, just like our Gracious Empress herself when her photograph is taken! Now she is a princess, but once she was only a little girl, carried to school on old Suzumè's bent back. Tee-hee! My back is crooked now as Daruma,—but a princess helped to crook it!"

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"Don't say such things, Suzumè!" cried Yuki, quickly. "They hurt me!"

"Why should it hurt you, Yuki-ko,—I mean, your Highness, when old Suzumè is only proud?" chuckled the beldame, with almost malicious enjoyment. "Let me be crooked, by your favor. Let me hump over like the lobster of long life. A princess curved my back, tee-hee! Ma-a-a! Will your kind eyes moisten for such a thing? Arà! I have ceased. Behold me now, your Highness,—straight and slim as a young willow down by the moat." She threw back her shoulders and swaggered comically.

"That is better. How is it that little Maru did not come to-day?" asked Yuki, determined, if possible, to change the current of the old soul's thought. Her effort was strikingly successful. Simultaneously Suzumè's face and hands fell. "Ma-a-a! I am a fool. Moths have eaten my memory! Maru crouches yet outside the street gate, waiting for permission to enter."

"And I, too, forgot. Kwannon, forgive my selfishness," murmured Iriya.

"Oh, poor, poor Maru!" cried the hostess, her face a bright tangle, now, of smiles and tears, "the cold wind blows down that street. Go quickly, Suzumè. Fetch her, instantly!"

The spoiled old servant cast a cunning eye to an electric bell set in its black wood disc. "August Princess," she whined, "deign but to put your smallest finger upon that white pebble yonder, and at once a fine man-servant will enter. Maru will be much comforted to receive her summons from a grand *man*-servant in foreign clothes!"

Iriya's face showed vexation at the old servant's forwardness, but Yuki laughed and touched the bell. She was beginning to realize, in a sort of glad wonder, that her heart grew lighter with every smile.

Maru came into the room sidewise. At every few steps her knees apparently gave way. She did not know, in a foreign house, just when she was expected to kneel and bow, so kept herself in readiness to drop at an instant's notice. Her face was round, like a dish. Her beady eyes snapped and sparkled with excitement. The small button of a nose, blown on by unfriendly winds, glowed in the centre of her countenance like an over-ripe cherry. At sight of Yuki, she found her cue and grovelled. "How is it?" asked Yuki of her mother, when Maru was at last persuaded to hold her head erect, "that, I not having yet written, you and the servants came to me?"

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"Why, did you not know of it? Prince Haganè sent, last night, a special messenger."

"No, I had not heard. Prince Haganè is very kind."

At the curious tone Iriya sent a keen look to her daughter. She did not like the expression gathering on the down-bent face. "Come, my jewel, you have not shown us half the wonders of your new home. Shall not Suzumè and Maru be given bliss? We can stay but an hour."

"An hour!" echoed the young wife, in dismay. "That is already half spent. Oh, mother, one hour?"

"Such are your father's orders. You know we do not disobey him."

Yuki sighed. "I know. Well, let us see all that we can in the short space. This room is but the dining-room, where, as you have seen, we eat foreign meals. There is a Japanese wing and smaller dining-room, which I shall often use when my master is absent. Now let us go into the long hall, then into the *zashiki*, or drawing-room." In passing the hall-way she saw Maru's eyes fasten on the telephone box. It had, indeed, an unrelated, black look, set so squarely against the flowered wall-paper. Yuki felt the tug on an inspiration. "Come, mother; I shall not need to write to my friend. I shall talk to her through this! Like the old *sennin* (*genii*), who whispered to each other from peak to crag of far mountains, I shall talk clearly to the slope of Azabu!"

Iriya caught her sleeve. "I fear for you to talk in that strange way, my child. The gods may not like it."

"Ah, mother, in America I have talked for hours and was not injured."

"Our gods were not in America to see," murmured Iriya, and followed with evident reluctance. Suzumè and Maru came close behind. Yuki boldly pulled down the receiver and held it to her ear. The servants uttered short squeaks like mice.

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"Moshi, moshi!" called Yuki, giving the Japanese telephone cry.

Maru shuddered. "Is it a deaf devil, that the *o jo san* speaks so loudly?"

"A whole nest of devils, Maru San," said Yuki, with mischievous and impressive gravity. "There are green and red devils like those that the lightning bolts bring down, and little foreign devils in boots and beards, and—"

"Oh, let us go! let us go!" cried the little maid, and clutched Suzumè's sleeve.

"America no *Kōshikwan*," Yuki was replying, in apparent unconcern, to the devils. Suzumè had realized the situation. "Fool!" she said to the cringing Maru, giving a scowl and a light cuff on the ear, "the princess is only telegraphing in talk instead of writing. The house-servants laugh at you. We shall have no face!"

By this time the imperilled princess was talking rapidly in English. Her countenance quivered, brightened, changed, as if a person stood before her. In pause of listening she would nod, smile,

listen again, giving murmured ejaculations.

The verisimilitude proved too much for Maru. In spite of cuffs fiercely renewed, and a desperate effort to keep her limp body from the floor, she sank from her mentor's grasp, clutching the thin old legs, and sobbing, "They are bewitching our Miss Yuki,—I know they are! Foxes are shut in that black box! She will get full of them, and then they will all fly out to eat our hearts!"

"They'd have a sop of sour jelly with yours, cuttlefish!" said Suzumè, kicking in disgust. Finally, in utter exasperation, she seized the culprit by the ear, sliding her bodily down the hardwood floor, and depositing her in a moaning heap on the back veranda beneath a water-cooler.

"Gwendolen, Gwendolen!" Yuki was crying. "I have just now learned, I think, why you have not come or wrote to me." (Pause.) "Yes, it was just that thing,—my rank, it is called. Alas, do you remember, Gwendolen, that poor little sea-maid how she feel when the proud grandmother beckoned eight large oysters to fasten upon her scales? Well, I have now the pinch of such oysters. But I will not care so much if only you will come!" (Pause.) "My mother is with me, and her servants, but they must go very soon. I will be alone.—Yes, he is to be absent all the day. Oh, come quickly,—quickly,—I cannot bear some more long waiting." Yuki wheeled from the telephone. "She will come, mother; my friend will come! Let us go to the long drawing-room and wait for her. I will send tea and cakes to comfort the silly Maru. Some other day we shall see all of this big house. It is very ugly, though costing much money. That is honorably often the case with foreign things. Oh, mother, I have been so hungry for you and my golden friend! She will be brought to us in the long drawing-room. We are in heart and soul, if not in race, true sisters. How kind she was to me at school! I have written you before. The other girls would tease me. They asked impertinent questions, and would always be tormenting me to dance. Gwendolen was the only one to see how I felt. She protected me, and would not let me dance until my heart began to sing. She knew that real dancing, like poetry, should come only when your heart sings,—not just because you are requested. Sometimes in homesickness I would dance, sometimes in joy of springtime flowers. Those girls tried, too, to dance,—the funny American girls! But they could never learn. Not even Gwendolen could learn, though I taught and taught and taught her!"

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Excitement bred of the coming visit caught her up like a leaf. Prattling on, she moved swiftly into the long room, beckoning now and then for Iriya to follow. The mother kept at quite a distance, embarrassed by this lack of restraint in a married daughter. In the centre of the room the girl paused, and, as if impelled, threw herself into a pose of wonderful beauty, every bone, every inch of white flesh set, as it were, into visible expression of a poetic thought. "I did not know that ever again I should wish to dance like this," Iriya heard her murmur. "Yes, I am coming back to myself. Even that little soul that fled on the ship,—it may come back last of all, but it will come."

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Half dreamily she passed into a second pose. The transition was music. Now her long eyes closed into a mere gleaming thread, her lips parted, and trembled. Almost without motion of her mouth she talked on, in broken Japanese phrases, uttering them in rhythms, which subtly related to the gestures of her body. "No, those girls could never dance,—never dance,—with their honorably stiff shoulders and their limbs like trunks of young trees. They attempted it with fervor, but they could not augustly dance. But I will dance again, and my souls will listen. I will dance the dance of the Sun Goddess and of morning, because my friend is coming!" She hummed, now, the tune and the words of a famous classic. Iriya, completely under the spell, sank to the floor in the attitude of a singer, caught up the rhythm, and sang with her:

"Night is where thou art not,

Oh, my beloved!

Night lies in the stone rolled close against thy door.

Let the sighs of spring,

(My sighing, oh, divine one,)

Let the salt waves' weeping (my salt tears) allure thee!"

The beautiful gestures flowed one into the next, like currents of living water.

"Lo, she awakens; light with shining fingers frets the dark rock fissure.

She approaches; see the black rock melt."

"Hark! listen!" cried the dancer, and paused with arms outspread. It was as if winds stood still, as if a flower-branch, tossed in air, lost suddenly its power to return. Iriya caught her breath. She too rose. Jinrikisha wheels were on the gravel. "My hour is gone," said Iriya; "I know it from the shadows. I will now return home, taking the servants with me. You remain here, my child, and

greet the friend who now enters."

"Yes, I will remain here, mother, my dear, dear mother, I will greet my friend," whispered the girl. The glamour of the dance had swept back and held her. Half in the world of poetry, half in the material present, she wavered. The dawn of her friend's coming shone through both. Iriya, with a last, tender look, slipped from the room. Yuki's lip quivered like a child's as she saw her mother go. But now, down the long hall, came the tap-tap of high-heeled foreign shoes. A new tremor stirred Yuki's lips, a little hint of fear hid in her eyes.

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Gwendolen paused on the threshold. For a long moment the two stood transfixed,—gazing, searching, each the face of the other. Yes, a barrier had grown between them,—the mystery of marriage, the recollection (on Gwendolen's part) of unspeakable slanders, the ghostly, intangible stirring of race antagonism, to which they themselves could not have given name. Yuki began slowly to whiten, but Gwendolen, with a backward toss of the head like Diana on a hilltop, cried out aloud, "My sister!" and the two friends, crashing through phantoms, found each other's arms. They clung close, sobbing and swaying. Whispers started, but never found conclusion. Names were repeated with every intonation of deep love. "My friend,—my Gwendolen!" "Yuki! Yuki! Yuki!" A dozen times they drew back, looked again, and clung closer. Finally they succeeded in reaching a sofa, and sat down, with hands still intertwined.

"And you, little you, are the mistress of all this great house! You are to give receptions, and be the chief hostess. I suppose you will chaperon *me*, you chicken! Isn't it a joke?"

"It do seem joky," admitted Yuki, with another sigh of full content.

"Well, Madame la Princesse, may I give you now my first social commission? I want a prince of my own,—a Japanese prince. Let him be poor,—all the better,—but his trademark, I mean his crest, I insist on having it warranted as the real thing."

"What would then become of poor Mr. Dodge?"

"Mr. Dodge!" echoed the other, with greatest scorn. "You certainly never had any idea I would look twice at Mr. Dodge! Besides, he is making a fool of himself over that fat, ogling Carmen Niestra. Ugh! She reminds me of a huge suet pudding with sweet sauce. I always suspected Dodge of low sentiments."

"I know not of this Miss Carmen," said Yuki, in a troubled voice. "But I like Mr. Dodge, always, very, very much; and I am sure he loved you—distractionately!"

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"That just about expresses it!" cried Gwendolen; and little Yuki never knew why her friend laughed so heartily, while the dark shadow of an unspoken pain still clouded her bright eyes. "Let's change the subject," the American said quickly. "Dad told me to give you lots of love, and to say that all of us were looking forward to that grand first reception of yours. Next Thursday, isn't it? No, Friday. We got our cards yesterday."

"You will come and assist me in the preparing, won't you, dear Gwendolen?"

"I couldn't be kept away!"

"And Mrs. Todd, too. Your kind mother, will she not come?"

Gwendolen averted her face. "The truth is, Yuki, mother takes Pierre's part. Nothing that dad or I can say has influence. That awful Mrs. Stunt owns mother now, body and soul; and Mrs. Stunt has no tender feelings to spare for her own sex."

"I am not surprised at your mother, or even greatly hurt. It is right that—he—should have friends to sympathize. Say to your mother, please, that I do not resent."

"I'll say nothing of the kind!" cried Gwendolen, indignantly. "It would please Mrs. Stunt too much. Oh, they will be waiting to question me about you. Mrs. Stunt's eyes will glare like those of a hungry hyena. I shall tell them that you are superbly indifferent. That will fetch them! Mrs. Stunt, as it is, will be the first to enter your reception-rooms,—the odious little painted ghoul!"

All brightness had faded from the young faces. Each stared upon troubled visions. "Since we are on such topics, Yuki," Gwendolen began, "I might as well tell you and have done with it,—Pierre himself is acting like a spoiled child, a cad. He wants to make trouble."

"His threat is to harm Prince Haganè, is it not?"

"Yes! But who told you?" She looked sharply at her companion. Yuki apparently had not heard. Gwendolen went on. "Dad simply laughs at him for a foolish blusterer. He says a cricket might as

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well shake its fists at a grain elevator."

"There is no rumor at all that Pierre may go home to France?"

"Absolutely none. Ronsard is using him as a cat's-paw. Since your marriage Pierre has been openly announced Second Secretary of the French Legation. A sinecure, but it gives him entrée to all court functions,—to official receptions,—to—*your* reception, Yuki."

"I have thought of this also," said Yuki. "He could not harm my husband in such an open place."

"No, but with that demon of a Ronsard behind him he could embarrass, perhaps mortify, both you and Haganè."

Yuki fell silent. Her slim hands clasped and unclasped nervously. Her eyes were fixed on a spot of carpet near her feet. "Of course it is certain that so great statesman as Haganè thought of all such dangers before he wished to marry me," she murmured, as much to herself as her companion.

"Good gracious, Yuki Onda!" broke in Gwendolen, with startling abruptness. "What are those fearful scars on your hands? Did they torture you after all?"

Gwendolen's shocked face and horrified tone expressed more than she would willingly have admitted.

Yuki's eyes flashed once. She drew her hands within her sleeves. "How can you say such silly thing? Nipponese do not torture!"

Gwendolen, to hide her emotion (for she did not entirely believe Yuki's vehement asseveration) sprang up and began walking up and down the room, near the sofa where Yuki sat, watching her. "What is it that you were about to warn me of Monsieur Le Beau?" asked the latter, calmly.

"He is weak—silly—sentimental; bleating all over the place about his blighted hopes,—his ruined life. He makes me ill!" The girl was thankful to expend on the absent Pierre indignation to which she dared not ascribe the real source. Those gashes on her friend's small hands were burned already on her own heart. It did not occur to her that accident had caused them. In a time of such conflict, they must be, necessarily, the marks of cruelty and violence. Yuki guessed the pent-up fount of passion in her friend, for she remarked quite coolly, "I assure you, Gwendolen, those little scratches were made by me,—myself, on our garden hedge. I was the stupidity. No one caused but myself. You know I have never told to you an untruthful thing. As for Monsieur Le Beau, he has all reasons for saying that I have ruined his life."

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"Ruined his grandmother!" cried the other. "There you are, looking meek again. No wonder that all men are bullies when we turn coward at the first frown. I thank Heaven it was no man, however, that made those scars on you. If it had been—" She stopped short, looking so fierce that Yuki had to smile at her. "Well, Amazon?" she asked.

"Oh, I hate all men!—young ones in particular. Pierre thinks his heart is bleeding, but, after all, it is chiefly his precious vanity. He don't like being jilted! Subtract vanity from the average man and you don't leave much beside the fillings of his front teeth. They are all alike! I know them!" She flung herself to the sofa and clasped her arms once more tightly around her friend. The outburst had relieved her; but a new sadness came. Yuki was still very pale. A little pathetic drooping had begun to show at the corners of her lips. Gwendolen was by nature the antagonist of resignation. She hated the dawning look of it on Yuki's face. "Yuki, Yuki, shall we ever be happy again as we were at school? Yet we were restless there. All our thoughts flew westward, far, far westward, and over that broad ocean, to your Japan. We could never be really happy, we thought, until we had reached, together, this country of your birth. Oh, it is beautiful, as you told me! Each day its beauty deepens. I know now what you meant by yama-buki fountains all of gold,—and the wide, still yellow lakes of 'na.' In our Legation garden the cherry-trees are crusted over with tiny pointed rubies, which soon—yes, very soon—must turn to flowers. All that I see is beautiful, and yet, Yuki, think in how short a time life has brought us both deep sorrow!" She drew a sigh, the long, luxurious, despairing sigh of untried youth. Yuki, having griefs more real, echoed it in softer cadence.

"Yes, the cherry-buds will open, and the fountain of your yama-buki toss, no matter what we are feeling! Is it not kind to be so? I have heard that your Legation garden is not very—harmonious. Will there be many bright spring flowers in it?"

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"The garden is a blot, but it is a big blot, and things grow there, thank Heaven! Haven't you ever been to the American Legation at all? Yuki, I have an idea!"

"No," Yuki had answered. At the new sparkle of excitement in the fair face she unconsciously sat more erect.

"I have an idea!" Gwendolen repeated. "You are now your own mistress. Why can't you drive home with me, and give mother a surprise? Nothing would soften her like that,—the Princess Haganè to call in person!"

"Yes, yes, I will do that thing!" cried Yuki, taking fire at once. "How clever you are, Gwendolen! I would sit here mourning for the month and not have such bright idea. I tell you, listen! We will send your jinrikisha off, then you stays to luncheon with me, and after luncheon we takes the pumpkin and some rats and turn them into a great coach with horses, and drive off in splendor, like two little Cinderellas, to your mother's house! Oh, what jolliness! let us go upstairs and remove your hat!"

"What!" cried the other, in mock astonishment, "you have an upstairs, and beds for me to fling my wraps upon, and a brush and comb, perhaps, for me to rearrange my locks!"

"Come see!" challenged Yuki. They ran off together, Yuki darting up the steps, Gwendolen catching at her flying heels, both laughing, giggling, uttering short shrieks. "Well," panted the American, sitting prone upon the top step, "it seems that life is going to be worth living after all!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

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EXCEPT in rare cases the ceremony of marriage among Japanese is still unmodified by foreign innovation. These people prefer to regard it as the most intimate of social functions, a family sacrament, a transition to be made in grave silence, not in the buzz of comment. Congratulations may follow, they never precede, a wedding.

In the case of Prince Haganè, his official necessity for a wife appeared significantly enough in the engraved cards of invitation, sent out by hundreds, to announce weekly receptions (beginning with a certain Friday) held by the Prince and Princess Sanètomo Haganè in the residence of the Minister of War. That word "War," printed so smoothly among high-sounding titles, bore little relation to the dark clouds of conflict pouring in about Port Arthur and spreading a sombre pall above Manchuria. Dark, too, was the shadow cast upon the hearts of loyal Nipponese. For a lull had come, a mysterious silence. Explanations were not offered to the people. Dead bodies or fragments of bodies, were still brought home for burial; new troops, by midnight, threaded city streets and crowded the railway stations, bound for the front, yet no sounds of battle came. It was as if a wheel had stopped, throwing out the entire mechanism of a well-ordered campaign. At the Imperial Palace in Tokio conferences were held daily, Haganè, of course, being present. Sometimes Sir Charles Grubb and his American colleague were called.

Yuki noted the deepening gloom on her husband's brow. In his scant hours of home-staying he seemed, now, only half-conscious of her existence or its relation to himself. Once or twice he had roused himself to answer kindly enough some question of hers regarding the coming reception.

Meanwhile Gwendolen and the young wife were together daily. The "old times" at Washington, to which they so often tenderly referred, as to an epoch centuries removed, gave promise of recrudescence. They laughed, giggled, ate olives, made fudge, and otherwise enjoyed themselves. If the absence of Pierre and the buoyant Dodge saddened at times these innocuous revelries, each girl hid her own regret.

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Mrs. Todd, as Gwendolen prophesied, had melted instantly. The friendly visit of the Princess Haganè, the gentle pleading of the schoolgirl Yuki, unchanged in spite of her new glittering husk of rank, surprised that small camp of prejudices in its sleep, and soon waved a bright laugh of victory. At the next visit of Mrs. Stunt, however, before the Medusa-like disapprobation of that noble countenance, Mrs. Todd froze timidly again, to be again sun-thawed by Yuki, and recongealed by Mrs. Stunt, until the will-power of the good lady took on, through too frequent tempering, not, indeed, the elasticity of a Damascene blade, but rather the pithiness of an honest vegetable left in a winter nook.

During a softened interval Mrs. Todd had promised to stand in Yuki's receiving line. Even at the moment she had given a few sentimental sighs for Pierre, and made a mental reservation that she would "explain" to his satisfaction. When Mrs. Stunt turned a hard, reproving eye, she fain would have rescinded altogether, but this time both Mr. Todd and Gwendolen upheld her. Thus bravely seconded, she dared for once defy her mentor. Mrs. Stunt made gestures of acrid resignation, and turned her face away. During the afternoon she concocted several choice paragraphs for "The Hawk's Eye."

A clear, blue day in early March dawned for Yuki's first reception. Sunshine coaxed new

flowers from the springing lawn, and rolled apples of joyous discord among the crows and sparrows. The two chief decorators, Gwendolen and Yuki, had not dared to rely on the day for external brightness. Draperies added to the long shapeless windows hung ready to exclude sunshine and storm alike. At Gwendolen's suggestion, candles and quaint candelabra were to give the key-note to decoration. Old junk-shops and second-hand dealers in temple brasses had been rummaged with rich results. Branching clusters of tapers sprang everywhere from plain spaces on the walls. Standing candelabra and quaint single candlesticks occupied tables, mantels, and the tops of cabinets and book-shelves, alternating with bowls and vases of cut flowers. The wall-lights, placed tactfully but a few feet above the head of an average man, threw into softened shadow the vast and disproportionate ceiling. Yuki's delight was pleasant to witness. She never could have dreamed—as she often told her friend—that the old lecture-hall could look so well. The garish hangings and unspeakable oil-paintings became inconspicuous, and were further softened by wreaths of smilax and other imported hot-house vines. As the opening hour approached, Yuki became more and more excited, though her efforts after matronly calm were apparent. Even the knowledge that Pierre would certainly come that afternoon should not daunt her. Nothing had been heard from him since that one interview at Kamakura. Of this Yuki had not spoken, not even to Gwendolen. Well, let him come, and give her pain! She deserved it! Still would friends be left, Gwendolen, and Mr. Todd, and the dear mother, Iriya, and—and her husband, Haganè. Her troubled heart faced round to him, but it was as if she stood before a stone precipice. He was too great; she too close.

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All through the forenoon of that busy day presents had been arriving. The flood-gates of official recognition had been thrown wide. Gifts of flowers, of fruit in wonderful baskets, of growing plants in exquisitely glazed hana-bachi, came in embarrassing confusion. Baron Tsukeru, who united a passion for Japanese peonies to a more exotic devotion to orchids, sent a great lacquered tray heaped with broken rainbows, hoar-frost, and strange, flying insects turned to flowers. Old Prince Shirota, who had been present at their marriage, sent to the prince and his new princess a box of eggs, together with a humorous poem, saying, "May each smooth egg betoken a life of wedded happiness, and may each year bring an heir. So shall joy and the house of Haganè be immortal!" A cabinet minister sent a case of champagne, also with a poem; but his was paraphrased from Tennyson. Sweetmeats, oranges, and loose flowers came literally by cartloads.

The great central offering, however, was a heap of exquisitely wrought confection representing blue waves, with a pair of Miyako-dori, birds symbolic of conjugal felicity, floating upon the sugared sea. This gift, placed reverently upon a little table to itself, needed no card. Upon the unpainted side of the satin-wood box in which it was fashioned, shone the Imperial insignia, a gold chrysanthemum with sixteen petals.

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The master, twice during the forenoon, had rolled up to the door in his carriage, gone into his private office, closed the doors tightly, and busied himself with desk-drawers and papers. In a few moments he emerged and drove away without having spoken. On a third visit, he came into the drawing-room, in search of Yuki. She and Gwendolen were at the far end, both looking upward and talking (one in English, one in Japanese) to a bewildered servant on a stepladder, who paused to listen, his face copper-yellow among the loops of smilax. Neither heard Haganè until he was fairly upon them. Yuki gave a start; but Gwendolen brought down level eyes and smiled at him. He spoke first to the guest, holding her hand closely for an instant, and uttering some conventional, though, in this case, sincere expressions of gratitude for her kindness to Yuki. He then asked of Yuki the exact hour at which the reception was to commence. He spoke in English. "Four, your Highness," answered Yuki, in the same tongue. "I shall be in this apartment at four," he said, and then took his departure.

The two friends watched through the window as he stepped under the porte cochère and entered the carriage.

"Your husband is a king among men, my Yuki."

"It does not become a Japanese wife to admit so."

"The hair he leaves on his barber's floor tingles with more manliness than the whole body of Pierre Le Beau."

"It does not become the one who has made Pierre suffer to say so."

"Pshaw! Nonsense! He enjoys his suffering. But of course I might have known you would make some such retort. Do you want me to try to keep him away from you this afternoon, or is it part of your penitence to assist him in insulting you?"

"Oh, help keep away, if you can!" gasped Yuki. "Prince Haganè will be standing by me then. I wish most of all for him not to be annoyed."

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"I wonder whether you realize, small Princess—" Gwendolen began, then suddenly stopped. Her look, as she scrutinized the upturned face, was singular; her tone, more curious still. She closed her lips tightly now, as if to forbid the thought to come, shook her blonde head, and facing

back to the window tapped a hollow rhythm on the pane.

Yuki's cheeks grew hot. "Some one—some one need me, I think," she murmured, and literally ran from the room.

Prince Haganè, punctual to the instant, fresh from the hands of his man-servant, impressive, unforgettable, in dark native robes of silk, took his place at the head of the receiving line. Yuki wore a robe and obi of splendid brocade, too heavy for an unmarried woman, but now befitting the dignity of a peeress. The colors were her favorite gray and pink, shot through with threads of silver. In her dark hair were pink orchids, the living flowers. She wore no jewelry but a broad gold band on her wedding finger,—a concession to her Christian principles,—and a clasp to her obi-domè, or flat silken cord which holds the great folds in place. This clasp represented intertwined dragons. Like the ivory pin which she and Pierre had broken, it was an heirloom in her father's family.

The new kinswoman, little Princess Sada-ko, was to be near her, above Gwendolen in the line, but lower than the matron, Mrs. Todd. Mr. Todd had "begged off." So also had Yuki's parents. Onda, in fact, spurred by his dread of meeting foreigners, found good pretext for visiting a village nearly a day's ride away.

Guests had not begun to arrive. Even the Todds (Gwendolen had gone home two hours before to change her dress) had not yet made appearance. Haganè stood quietly in his place, and let his gaze move slowly through the changed and decorated rooms. The candles gleamed with intense yet softened brilliancy. In an adjoining parlor he could see the corner of a long table spread with rich food. Servants in livery moved about, noiseless as shadows. A distant door was opened. The flames of the candles leaned all one way, fretted a little, then stood upright. A few drops of wax trickled over to the floor. Instantly a servant came with knife and saucer to scrape up the hardening substance.

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The old Prince Shirota sat in a low chair near the fire, with a late American magazine on his silken knees. Iriya hovered near, devouring with proud eyes this vision of her daughter consorting on equal terms with princes. Servants stole everywhere, soft, sleek, gentle, like well-fed animals.

A curious expression grew in the eyes of Haganè. His mouth writhed into a harsh and ugly smile which did not pass. Yuki felt the change in him, glanced up, and shrank a few inches further from his side. He did not notice her. He had been reading, but a few hours before, the written report of a Japanese spy, one of the few who had escaped alive from the very citadel of Port Arthur. The conditions of that fortress were plainly stated: food in abundance, ammunition, men, stone walls practically impregnable, a brave man in command,—all things in Russian favor; and yet by Japanese life that stronghold must be taken, by death the national honor be restored. As their Emperor read, and laid the paper down, he had bent his head, as if praying, and one hand had covered his down-bent eyes. Haganè shivered at that memory. Hunger, privation, cold, the agony of wounds untended, the deeper agony of remembered little ones soon to be fatherless, praying now in distant mountain villages,—this must the Japanese know to full measure. Food and shelter in Manchuria could alleviate, and for such alleviation, money was the only aid. Food, clothing, shelter, ammunition! Why, the very candles fanning out a brief existence on these walls would feed a brave battalion for a week! The table yonder, spread with delicacies for foreigners already gorged,—that long table would bring peace nearer by a hundred cannon detonations. The outer world, civilization so-called, demanded that tawdry ostentation still show her front.

"My Lord—your Highness," whispered Yuki, barely touching his sleeve, "has aught offended you?"

He looked down into her anxious face. His noble scorn melted into sadness. "Nay, Yuki, I was but counting the lives of soldiers by these candles on the wall."

"Lord, so have I thought, even to the point of weeping; yet you had told me to make some display, to have things fair to look on."

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"I blame you not, my good child. There is no fault at all in you; yet the smell of that rich food sickens me. I long to be in the field with men; to share their handful of cold rice, their shred of salted fish. I hate the silk upon me, the soft rug at my feet, the smiling servants,—how can they smile? When the foreign manikins arrive, it will be hard fighting for me not to laugh at them,—to throw, like some stung cuttle-fish, the inky substance of my scorn—why should they laugh and feast? But, little one, I rave. You have never heard the old volcano growl before? Well, I shall be calm now; let us draw pink clouds about me, and set spring flowers among the fissures of my soul."

"I fear you not, my Lord, I but adore your spirit. I, too, in my weak woman's way, have had a thought. Shall we not purchase less rich food another time, and fewer candles? Instead, I shall buy thread and cloth and cotton. I will this very day invite the women here to weekly meeting for sewing. Princess Sada has been telling me that many are already started. We can make bandages, clothing, cover for your brave men. Into the texture we shall weave our very hearts. Tears of pity may, indeed, soothe the noble wounds no less than the ointment of our surgeons. Shall it not be so, my husband? May I speak to my friends to-day?"

Haganè had lifted one hand to his mouth while she made eager speech. It was steady enough when he answered. "You have pleased me, little one, greatly have you pleased me. I shall speak of this even to our Sacred Sovereigns."

Gwendolen came bounding in like a child. "Do you recognize me, Yuki?" she cried, pitching her long cloak backward. "Of course Prince Haganè would not."

She stood before the two, a shimmering vision of white, touched at intervals by gleams of primrose hue. Haganè smiled. "If I mistake not greatly, it is the entire costume worn by Miss Todd when first I was honored to make her acquaintance. You called the ball a *débutante's* I think."

"Heavens, Yuki, think of his remembering! I see now, Prince Haganè, that you are truly a great man. What on earth have you been doing to your prince?" she added in a lower tone, as Haganè stepped forward to greet Mr. and Mrs. Todd. "He doesn't look a day over thirty-five, and handsome—He is the noblest-looking man that ever I saw!"

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Mrs. Todd, resplendent in her favorite mauve satin, violently adorned in butter-colored lace, took her place next to Yuki. She liked well the importance of the position, yet kept furtive glances scurrying toward the door in outlook for Pierre and Mrs. Stunt. It was the apparition of the latter that she dreaded most. She trembled in recalling Mrs. Stunt's threat of forbidding and condemnatory conduct. "Not in Yuki's own house, my dear Mrs. Stunt," she had pleaded. "Don't go to the reception at all if you disapprove so of their behavior. Wait until you meet them outside." To this Mrs. Stunt had replied only by tight lips, and a glance of incorruptible virtue, as one who should say, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" Mrs. Todd envied her friend the rigidity of her moral nature.

Mrs. Stunt came among the very first. Although small in stature, she never failed to make herself conspicuous. She had acquired an air of patronage, of condescension. If a person or a group of persons continued to converse within the first few moments of her appearance, she had a way of looking at the offenders, of singling them out, that was never thereafter forgotten. On this occasion she was resplendent in a new gown of silvery gray silk, very tight as to bust and hip, and a trifle scanty as to skirt. A reason for this insufficiency showed in the yokes and sleeves of the Misses Stunt, lank, timid damsels of fifteen and thirteen respectively, who followed with unquestioning eyes their energetic mother. Each had a pinkish frock hung from a "guimpe" of silvery gray.

Kind-hearted Mrs. Todd literally held her breath as this important person bore, like a small nickel-plated naphtha launch, straight to the dark sea-rock of her host. The tight gray waist had the sheen of armor. Mrs. Todd watched for the steely reflection in her friend's bright eyes. They were now lifted to the face of Haganè. But no!—barbed lightnings did not flash admonition from their depths. Never were blue china beads more free from righteous indignation than those upraised orbs. She literally grovelled, first at the feet of Lord Haganè, then before his bride. Yuki received her gushing compliments with unsmiling lips. This made no difference. The Misses Stunt were then signalled to grovel.

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Mrs. Todd's mouth, opened in incredulity during this brief scene, had forgotten to close. Something like indignation tingled through her full veins. Was Mrs. Stunt after all the hypocrite Gwendolen said she was? "Mrs. Stunt!" she called eagerly. Surely some explanation could be made.

The valiant one swept by her with a nod. She gave but one short sentence, back-flung, "Dear Mrs. Todd, how very warm you're looking!"

Princess Sada, whose title Gwendolen took pains to enunciate distinctly, came in for her share of compliment. The American girl next her, half-angry, half-hysterical with suppressed laughter, was hastily whittling a mental arrow, her keen eye searching, meanwhile, for some weak spot in the self-love of her foe. Mrs. Stunt, scenting trouble,—her perceptions in this regard were canine,—would have avoided the girl, but farther down the line were more Japanese. Another princess might be stowed among them. Mrs. Stunt could not relinquish a possible princess. She gathered up her mantle of effrontery, and went to her doom.

"Oh, Mrs. Stunt, not that high, fashionable hand-shake between old friends," cried the clear, sweet voice. Guests now poured into the doors. Many paused to hear the next sound of that pleasing voice. "I can't tell you how glad I am that you have met at last my friend Yuki, the Princess Haganè! You have talked so much about her, and now you have really met. I saw Yuki's joy in the

meeting. You were intoxicating in your sincerity, dear Mrs. Stunt, a pewter-mug literally frothing with felicitations! Why, and here is Miss Stunt and Miss Leonora Stunt! Yes, I am glad to see you both; but move on, children; you must get mama to bring you with her on some of her frequent visits to the Legation!"

Mrs. Stunt carried her tarnished pewter bravely down the line. She was actually dull, leaden-toned with rage. It was not so much Gwendolen's impertinence that stung her, but the fact of the loud, clear voice, pitched for all to share. Whatever Mrs. Stunt's good opinion of herself, she could not but realize that most of those who overheard rejoiced in the Stunt humiliation.

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The moment she had spoken, Gwendolen regretted it. "A mean, tawdry, contemptible bit of revenge!" she muttered to herself. "I feel already nearly as vile as she." The girl looked up to meet her father's deep-set eyes. A pathetic little moue, a single pleading gesture, and the tenderness returned to them; but his first look rankled.

It had been decided between Mr. Todd and his daughter that he should remain near some door or window in the thick of arriving-time, where at each loud carriage entrance he could draw aside the drapery and try to recognize the equipage. When the French coat-of-arms appeared he was to signal Gwendolen. Of course Le Beau would accompany his chief. The two now were inseparable. The only plan which Gwendolen's thought had suggested was to intercept Pierre at the door, and with what wit and invention then came to her aid, try to separate him from his evil genius, Ronsard, and, if possible, keep him away from Yuki.

Dodge entered airily alone. He wore a crimson carnation in his buttonhole and dove-gray "spats" above his patent leather shoes. Seldom now did he accompany the Todd family to any social function. Gwendolen had been asked by her parents the cause of this sudden aloofness, and they had received in turn the ambiguous and not altogether respectful reply, "How should I know? Am I our secretary's keeper?"

Dodge paused now near the door through which he had entered. The rooms were filling rapidly. His clear, dog-like eyes of hazel brown threaded the crowd, resting the fraction of an instant on each form. He searched, apparently, for some special object. Gwendolen, in her pretty débutante's gown which should, by rights, have evoked pensive memories, received but the usual light stroke of observation. The brown eyes shot on past her, swept around the walls, came back to the door where the owner of them stood, and then turned about to the entrance hall. "Ah!" said Dodge, under his breath. The eagerness of the sound carried it to Gwendolen's ear. She saw him disappear. A moment later he re-entered with Carmen Gil y Niestra, languid and beautiful, in cream lace and crimson carnations.

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The two young people came down the line together. Yuki gazed with some curiosity on the face of the Spanish girl. Gwendolen waited for them. She held herself like a young Empress receiving coronation felicitations. The white débutante's dress seemed to become alive as Dodge neared it. One long tulle fold streamed after him as he went by. Gwendolen caught at it angrily.

Mr. Todd touched his daughter on the shoulder. She slipped out quietly to the hall-way, threw on the long dark cloak she had left there for the purpose, and was in the doorway before the French barouche had entirely stopped. Pierre issued first, and without having observed her, stood ready to assist his chief. He gave a nervous start as Gwendolen touched him. "Let the count go in alone," she pleaded. "I must speak with you."

The minister now emerged, a pendulous and unstable bulk. Gwendolen flew to his side. He looked into a face vital with excitement, hurt pride, vague apprehension. Her eyes were fairly black, her usually pale cheeks, red as Carmen's flowers. Her beauty smote the old sensualist with delight. "Mon Dieu, Mademoiselle, but you are lovely," he murmured partly to himself. Ignoring physical disadvantages, he paused to make her a deep and courtly bow, his hand pressed reverently upon that portion of his torso where, beneath layers of unhealthy fat, squatted the small toad of his heart with the cross of the Legion of Honor about its neck.

"I am glad that you think me lovely at this moment," said the girl, coquettishly, swallowing hard her rising disgust. "I want you to help me. Please go in without Pierre. Do not let the usher call his name just yet. I must speak alone with him."

Count Ronsard's admiration was supplemented by a shrewd and contaminating look. He and Pierre crossed glances. The minister bowed again, this time with less ceremony. "Whatever beauty asks is already granted."

He whispered something to a servant who had stepped up to take Pierre's place. The servant hurried in before. Ronsard climbed heavily, alone, the two stone steps of the portico. Gwendolen had drawn near Le Beau, when the bawl of the usher, in a voice unusually loud and distinct, arrested her. "His Excellency Count Ronsard, Minister of France, Monsieur Pierre Le Beau, Second Secretary to the French Legation."

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Gwendolen caught her breath. Her eyes began to blaze. At this instant Count Ronsard, now on the top step, gave a cry, tottered, and would have fallen but for Pierre's agile spring.

"My ankle, my infernal ankle! I have sprained, perhaps broken it!" he groaned aloud in English. "Your arm, my son, I cannot walk alone."

Thus supported, he limped heavily into the drawing-room. Yuki hurried to meet him. A low cushioned chair was wheeled for his convenience. He dominated at once the entire assemblage. Formal greetings ceased. Half a dozen different nationalities crowded in to inquire about the accident. He and Pierre took turns in explanation. French, German, Spanish, Italian, English, Japanese, each was answered courteously in his own tongue. Yuki sent upstairs to her medicine-case for bandages and liniment; but this attention the gallant count repelled. His boot would keep the swelling down, he said, until the sick chamber of his own house could be reached.

Gwendolen let fall her cloak in the hall way; whoever would might rescue it. Slowly she entered the drawing-room, paused near the interesting group about the sufferer, and stood watching, her whole slight frame in a hot tingle with impotent anger. No mark of pain rested on the flabby countenance of Ronsard. Pierre looked far more ill. This fact but added to Gwendolen's uneasiness. Yuki had a tender heart for human suffering. She heard the count's brave self-control admired, and her disgust turned to a mental nausea. For the moment no counter-stroke occurred to her. Even the keen eyes of Prince Haganè were, apparently, deceived. He stood near the Frenchman expressing grave concern. Yuki, perforce, remained within calling of her afflicted guest. Haganè at length moved off. Pierre, Ronsard, and Yuki were together, a meeting that Gwendolen had striven against, and plotted to prevent. Gwendolen fancied that her schoolmate already turned more wan, that she trembled and shrank from the low words that were spoken. She was a white dove picked upon by vultures. Mrs. Stunt stood across the room gleaning items with her steely gaze.

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Discomfited, utterly worsted, Gwendolen trailed slow steps down the lighted vista. She longed for her father, but now he and Prince Haganè had begun to talk. A vacant window, half-hidden in trailing vines, allured her. She hurried to it, threw aside the curtain, and looked out into the deepening twilight. All of this fair March day had been blue and windless. The night was a bowl of liquid sapphire, a deep aerial sea into which the house had been lowered, like a great illuminated bell. So tangible, so intense, was the outer blueness that it seemed to Gwendolen, should she lift the sash an inch, a gentian tide must gurgle in through the fissure, steal along the wall to the shadowy floor, and silently fill the long rooms with a purple flood.

That moment brought to the girl her first tinge of worldly bitterness. Heretofore, with the one exception of her quarrel, things had seemed naturally to come right just because she wished it. Even in dreams, things always came right for her. Now, by some shabby turn of fortune, the reverse was true; failure marked every effort. Being young, healthy, and totally unacquainted with real sorrow, it was inevitable that she should luxuriate in an imaginary despair. She stared into the night, envying its cool blue depths of silence and oblivion. She raised long lashes to the stars, gleaming faintly now like small phosphorescent mushrooms springing on a damp blue field, and wondered, sighing, whether on those distant planets lived any girl so miserable as she.

"Miss Todd," murmured a low voice. She wheeled back to the lighted room with a gesture so sudden that two large tears splashed upon her cheeks. Dodge stood beside her half-abashed, altogether eager, deeply flushed by the late battle with his pride. Gwendolen's heart gave a bound toward him, then sank down whimpering. The girl, too, felt an overwhelming need for tears. One kind word more from Dodge, one faint concession on her part, and she must surrender utterly, bend down with her face hidden, and sob out her anxieties and her relief. Oh, if they were but alone, and she could "make up" as she longed to do! But now, because all eyes might turn to them, because she had not the self-control to explain, his tenderness must be met by scorn, in self-protection she must lash herself to stoicism by blows rained on him. She drew herself upright. He could not see how feverishly one primrose-colored hand clutched the window-frame. "You have—mis-taken your—corner, Mr. Dodge," she jerked out in a voice that needed to balance every word, like an acrobat on a wire. "Miss Niestra is, I think, in another part of the room."

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"I have, as you say, mistaken the corner. I shall not offend again," said Dodge.

The girl's heart called out after him. She bit her lips to keep back the gush of tears. "Now he will hate me forever and ever! He'll never want to speak to me again," she told herself. She threw her head back, and stepped out into the light. Scrutiny would help to steady her. Count Ronsard still held court, his two attendants being Pierre and Yuki. Gwendolen's generous heart flared into new anger for her friend. "What are my stings to Yuki's!" she cried to herself. "Those two men are devils to torture a woman as I know they are doing!" Gwendolen felt a sense of returning energy. She had found a definite task.

Count Ronsard, who flattered himself that he understood all women, to whom raw débutantes were as glass candy jars in a village shop-window, felt a little surprise, perhaps even a little excitement, as Gwendolen, smiling like a tall white angel, bore down upon him, and announced, in her sweetest voice, that she had come to "keep him company." Enlightenment and a challenge lay

in her two next sentences. "Bring me that footstool, Pierre. Yuki, darling, let me take your place now as ministering angel to the count. Other guests may need you."

Like a snowy bird of Paradise flecked with gold, she perched beside the caged Frenchman. He saw through her feint as clearly as she had seen through his. Having avowed himself incapable of walking, he had no choice but to remain where he was, or to return home. In sheer intellectual delight at the girl's wit and daring, he yielded himself to her snare. Her sentences enwrapped him in bright skeins. Excitement gave her pungency. She realized that she had never talked so well, and even in the midst of it regretted that it had to be wasted on an "old pig." Pierre hovered about sullenly until released by a nod from his chief. No further speech did he obtain with Yuki. Gwendolen noted, with malicious satisfaction, how close the young wife kept to her husband's side, how tenderly the great man leaned and spoke with her. Together they now moved through the crowded rooms, delivering invitations to the sewing-meeting on the following Monday, the first to be held. The air of the room crackled to eager acceptances. Mrs. Stunt's was the explosion of a small torpedo. Tranquillity and her usual pale-rose flush came back to the face of the little princess. Gwendolen's sparkling eyes jeered light into those of Count Ronsard. The man was a great man in his distorted way. As yet life's greatest values were, for him, of the mind. Rising at last with ostentatious and smothered groans, as he prepared to limp to his waiting carriage, he gave the girl her meed of praise. "Mademoiselle," he said gravely, "it would be a happy day for France were you to become the wife of one of her diplomats."

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"Merci," said Gwendolen, with a French curtsy. "The profession allures me, but—an American diplomat will be good enough for me!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

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A SHORT whispered colloquy between Haganè, the little Princess Sada-ko, and Yuki, during the reception, a few days before, resulted in the decision that the Japanese ladies should be asked to come quite early to the sewing party; the foreign contingent to be bidden later, about one in the afternoon. To all Japanese the early hours of the day are best. Yuki knew that this was not the case with foreigners. Besides, to have served a hot foreign luncheon to an indefinite number of guests would have taken from the purpose of such a meeting most of its charitable intent, and, very likely, all of the material profit. The simplest of Japanese collations,—a bowl of thin fish soup, rice, tea, a fairy dish of pickles, one sweetmeat, maybe, this could be served with propriety to the Empress herself, had that gracious lady been present. These women worked for their own hero soldiers, for their own adored Nippon. Their utmost efforts were privileges; what the foreign ladies gave might, among themselves, be considered alms.

When all had arrived, that is, the foreigners as well as Japanese, they were to be given for entertainment, music of the two worlds. First, English songs from a charming soprano, a Mrs. Wyndham of Yokohama, justly celebrated in the East, as in her own land, for an unusually pure and lovely voice. For Japanese they were to have improvisation and martial chanting from a Satsuma biwa player, a court musician in highest favor with their Majesties. The lending of him to Yuki for this meeting had been a royal answer to Haganè's modest statement of his young wife's plan.

The Japanese ladies, mostly of the noble class, began to arrive before the blue morning mists had quite lifted from the long, gleaming surfaces of castle moats; before the wild white herons, perching on great down-sweeping arms of castle pines, had warmed their chilly feathers to the skin; before the budding cherry-boughs had dared unfold a single dripping leaf. By eight o'clock that end of the huge upstairs hall set apart for their exclusive use had few vacant places. The Japanese ladies brought scissors, thimble, and needles; material and thread were contributed by Prince Haganè. Yuki's mother was among the first. Iriya grew younger and prettier with each day, in this new pride and happiness won through her only child. She had not brought the servants. Yuki insisted that they be sent for. They came as upon the chariot of the wind, released by a gruff sound of acquiescence from their master, their blue sleeves flying horizontally in the morning air. Little Maru, whose excessive love for candy kept her in a condition of pink rotundity, gasped joyously for breath. "Ma-a-a!" she cried at first sight of a courtyard filled with crested kuruma; and "Ma-a-a!" again, as she tripped on the top step and fell full-length into the hall; and "Ma-a-a!" once more as the obliging butler stooped to rescue her, until Suzumè, frowning heavily, called her a bean-curd, and bade her cease exclaiming.

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It was a gentle company that worked in the upper hall. Shining black heads bent as one above tumultuous yards of white cotton cloth. The peculiar odor of cambric and unbleached domestic was mixed with Japanese perfumes of sandalwood and incense, and with the unique aroma of hair-oil made from camellia berries. Work went on steadily. Great white towers of bandages were finished, and removed by servant-maids, who staggered, laughed, and joked softly, as they bore the tottering burdens to the packing-room downstairs. Sounds of hammer and nails arose as the

packages went into boxes. They could hear workmen haggling over the spelling of certain Manchurian addresses.

In the big hall the nobly-born seamstresses talked, smiled, raised eyebrows, nodded, shook their heads over bad news, and gave small, half-finished exclamations over good, much as a roomful of Western women might have done. The fortunes of war dominated interest. Bereavement had already fallen upon more than one of the gentle company. Death was spoken of quite simply, with no affectation of distress. Universal contempt was expressed for a certain young widow who had been coarse and self-centred enough to faint at her husband's tomb. "Hirotsunè's spirit must have covered his eyes with shame at that sight, and thanked the gods she had borne him no son," said an elderly aunt of the dead hero, Hirotsunè.

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But not all the conversation was of war. The rise in the price of provisions was commented upon by anxious housewives. In all cases the household expenses had been cut down, and the money deflected to the national treasury. This seemed as natural to them all as that water should flow. "The poor food makes, of course, no difference to us who are adult, or to our boy children," murmured one sweet-faced matron. "But sometimes the babes, and the very old servants, grumble a little at having barley mixed with their rice." Fashions, since no one thought of buying new gowns, was, for once in a female gathering, utterly ignored. Gossip concerning foreign residents, especially women, remained, as usual, an engrossing theme. The latest Yokohama and Tsukijii scandals were whispered, not without zest. These high-nosed, fierce-looking creatures of their own sex were a source of constant marvelling to Japanese women. "Kitsui" (mannish) they were called, as the extreme of disapprobation. Yuki defended them, and gave a softer coloring to some of the alleged misdeeds. Gwendolen she cited as an example of a Western girl who must, in her past incarnations, have been entirely Japanese. The guests listened politely, but Yuki read skepticism on their calm faces.

During the long forenoon not once was a voice raised or a loud laugh heard. Yet not one face ever lapsed into indifference. One might have gained from the resilient poise of slender throats an impression of yielding strength. Their chatter was a murmur, with tripping, short interludes of sound, and cooing, long-drawn vowels soft as their own white hands. They were a flock of gray doves in a sheltered niche. Never, one would have said, were creatures more tender, more feminine, more dependent. So would a foreigner have thought, to see them; but a Japanese knows the truth. Not a woman there but might be the child, the parent, the wife of a hero. Many had looked calmly on death. Not one among them would falter at the extremest test of heroic sacrifice, and should the call come, this little sewing band would rise, arm itself with swords, and deal what desperate death it could upon intruding enmity, before at last plunging sharp surrender into its own brave heart.

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At noon the Japanese meal was served. After it came a little pause of rest, enlivened by smoking from small gold pipes, and the drinking of added cups of tea. Just before one o'clock the sewing was resumed. Then the little silk-clad ladies waited, in deeper agitation than they would have felt in facing Kuropatkin, for the coming of their foreign friends.

Mrs. Todd was punctual almost to the minute. With her came Gwendolen and Mrs. Stunt. A slight coolness now existed between the two elder ladies. Mrs. Stunt's explanation that her effusiveness to the Haganè was merely "sarcasm" had failed to convince even so trustful a nature as Mrs. Todd. Coolness, however, did not keep Mrs. Stunt from a neighborhood where she might derive profit.

She had walked on foot to the Legation, declaring that her jinrikisha-man was shockingly drunk, and had begged a seat in the American carriage. It was, of course, given, and by the time Yuki's residence was reached the artful one had regained some of her lost favor with Mrs. Todd, and deepened the loathing of the silent Gwendolen.

The three came up the stairs together, their foreign shoes pounding in unison, causing the huge, badly constructed house to rattle at every window.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Todd, as she lifted her lorgnette to survey the long hall and the gathered company, "a regular sewing-bee, isn't it? And I see, Yuki, you've got the piano upstairs, after all. I didn't believe you'd get it up those steps."

Yuki had, of course, met them at the door. She and Gwendolen fell, through force of habit, far in the wake of the bustling dame. Mrs. Stunt kept well beside the leader. The two girls clasped hands shyly, and looked at each other with side glances, like happy children in the first embarrassment of play. Many of the Japanese ladies lifted glances of interest to the tall blonde girl. This must be she of whom the Princess Haganè had spoken, the girl with the face of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu,—with the strayed soul of a Nipponese. She wore this afternoon a simple costume of golden-brown silk. It was just the transition tone between her golden hair and the darker brows and lashes. A wide hat of bronze-colored velvet piled high with paler plumes balanced itself on her delicate head. Bronze-colored gloves ran up the slender arms to the elbow, where the sleeves fell away in a deep pointed ruff. A belt of dull yellow shark's skin and bronze boots completed the costume. The seated women, ignoring the advancing bulk of Madame Todd,

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the restless insistency of her companion, let smiling eyes rest on Gwendolen, then nodded to each other, and exchanged glances, as if in corroboration of Yuki's previous words.

"I am keeping seats for your party, dear Mrs. Todd, over there by that most sunshine window," said Yuki. "Please see that a chair is held for Mrs. Wyndham, who is so very kind to sing for us. Ah, I hear many peoples arriving. I see Mrs. Wyndham now. I will advance to her." Yuki hurried off, and soon returned with the prima donna, whom she delivered into Mrs. Todd's efficient hands.

"My *dear* Mrs. Wyndham," cried that lady. "Oh, I beg pardon. Mrs. Stunt, Mrs. Wyndham; my daughter, Miss Todd, Mrs. Wyndham. I didn't realize that you had not met Miss Todd."

"I called at your Legation last Tuesday,—the proper day, I am sure,—but failed to see Miss Todd," said the Englishwoman, stiffly.

Mrs. Todd flushed crimson. Mrs. Stunt turned away to hide her satisfaction. A public slight to Gwendolen generally meant, for Mrs. Todd, attempted annihilation of the offender. She turned angered eyes to Mrs. Wyndham, and would have spoken, but Gwendolen pressed her arm. "No, mother dear, don't defend me; I deserve it. Let me speak. Mrs. Wyndham, I am mother's despair at the Legation. I forget reception-days half the time. I—I—" here she lowered her voice to a delicious, confidential whisper, "the fact is I—I *shirk* them. So many old frumps, you know! It's getting to be a regular hen-roost. But, honest, I am sorry I was out last Tuesday, and I want you to give me another chance." Gwendolen could generally be irresistible when she chose. Now she chose not only to win Mrs. Wyndham, to whose high-bred English face she had taken an instant liking, but to deal another blow to her enemy Mrs. Stunt.

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In both efforts she was successful, though Mrs. Wyndham did not capitulate all at once. The sparkling hazel eyes and the gray ones met. Suspicion lived a little longer in the latter. "Please," murmured Gwendolen. Suspicion died. "I am always at home on my Wednesdays," said the Englishwoman.

"I'll be there," laughed Gwendolen. "Have me a place set at your breakfast-table!"

Yuki had vanished to perform her duties of hostess. Mrs. Todd and her small party took the "sunshine" seats, and a Japanese lady whom they had not met brought them foreign sewing materials. Work had not begun with them when a low, plaintive voice leaned to Mrs. Todd's large ear. "Please, please, help me in all ways you can, dear Mrs. Todd. This is much worse than that reception I held downstairs. So many foreign ladies are come,—and they all look at everybody so very hard! Ask kind Mrs. Wyndham to sing just as soon as she are ready, and soon, please."

Mrs. Wyndham rose instantly, and looked with composure over the sea of lifted heads. Every chair was now taken, and servants brought up new ones from the rooms downstairs. She was used to audiences, also to commendation. In her hands she held a roll of music. Mrs. Wyndham was one of those colonists—a large class in the Far East—who never forgive Japan for not being England. She emphasized her homesickness by withdrawal from all native interests, except, as now, when she could give pleasure and assistance by her voice. It was her pride that she ate no Japanese products. Everything on her table was "imported." Even her garden held only English flowers. That great sea of spiritual and physical beauty which lies in Japanese character, and in its environment, was to her nonexistent. Such dwellers in the East are like children who, in springtime, search the grass for fallen apples, and never once lift their disappointed faces to the pink canopy of bloom.

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As may be inferred, all Japanese music was, to Mrs. Wyndham and her intimate associates, mere squeaking, caterwauling, an excruciating discord. She spoke constantly of "civilized" music. She was fond of referring to the English school of harmony. She was exaggerated in her use of English method.

"Shall I be compelled to play my own accompaniment?" now asked Mrs. Wyndham. Her pretty face showed concern.

"If the music is not too hard I will try," said Gwendolen, springing from her chair, while scissors and thimble fell clattering to the floor. She gave the fallen articles a contemptuous glance, and, without a motion to rescue them, followed Mrs. Wyndham to the piano.

A group of young Japanese girls, put in a corner to themselves, exchanged looks of delight, and began to titter like wrens. "How much do the ways of the honorable foreign scissors and thimble resemble those of Japanese scissors and thimble!" they confided one to another.

"My thimble generally rolls off the veranda and buries itself among pebbles. I think it possesses an imp!" laughed one.

"Mine goes always into the red coals of the hibachi," giggled another.

"That is precisely the conduct of my worthless article," added a third. "The water-kettle has to

be taken aside, and grandmother scowls. Then we all dig for the thimble with the copper fire-sticks. When we find it, it is quite black, and—Ma-a-a!—so hot, that it must be dropped at once into cold water, where it hisses like the head of a small serpent."

"Now what shall I sing for such a crowd as this?" mused Mrs. Wyndham, as she shuffled the loose leaves of her music. Her words had the sound of inner meditation.

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"What would the Japanese like best?" asked Gwendolen, in a low tone.

"Oh, my *dear!* I wasn't thinking of them!" protested the other. "They are incapable of appreciating any real music. I was thinking of our foreign friends."

"Yuki Haganè is a Japanese. She loves the best music. Brahms is almost a passion with her. She says that he sounds like the wind in pine-trees, high above a great battle."

"Oh, Brahms!" said the other. "I never sing Brahms. He is too harsh and unpoetic. These bellowing contraltos affect him. As for me, I must have something light, poetic, full of melody."

"Here is our American McDowell," murmured Gwendolen, and bent her face that its expression might not be seen. "Being patriotic by profession I plead for McDowell."

"You do not consider him,—over their heads?" asked the Englishwoman, dubiously.

"Oh, well, you can give them Sullivan next time, and bring down the average!" Mrs. Wyndham bent a suspicious look, but Gwendolen's lifted gaze was that of a seraph over a last harp note. "I'll try McDowell. Can you play the accompaniment?"

"I can at least attempt it," said Gwendolen, meekly, and forthwith rippled out the prelude with an ease that further deepened suspicion.

The song began with a single note, long sustained, the voice striking in abruptly among hurrying chords. Mrs. Wyndham's beautiful voice took it like a star. Suddenly, with another upward swerve, the note wavered, passed into a new kindling as into the life of a bird, and swept along on higher currents with motionless, outspread wings.

The foreign ladies exchanged glances of rapture. The Japanese workers, on the other hand, stared first in astonishment, then with growing apprehension. Surely this was not singing! Something must be going wrong with the honorable insides of the kind lady! They stole timid looks toward their hostess, and by her calm, interested face were reassured. Still the piercing note went higher. The singer's throat swelled slightly, and her face turned red. From the group of Japanese girls one hysterical chuckle escaped. That set off the whole lot. Staid matrons bowed convulsed faces to folds of cotton cloth; silken sleeves came into requisition. A few of the foreign ladies looked about and frowned. Yuki half rose from her chair.

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Now, fortunately, the highest note was reached. It broke its flight with a great twitter of wings. The bars of a staccato love-song began. Again the Japanese women stared, but now in admiration as well as wonder. Never were singing notes so light, so delicate, so silvery! As the song ended (and indeed it had been exquisitely given), the foreign ladies burst into simultaneous applause. Led by the bolder among them, the Japanese followed suit.

"Oh, we can't let you stop at *that*, dear Mrs. Wyndham," came Mrs. Stunt's high, rasping voice. "Won't you give us that lovely thing of Goo-nowd's you sung at our last Charity concert?" Mrs. Wyndham consented. After Gounod it was an English ballad, then another and another, until at length the singer, with pretty petulance, turned from the piano saying that she had already monopolized too much time. A great buzzing of thanks and congratulations surged about her. No expression of admiration was too exaggerated. In fact there was none that pretty Mrs. Wyndham had not heard many times before. She accepted these tributes now, as usual, with deprecating smiles, and little protesting shakes of the head, finally declaring that they would make her conceited if they didn't stop.

No one noticed the American girl, still at the piano. She gave a swift look around, and seeing that the biwa player had not come, began whispering to the keys the first notes of one of Chopin's most delicate fantasies. Like the down on a moth's wing, it came. Like crystal raindrops, then, mixed with the perfume of bruised petals, and sometimes the distant yearning of a bird. This was music that even the untutored Japanese girls could feel. It held the sound of their own koto strings, —it breathed whispers of their own trees, and winds, and sighing sea-stretches. Gradually all voices in the room ceased. Faster the notes came, though still with a suggestion of whispering. Gwendolen's white hands became a misty blur. The theme drew closer, with now a wind-driven swish of rain and scurrying petals; now the nearer cry of a bird, and a low under-rhythm of human sorrow. The sounds whirled and lifted into melodious agitation. The caged bird seemed to give low plaints of fear; the wind and the rain drove close, dashed into the face of silence, and drew back. Then all sounds died away in waves of exhausted sobbing. Gwendolen sprang up, leaving the piano

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vibrant. She hurried to the nearest window, turning her face from all in the room.

Mrs. Wyndham was the first to speak. Her light laugh had an artificial sound. "And to think, my dear, that I insisted upon knowing whether you could manage my accompaniments!"

Gwendolen did not heed. She was tingling with the excitement and unrest that Chopin's music so often brought her. Yuki came softly, slipping a little scarred hand into that of her friend.

"I hate Chopin!" cried the American girl, in a low, angry voice. "I wonder why I keep on playing him! Every time I say I won't, and then I go and do it! He is morbid, he is childish, he is French! One sees his weak chin quiver, and the tears roll down his cheek! He wants you to see them. I hate him, I say! But, oh, he is a compelling genius!"

"Yes, he do like every one to see him when he cries. But when I hear him I think, 'Oh, what must it be to a person's soul to be able to cry such tears of music!'"

A sound at the main entrance-door caused the little hostess to turn. "Ah, there is the Satsuma biwa player! I must now go to him. He, too, makes tears, Gwendolen, but of a different sort. Perhaps you will not wish to cry for him. You may even think him to be funny, as many of the Japanese ladies thought Mrs. Wyndham's beautiful singing to be funny. You must not try to stay,—you and Mrs. Todd,—if it will tire you."

As she hurried away Mrs. Wyndham drew slowly near. "You naughty one! I shall owe you a grudge for this. You are not to be forgiven until you promise to come often—often—and let us play sometimes together. You are a genius!"

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"Not quite that, I think," said Gwendolen, smiling. "Though, indeed, I have never known a friend to take music's place, except Yuki; and now that she is a princess, I suppose I can't feel her to be so much my own. I shall love to come to you and play. Your voice is like sunshine on an English fountain."

"Ah!" said the other, "what a charming speech! No man could say anything half so pretty! Now, as reward, I am going to give you a piece of valuable advice." She leaned confidentially near. "Make your escape while you can." She nodded significantly toward the biwa player, who, with Yuki beside him, stood shrinkingly in the doorway. "I've heard him once,—or one like him. It is what you Americans might call 'the limit!'"

"You mean for me to go? But I have never heard any Japanese music at all!" protested Gwendolen.

"Oh, in that case—" said Mrs. Wyndham, with her delicate shrug. "If you care for the experience!" She hurried off with many protestations of regret. Several other ladies followed her example.

The biwa player now stood beside the piano. Two Japanese tatami (padded straw mats six feet in length) were brought in and placed upon the floor. Before inviting him to be seated Yuki made a hesitating little speech to the company, first in English, then in Japanese, saying to the foreigners that while the music to come would doubtless be strange, and possibly displeasing to them, to her and her compatriots it was a trumpet-call to heroism. "It stirs our blood to every drop!" she cried, forgetting, for the instant, her shyness. "It echoes to the brave deeds of a thousand years ago,—it foretells deeds more greater that may come! It is the crying of strong souls, it is breath of our fathers' Gods!"

Gwendolen, in that vague sort of way in which impressions of alien customs are formed, had believed all male musicians in Japan to be blind. Some one had told her so, or she had read it. She was surprised, therefore, and interested, to see in this famous singer of battle-hymns a young man, indeed almost a boy, with thin, shaven face, tumultuous black hair not too closely or evenly cut, tossed in thick locks all over his well-poised head; and eyes, large, straight, expressive, and brilliant enough to be the ornament of a young French or Italian seigneur. He showed a slight embarrassment, at first, in the presence of so many women. He was used to the audience of statesmen, to the flashing response of Majesty. Here were not only Japanese girls, mere children, but a great company of high-nosed, pink and purple foreigners. Saturated as he was, made up of lore and legend, with songs of the Lady Sakanouyè, or of Ono no Komachi never far from his lips, even Gwendolen's bright beauty seemed a trifle abnormal, bleached, repellent.

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Now his hostess, the young Princess Haganè, looked into his eyes, and spoke to him in their own tongue. "Be not concerned, honorable sir, at the presence of foreign women! They cannot understand your words, of course; but I am sure they will listen courteously. As for us,—we Japanese women,—we are the wives, the daughters, the mothers of heroes. Our frail lives toss as thin flames on the altar of prayer. We cannot fight, we can only pray and work. Sing strength to us as we minister to distant soldiers dying, perhaps on barren fields, or heaped, dead, in the ploughed siege-trenches of this fearful war!"

His deep eyes seemed to drink of her inspiration, so long was the gaze with which he held her. "I am honored to sing at your bidding," he answered. He had forgotten to bow at the words. He forgot that she was a princess. He recognized her as a spirit. Forever after this slight girl, seen but once, became one of the poet's galaxy of pale, pure stars. For years he could not sing of the death-struggle of the Heikè clan without a vision of her prophetic eyes.

He took his seat very slowly on the soft straw mat. Yuki withdrew, and became lost among her guests. The biwa, a large lute in the shape of half a pear, had been held, all this time, closely against the young man's breast. Now, in taking his seat, the instrument was extended to the full length of his right arm. It gave out, under his close grasp, a sleepy hum. For an instant only it was placed apart from him, on the mat, that he might spread and smooth the knees of his silken robe, draw his stiff sleeves into exact angles, and adjust the low kimono collar. Then he turned impatiently again to the lute. It murmured to him; he drew it close, smiling as a mother upon her babe.

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"Ain't he handsome for a Jap?" whispered Mrs. Stunt to Gwendolen. The girl winced. She was studying him in her own way. His manner, just before beginning, was aloof and reserved, as if he were restating to himself consecration to service. The Japanese women, even the oldest, gazed upon him with deep reverence.

"Beethoven may have smiled like that, or St. Francis of Assisi," thought Gwendolen. "It is a look, not of race, but of immortality."

The player's head lifted slightly. He was losing consciousness of material presences. His part was with the unseen world; he must draw down currents of a mighty past, and send them as new streams of influence, on through a menaced future. For he was to improvise, not to repeat. His theme alone was set,—a most heroic incident of civil wars, resulting in extermination of a dominating clan. The annihilation of the Heikè might give him text, but the flow of rhythmic words should vibrate, thrill, moan, quicken, purl, or shatter, as the mood of the moment might demand. Doubtless in this pause he was invoking, in full faith, the souls of those dead heroes; offering them possession of his human frame, and entreating higher gods to make him worthy of the test.

His low voice and the first three slow notes rose together. The minor quality suggested lamentation. A short passage, rapidly chanted without accompaniment, made the hearts of the listeners beat a little faster. Then voice and instrument clashed together; both whirled nearer, until, all at once,—silence! The player looked about the room in bewilderment. He stared down upon the biwa. He closed his eyes and swayed slightly backward, then forward, then back again. Suddenly he reopened his eyes. They were larger, more brilliant; they flashed a new fire, the glare of battle reflected in their depths. Words now came rapidly. His sentences fell of themselves into long, unstable rhythms. Cadences were lacking. All phrasing, except in rarest intervals, broke into the air with a sob, a sigh, a shuddering gasp. Often now the biwa strings were slashed across by the ivory plectrum, and the human wail rang through vibrating response. Then voice and strings plunged into a seeming discord, a frantic wrack of sound exorcised an instant later by pure calm notes struck separately, like the drip of slow water.

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In the sense of Western harmony there was none, but something in the weird vibrations of long notes, the intricacies of overtone, and, above all, the unbelievable subtleties of rhythm, gave to one eager American listener, at least, her first insight into a new world of sound. "They are nearer in this, as in all their other arts, to nature," she thought to herself. "They summon the very essences of being, and find skeins for entangling them. Without conscious representation, they suggest to the human ear the lisp of sea winds, the flutter of fire, the rushing monologue of mountain streams. They hear sounds we Westerners never hear. I believe the very mists are audible."

As the emotion increased and the subject became more martial, the time of the music grew rapid, broken, syncopated, involved. Soft, melodious passages shattered into jarring notes. Like European troubadours of France, or the meistersingers of mediæval Germany, he yielded himself to the unconscious swing of impulse, and sang what was given him. Lines shortened. Syllables became more staccato. It was dramatic, undidactic—the deeds rather than the thoughts of men. His diction became more simple and direct, with sharp, incisive verbs at the end that rang like smitten steel. His whole body, at times, was shaken. After some terrific passage, while the sobbing lute-strings sustained the passion, his body would bend over and down, as if, in its abandonment to joy, grief, or battle ardor, it would hug the instrument that had become its soul.

Now he sang of the hero youth, Atsumori, of his insistence upon honorable death at the hand of his conqueror, Kumagayè.

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"The Hour of the Hare comes at last, and the red sun advances,

Raised like a cry and a shield in the mists of the morning,

"Warriors and chiefs and the dauntless brave youth Atsumori

Drive to the sea all the hordes of the sweating red demons."

The dove-gray garments of the Japanese women, folded so modestly across seemingly quiet breasts, began to stir and palpitate. More than one tear fell upon the bandages. Yuki's face, set now unflinchingly upon the singer, grew ever more white; her long eyes burned, and trembled apart. Unconsciously she went close to him, and, kneeling upon the hard floor, drank of his voice. The group of Japanese maidens hid faces in their bright sleeves. The air stirred and tingled with invisible influences. Gwendolen began to shiver like an animal which knows not its own source of fear. The charged atmosphere, the face, the voice of the singer, Yuki's great glowing eyes, swept in her soul strained chords of unknown feeling. She felt in herself the vibrations of that trembling lute. In its cell a soul, just wakened, fumbled at a new discovered latch. "Surely it must be reincarnation," whispered the girl. "Surely I have felt and seen all this before! Yuki and I together have listened; that look was on her face. Yuki!" The cry was scarcely a whisper. Yuki, many feet away, could not possibly have heard, yet instantly she turned,—the eyes, night-black and hazel, caught and clung together, with half ghostly memories that were the same.

"Hissed there the sea with the scorching of steel and of passion,

Rolled up the clouds from the sky and the shore in a tumult,

There on the sand lies the body of young Atsumori."

One great crashing across the strings, "like the tearing of brocade," and the singer's head fell forward,—his frame trembled and shrank, he quivered into stillness. Yuki half crawled to him, holding out a protecting arm, and facing her guests like a young tigress. "Do not any one speak. Do not crowd about him," she cried in English. "His soul will be weary from the long journey."

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The Japanese women understood, and returned quietly to their sewing. The foreigners tittered, shrugged, and exchanged glances, then they, too, began to work. A servant brought tea to the singer, and a glass of cold water. At length he stretched out a trembling hand to the latter, and having finished the draught, rose quietly and went from the room, with Yuki close behind. A few moments later Gwendolen heard her returning, unaccompanied, along the hall. She went out to meet her, thankful indeed for the privilege of a few words alone.

"Yuki-ko," she faltered, "I just wanted to say that at last I understand,—I think I understand entirely."

Yuki, still half in the world of shadows, gave her a strange look. "You understand, Gwendolen? Is it my marriage you speak of?"

"Oh, so much more than that!" cried the other, with a little sob. "Had you been what the conventional foreigner calls 'faithful,' you would have been the most faithless girl in all the world!"

"You are a wonderful friend," said Yuki. Her voice had the strange quality of her look. Both had caught the rhythm of low martial chanting. "But even you, my Gwendolen, did not hear or understand it all. There is tragedy before me. You did not hear that in the music?"

"I thought I heard it, darling, but I shut my ears! I shall not believe. We can compel even tragedy, Yuki. Nothing can harm you with Haganè's love!"

"It is of that the tragedy come. But do not trouble. If I can serve Nippon, I ask no more of this life."

"Yuki, what can you mean?" cried the other, holding her back.

"Hush, dearest; do not trouble," smiled Yuki. "See, the guests turn their heads to listen. I must go to them. I have no fear at all."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

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THROUGHOUT the months of March and early April this strange hiatus in war bulletins hung, like a gray sky, above national enthusiasm. The more dignified of the newspapers still adjured the populace to patience, still exhorted them to have faith in their wise and careful leaders. "The

Hawk's Eye," on the other hand, bereft of inflammatory battle themes, served up, with new condiment of ingenious suggestion, the personal gossip of the hour. Few of the weekly issues (those printed entirely in English) omitted a guarded slur upon the conjugal felicity of the Haganè household. Gwendolen came in for her share of veiled allusion. Yuki-ko, each week stung by the contemptible malice of the attack, promised herself that never again should the paper be opened in her home. Gwendolen, at the American Legation, weekly did the same. The results of both resolutions were equally humiliating.

This was not a happy time for Gwendolen, creature of sunshine and spring breezes as she seemed. The continued strained relations between herself and Dodge interfered quite seriously at times with the young man's official duties. Mr. Todd leaned more heavily than he knew upon his attaché's four past years of experience in Tokio life, and resented an attitude of one of his own family, which kept Dodge so rigidly within the paling of mere officialdom. Mrs. Todd, who had never professed great friendship for the secretary, now most loudly denounced his "outrageous flirtation" with the Spanish girl, and even declared it an affront upon her Legation. Gwendolen, urged one moment to stop the affair, "as she certainly could by the lifting of a finger," was, the instant after, taunted by her inability to do so.

The public friendship between Dodge and the charming Señorita deepened obviously with each day. Hints of an early marriage flecked "The Hawk's Eye." Mrs. Todd began to feel herself personally injured by her wilful daughter. Finally, goaded into action and spurred by her own restless heart, the girl made a counter-move of a sudden and desperate intimacy with Carmen herself. Such things are not unknown in the history of adolescence. Carmen yielded to the American's bright fascination with the caressing languor characteristic of her. The two girls lunched together, dined, drove, and had tea together, and spoke of each other in exaggerated terms of endearment. Dodge, whatever his private surmises, retained an unaltered front. Naturally he and Gwendolen were more often together. She showed to him an air of cherished hostility, varied by small lightning-flashes of appeal. Two feminine currents blew full upon him. Dodge kept his hat on. The beautiful Castilian bore toward him the attitude of an indulgent conqueror. Gwendolen aided this, and whenever possible threw Dodge into the position of Carmen's accepted lover. Also, for some reason known only to herself, she encouraged the Spanish girl in her belief in Dodge's overwhelming adoration.

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Gwendolen soon discovered that her new friend had an uncontrollable yearning for "dulces," and eagerly embraced this opportunity for demonstrating her new affection. Gwendolen scoured the alleys of old Yedo for novel sweetmeats; she purveyed from the French shops of Yokohama imported dainties; she sent a telegraphic order to a certain New York confectioner. Carmen appreciated and devoured all results. The Japanese confections, which many other European ladies might (without, of course, having tasted) pretend to despise, she declared delicious. The "amanatto," or small purple bean, boiled and sugar-coated with lilac frosting, she called "fairy marron." Mikan, or small oranges preserved whole, with a flake of cinnamon and ginger, gained an established place on the Spanish Legation table. "Hakka ame," that delicious triangle of peppermint cream, improved from an American missionary's original recipe, vied in public favor, as a hors-d'œuvre with French bonbons, salted almonds, and olives.

Once Carmen's French maid, suspecting, perhaps, more than a purely altruistic intention in Gwendolen's persistent offerings, warned her young mistress against immoderate indulgence in sweet foods, and protested, with many gesticulations and a hint of tears, that the very last importation of Paris gowns already needed the letting out of seams, and would soon be unwearable. "Nonsense, Lizette," smiled the pampered one, "not eat dulces? I have always eaten dulces. How, in the Virgin's name, would one get through a novel without a plate of dulces beside it?"

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The maid sent a hostile glance to Gwendolen, which the blonde beauty had the conscience not to resent. Rapidly increasing embonpoint was Carmen's one menace to beauty. She had already begun to pray to her patron saint for diminution. On the prie-dieu invariably lay a half-nibbled chocolate. Were not Gwendolen's friendship so open, so obvious, one might have suspected that she connived with fate to circumvent her Carmen's petition; that actually she assisted in the mournful process of burying perfect features and luscious, languorous dark eyes in warm cushions of pink fat. But no, we must not think such things of Gwendolen.

Because of the new intimacy and an increasing activity in Tokio society Gwendolen now saw much less of her schoolmate, Yuki. Perhaps it was as well. The Princess Haganè had her own lessons to learn, and they were Japanese lessons. Following close upon her first sewing-meeting came Yuki's presentation to Their Majesties. The court ladies welcomed her into their midst. As in humbler Japanese circles she was immediately asked innumerable questions. In return she began learning, from her high-born interrogants, the new language of extreme court ceremony.

Another reception and another sewing-meeting fell due. To the latter of these functions a mere handful of foreign ladies came. Gwendolen and Mrs. Todd were detained, actually, by some globe-trotting Washington associates, who landed that very day at Yokohama. In the two subsequent gatherings foreign attendance ceased altogether.

Each reception was, however, a "crush." Gossip is a magnet; the presence of eligible young

men not exactly detraction. Mrs. Stunt and others of her kind went openly to see whether Pierre Le Beau would attend, and how he would conduct himself before host and hostess. It was the secret craving of such social vultures that a scene, the more disgraceful the better, be enacted for their entertainment, and the disappointment was correspondingly keen when neither Pierre nor Count Ronsard attended. The count, indeed, sent cards and a gift of flowers. No mention at all was made of the younger man.

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Three of the Haganè official functions had taken place. March hurled itself gruffly into the outstretched arms of spring. Gwendolen knew why Pierre stayed away and why Ronsard remained so impassive. She had good reasons for not telling Yuki. At her friend's silence the latter wondered. Instinct told her that there was a deeper explanation than mere forgetfulness. More than once she had nerved herself to inquire; but always, just on the point of asking, something had happened to interfere.

A new cry, which affected Yuki far more openly, began to ring through the current press. "If complications have arisen in Manchuria let Prince Haganè go and unravel them!" This demand grew in insistence with each day. Presently the whole nation had arisen, and was clamoring, "Send our War Lord, Haganè, to the front!" Yuki waited patiently for her husband to inform her of the reception of this demand in high quarters. Like a good Japanese wife she dared not force the issue. On every side her part, it seemed, was to wait, to command herself, to endure suspense. To an impatient nature such as Gwendolen this would have been torture. To Yuki, trained through centuries of brave ancestors to play her woman's part of uncomplaining quiescence, the strain was not so great. Her ignorance of Pierre seemed, indeed, the heaviest burden. She scanned now the English columns of every paper, hoping against hope that her eyes would seize the printed assurance of his return to France. This was the young wife's prayer, uttered on her knees each night, muttered through pale lips a hundred times each day, that Pierre would go quietly home, and in his own dear land forget the woman who had broken faith with him. His threat against Haganè's life did not sound to her absurd. It re-echoed to her, always with a pang of fear. Love and hate alike give preternatural insight. By injury to Prince Haganè alone could Pierre gain full revenge. By this means he could strip the flesh from the bones of her loyal sacrifice, laying bare the grinning skeleton of a national disaster, wreaked through her.

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Of course she could not speak these fears to Haganè. There was no one, not even Gwendolen, to whom she could whisper them. Haganè was now seldom at his home. She gathered, once or twice, from gossip of the servants, that he had spent the previous night and day at the Tabata villa, with a small company of statesmen as his guests. In the infrequent visits, she, studying his face with unconscious intensity, saw the same power, the same sadness, the invincible strength unshadowed and unexcited by this renewal of popular hero-worship. The thought that he might leave her alone, to fulfil the duties of his position, brought to the young wife a pang of terror, of misgiving. She believed it to be merely a shrinking from heavy responsibility. To outward appearance she and Haganè stood on opposite shores of an increasing chasm; but in her heart, when she dared listen to its timid pleadings, she knew it to be a narrowing, not a widening, void their joint lives spanned. She could not doubt that he felt some grave pleasure in seeing her on his expected visits to the great shell of his official home. The weekly receptions, where she bore herself with ever-increasing dignity and poise, did indeed give to the husband a deep impersonal satisfaction. It was more than satisfaction that he felt, as he saw the great filled packing-cases sent away each week to suffering soldiers in Manchuria.

Once, coming in upon her unannounced, as was his custom, he had suddenly taken the white thing in his arms, thrown her head back to his shoulder, and gazed into her eyes as though to drag from some hidden depth an awakening thought,—a cradled possibility. Yuki's lids drooped under the blinding force of his look. She felt as though a great silent wind blew, pinning her against a rock. Surely in his twitching face was more than a calm self-congratulation! It was the man, the master, summoning by right what was rightly his. Love—strong, terrible, yet tender, showed for an instant in his dark eyes. He went from her as quickly as he had come. No word had broken the silence. During the rest of that day Yuki rocked in her heart a new-born hope, a possibility so strange, so ineffable that she dared not open her eyes to its tiny face. With bowed head and fast-closed lids she hushed it. That day set her feet on the temple-stair of shining prophecy. But how dare she, already to one pledge so faithless, climb upward, even on bleeding knees, to that splendid portico above?

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April spread her witchery of green and flowers over a thousand barren hills. Wild azaleas, wigelia, and bokè (pyrus Japonica) barred the slopes with pink and crimson radiance. Valleys, so lately brown, spread now a wide bloom of violets, a curdled residue of purple morning mists. Earth-dwarfs, congeners of Loki, who people the under-world, drove upward from their subterranean caves huge copper spikes of young bamboo—ten inches across, some of it, as it pierced the mould—a marvellous springing column climbing by joints, two feet a day, toward the sun, and casting off brown sheaths, like outgrown jackets. Children roamed the hedges, the rice-field dykes, and copses (forgotten and unbuilt, sometimes in the very heart of Yedo) for tsukushimbo and the yellow chrysanthemum. All gardens, even those amorphous products of Eurasian uncertainty surrounding the American Legation and Yuki's official home, needed to be fair. Birds came to them, and early butterflies. The sun poured down upon them in equal measure his golden cataracts of joy.

Saturday of the first week came. Pierre Le Beau had not been mentioned to the Princess Haganè, nor had she found a printed notice of him containing a hint of information. Cleverly insulated wires of venom, it is true, attached to her name and Haganè's. Sometimes Pierre was subtly referred to, but never openly. Next day, thought Yuki, she would go to church. Perhaps something would be said of him by the ladies who always crowded so eagerly about her carriage door. This weekly service, in the Episcopal church at Tsukijii, formed now the closest tie that bound Yuki to her Western memories. It was anticipated with eagerness. This link, at least, she told herself should not be snapped. Haganè's consent that she continue openly her Christian devotions had been unqualified.

The mail that Saturday morning proved unusually large. An American mail-ship was in. Several letters and papers came from trans-Pacific friends, a great many Tokio social invitations, a few notes relating to Red Cross matters, and one folded pamphlet with a Japanese postmark. She knew from its pink wrapping that it was "The Weekly Hawk's Eye." With a slight shudder she put the evil thing aside, with a vague reawakening of the intention to burn it unopened. Slowly she read her letters and invitations. She glanced through the few American papers for any blue markings. All were finished. She leaned to gather them up and have them taken to her private desk upstairs, when the sun, pointing one bright finger through a blind, fell upon the pink wrapper and rested on her name. "Princess Sanètomo Haganè." It looked very cheerful and suggestive. The dull pink of the cheap paper glowed into a rosy hue. Perhaps it was an omen. Perhaps if she were brave and opened the sheet boldly she would find, instead of the usual malicious innuendoes, the announcement that Pierre was leaving for France. Thinking of Haganè's eyes as they had probed her own she flushed, trembled a little, and murmured aloud, "Oh, if he would only go—if Pierre would only go—how happy—" She broke off. A wave of compunction, pity for Pierre, scorn of her own fickleness, rushed upon her. She took the paper hastily, set her lips for what might be in store, and opened at random.

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Her name was plain enough, and Prince Haganè's. This time headlines had been dared. "Prince Haganè soon to leave his young wife. The Nation demands his presence at the centre of martial differences. Haganè loath to leave his young wife. Who knows what may happen? M. Le Beau raving in delirium at the German hospital in Yokohama."

So much she read and paused. Very quietly she folded the paper and slipped it within a gray silk sleeve. She stooped for the crumpled pink wrapping, smoothed it also, and dropped it in her sleeve. Next she gathered into a neat package the mail she had been reading, rang for a maid-servant, and sent the mail up to her boudoir. Her orders were given in the usual low, pleasant voice. In closing, she said, "Should visitors come I am to be found in this room."

Again alone, she walked to a western window and stared out at the great square shadow of the house thrown across the awkward garden. Beyond the straight line of the shadow, paths shone brilliantly in the sun, and flowers danced. Spring had come a little early. Everything that had a blossom to show rushed, it would seem, to the perfumed exhibition.

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Yuki shivered slightly. For the first time she knew that her hands were growing cold. She moved slowly toward the fireplace, an ordinary foreign grate with coal fire burning. Nearer the warmth she drew out again the pamphlet, unfolded and deliberately read the article from the first word to the last. Some passages she dwelt upon, extracting to its full flavor the bitterness of frustrated hope.

According to the "Hawk's Eye" correspondent, Pierre had caught germs of malignant malaria, perhaps of typhus, while wandering in a state of great mental agony along the moats that border a certain official dwelling. He was now at the crisis of his malady. Two nurses watched him night and day, for his dementia had made of him a cunning schemer, full of sly efforts to escape. When detained he raved fearfully, saying that he had "things to do." "The Hawk's Eye" ingenuously marvelled as to what these "things" could possibly be. As is usual with articles so inspired the suggestions were far more damaging than any actual statement.

She let her hands fall limp. One still clasped the ugly journal. Only a few moments before she had accused herself of heartlessness toward one she had wronged. In her generosity she had almost demanded a deeper suffering, if only it could be directed personally to her offending self, and not include, in its consequences, that great man whose name she now bore. Well, here was her punishment,—a fetid, scalding stream of venom, hurled full and straight at her. Attacks like this were, she knew, less to Haganè than the mud children throw against the base of a lofty statue. His mind moved in a stratum far above such contamination. The nation spoke direct to him. His ear was for his Emperor, the old gods of his race. "Yes," thought the young wife, "I wished to suffer for the wrong I have done, but these writhings of a polluted personality can scarcely be dignified by the name of suffering. It is as if one went forth bravely to combat a knight in armor and encountered a filthy swine. One cannot retaliate upon a beast. Nor,"—here, with a nervous transition to energy, she tore out the offending page,— "nor can I, being his wife, attempt punishment for this defilement." The sound of tearing paper soothed her. One by one she snatched the sheets, crumpling them loosely, and threw each in turn upon the coals, where it twisted, opened its angles, caught in a little puff of smoke, and burned quickly. A sound came to the front door. Some one opened it. She gathered the remaining pages, rolled them hastily into a pithy sphere, and tossed the whole mass to the grate. A soft explosion of smoke and brightness followed.

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Red light fawned upward to the slender gray figure and excited face. A door of the drawing-room opened, and the draught pulled out from the grate before her a long, pliant tongue of flame. She felt Haganè catch her backward. "That is a risk, to burn papers in these great, ill-constructed chimneys, my little one," he said. Yuki clung to him, staring up into his face to try to judge whether he had already seen the offensive article. He had an unusual animation. She even fancied that his voice shook; but it was not the excitement of anger or disgust. Some national crisis had come. His next words proved the truth of this supposition. "I wish you not cremated this day of all days," he smiled, trying, as she could see, to speak with some lightness. "I need my wife. An opportunity for service has come, more important than all that has gone before. Are you ready, my Princess?"

"Lord, I live but to serve you and my land."

"We are in a national crisis, Yuki," said her husband. He began to walk up and down the long room with an abandonment to agitation which she had not seen in him before. "A crisis," he repeated. "I shall not explain the matter of it. You need not have the weight and burden of such knowledge, but you can aid me greatly." He paused now near a window. Yuki followed. "I await your pleasure, Lord," she said.

He turned to her the deep magnetic gaze she dreaded, yet, strangely enough, longed, at times, to provoke. One massive hand leaned on her shoulder. She had no impulse now to shrink from him. She longed to cower against the strong defence of him, to hide in his breast, in his sleeves, as the frightened souls of little dead children hide in the sleeves of Jizo Sama. As though understanding the unspoken longing he drew her very near. His words were still impersonal. "Some terrible, hidden things long suspected have come to light. I do not believe the wrong past mending. The first step in restitution comes to-day. It is a secret meeting here, in this house,—a small gathering of statesmen, but it may mean to us defeat or victory."

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"Yes, Lord, I listen. A meeting at this house."

"It must appear to be a casual assembling. No servant, not even the good Tora, is to be trusted. When I have given you full instructions I return at once to the palace. Should any unforeseen chance call me back before the hour of one, I charge you speak no words into my ear, nor seek to deflect my thoughts from their ominous course. I bear a heavy burden, Yuki. But the Gods will aid me in my strength."

"I will not honorably accost or fret you, Lord."

"The statesmen,—and here are the written initials of their names,"—he drew a small scrap of paper from his sleeve—"these seven statesmen, including Sir Charles Grubb and Mr. Todd, will be ushered as usual into these drawing-rooms. If no other guests be present, say to these men in turn, after the first salutations, these exact words: 'I have received from my lord instructions and the initials of your name.' Can you repeat precisely?"

Yuki did so.

"That is well. Thirteen words, remember. They make to these seven a sort of password. Each, as you speak, is to be conducted to my small office-room to which the wooden doors, and the heavy portières also, are to be drawn."

"I understand, your Highness. But what am I to do if other visitors come?"

"Ah, little Princess Haganè, it is in such straits that your experience of foreign social hypocrisy must be made to serve you. It is of imperative need that you do not leave this room after the hour of the Rat (1 p. m.). Yet it is also imperative that you receive, equally, all guests. Those unbidden you must get from the house."

"It is a difficult task, Lord, but it may be done."

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"That is a brave wife. Remember that not only from the time of the Rat, but this hour, too, this very moment, commences your vigilance. Tale-bearers and enemies may be lurking near. If human ingenuity can keep a meeting secret this will be kept, but, alas, in a time of great issues the dragon's teeth sow spies instead of men. Do you understand all I have said, my Yuki?"

"I understand, your Highness, and am honored to do your august bidding." Before leaving her he gazed for another moment steadily into her upraised face. "You are pale to-day as your name, my small snow-wife; yet your eyes move and glitter with a strange unrest."

"I beseech your Highness concern not your weighty thoughts with my unimportant outer appearance."

"I must not do so, indeed," murmured her husband. "My chief thought now must be my

Imperial Master. Farewell, little one. I shall arrive at one, if not before."

Yuki followed him to the door for a last wifely obeisance. The carriage had been waiting for some moments. After the loud rattling of wheels came a hollow silence. Yuki stood on the granite doorsteps looking outward with unseeing eyes. The house-shadow shrank closer to the huge cube that cast it. Sunshine, like a golden fluid, brimmed up the azure walls of day. From garden-beds nearby, and from path-borders leading into hazy distance, blossoms beckoned. She saw only an iridescent blur. The jinchokè (called by foreigners Daphen Odora) rose in waxen masses of white or arbutus pink. Azaleas heaped formless hillocks with Tyrian hues, and the long yellow sprays of yama-buki, to which Gwendolen had so often been compared, poised waiting for the breeze, or else tossed in bright indignation at the sudden desertion of a bird. Sweet odors flowed inward, and whispered her to follow. Still half unconsciously she stepped down to the gravelled path and began to walk in the garden.

Sometimes, among the beautiful familiar blooms, an alien flower smiled, a budding rose-tree, or a purple blotch of English violets. The thought of Pierre's danger came now with less of acid pain. Perhaps this illness was to save them both—and Haganè. The long hospital days might bring to the young Frenchman clearer judgment, and perhaps a more forgiving heart. In convalescence, surely, he would wish to return to his own land. At such times the spirit is fain to leave the weak body, and speed on before, to childhood's home. She had reached a cluster of the early iris. These were Pierre's flowers, the lilies of his France. She stroked the silken petals as though they were hands. "Pierre, my poor, poor Pierre," she breathed aloud.

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"My Yuki-ko," came as an echo.

Yuki started and looked around in fear. "Little flowers, was it you that spoke my name?"

"Yuki," came the low voice again. "Do you grieve for Pierre? Poor Pierre is dead!" He stepped out from behind a cluster of dark cypress-trees. Yuki bit her lips to keep from screaming. Was this the ghost of the man she had loved?

"Yuki," said the phantom, with a little chill whine in his voice, "won't you even speak to me?"

"Is it you, Pierre, or is it indeed your newly fled spirit come to reproach me?"

Pierre ran his hands through his short, dry hair, then dropped them, as if the effort had been too great. He took a step forward. "Why, yes, it is Pierre, after all. I thought I was dead, but I am not. Yes, sweetheart, you may come to me. It is your Pierre."

Yuki ran to him and caught one dangling hand. It burned her like hot metal. "You escaped, in spite of your two nurses?" she cried.

Pierre began to whimper. "Yes, yes, Yuki, I got away at last. I had things to do. Don't send me back there, Yuki! My room has bars, like a cage."

"How did you get away?"

"Little Jap nurse couldn't resist me. Told me of a back entry. Nice little nurse in white cap. Jap—cap; cap—Jap. Ha—ha!"

"Come, dear," said Yuki, pulling him gently. "I will not send you back. You shall go with me to the little Cha no yu rooms at the far end of this garden. There you can lie down until you feel better. Will you follow me quickly and in silence along this little path?" She pointed.

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"Indeed I will—no need to ask twice," cried the sick man, and began to giggle like an excited child. "I'd follow you anywhere, Yuki. Are we running away to be married?"

"Hush, Pierre; if you laugh and speak so loud others will hear you and send you back to prison. We must be very, very quiet."

"Very quiet," echoed Pierre, solemnly. "Never do for old prince to hear us, oh, no!" He began to mince along on the tips of his toes, giggling every now and then at the thought of the trick they were playing.

Yuki sped on before him, like a fawn. At the tea-rooms she sprang to the narrow, railless veranda, drawing a single shoji panel carefully to one side. The two small rooms were in order. Sunken into the floor of one was the copper hibachi, two feet square and now filled with cold ashes, an article indispensable to tea-rooms of ceremony. The sun pouring against translucent paper walls flooded the small space with radiance.

"What dear little rooms!" exclaimed Pierre, as he scrambled in, panting. "She would call them

'cunning little rooms,' that yellow-haired American girl. What was her name, Yuki? She is not a good friend to poor Pierre; she could not swear it when I asked her. Are these the little rooms where we are to live, Yuki, now that we have run away from the old prince and are married?"

"Yes, dear," said Yuki, soothingly. "Here is where Yuki will care for you until a betterness comes. See, I shall heap for you these nice cushions. They are your Japanese pillows. You must lie on them very still, and keep all these shoji shut close until I can go and get some medicine for you."

"No!" said Pierre, fractiously. "Medicine no go! Kusuri, ikanai! Too much kusuri every day at hospital. Nurses all carry spoons in their belts. I don't need more medicine, Yuki; only for you to kiss me. You haven't kissed me all day!" He threw himself among the bright cushions and began tossing his head from side to side.

"I will kiss you when I get back," said Yuki. "Only promise to lie here very quietly until I can come, and many times I will kiss you."

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Pierre raised himself on an elbow and looked dubious. "Kiss me before you start," he demanded. "You break promises, you know. And this morning you have such a droll fashion of going suddenly far away, and then starting back quickly, just like the end of a trombone that one is playing. You must be a witch, Yuki, to move so swiftly through the air. Kiss me, or I shall not believe it is really you."

With a heart strained to the limit of endurance Yuki knelt beside him on the matted floor and pressed her ashen lips to the red coal of his mouth. Pierre, seizing her with superhuman strength, kissed her again and again, until the tortured woman felt that she must rend the air in clamor to some native god or demon who might save her. This passion, branded on the soul of Prince Haganè's wife, gained a new and terrible power of defilement. In a spasm of anguish she wrenched herself free, went backward from him, and seized the shoji's edge to hold herself. "I will kiss you no more until you take the medicine," she said, with a steadiness that surprised them both.

He lurched forward, grasping at a swaying sleeve. She eluded him. "If you are not more controlled I will leave you altogether, and send police to take you back to Yokohama!" He grovelled at her feet and whimpered. "I'll be good. Don't send me, Yuki. But if I lie quite still you'll kiss me many, many times again when you return, won't you?"

Yuki hesitated. He dragged himself half upright. "You shall. I'll kill you! I'll kill myself, here! You must kiss me. A wife always kisses her husband. Swear that you will kiss me!" The light of increased madness glared in his beautiful eyes.

"Yes, I'll kiss you, I swear it," faltered the girl. Pierre laughed foolishly in his satisfaction. "Then I'll lie still among your pillows, little wife. Old prince sha'n't find us. Put us in boiling oil, that old prince. Don't be gone too long, little wife."

Yuki hurried along the intricate paths toward the house. Dry sobs rose one after another slowly, coming relentlessly upward in her slender throat with a distention that grew to agony. "I must not stop to think, I cannot give up now," she panted. "O Kwannon Sama, what am I to do?" This black hour, like some dark chemical, was turning the memory of all other grief to light. The one conscious thought which her mind hugged jealously was Pierre's necessity for medicine. Fortunately, she knew a little of this, and kept a well-filled chest. His fever was terrific. Human pity demanded that she first allay this raving torment of the blood before delivering him to cold officials, or even to Count Ronsard of the French Legation. Her thoughts and plans in this present bewilderment could get no further than the fever-draught now to be given the sick man. With shaking hands she prepared it, and then a second drink, a powerful sleeping-potion. She got back to him as noiselessly as she had come. Apparently no one had seen her. Pierre was now in actual fever-madness. He had thrown coat, waistcoat, and watch in various parts of the room. The cushions were strewn wide. A corner of one rested in hibachi ashes. In one of his hands he clasped tightly the half of a long ivory hairpin.

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With the patience of a mother and the ingenuity of a wife she coaxed him, at length, into swallowing one of the draughts. He did not demand the promised kisses. He did not know her now, or, rather, the recognitions came in short flashes, like heat lightning. Sometimes he took her to be Gwendolen and accused her angrily of connivance with Haganè and the ambitious Onda family. Again he thought her the German head physician and raved of his wrongs. He passed rapidly from one language to the other, essaying at times his broken Japanese. It was generally in English that he denounced his faithless sweetheart, and the epithets directed against her caused Yuki's heart to sink with shame,—not for herself, but for him.

A longer interval of sanity came. He recognized his companion with piteous little cries and tears of joy. He believed that at last they were married, and prattled on of the long, happy future, of their little home in France, until Yuki, having come for the moment to the end of suffering's capacity, listened with a dreary smile and dull ears.

The second draught, the sleeping-potion, was to be given in half an hour. Through that interminable time she waited, his head upon her aching knees, his fevered hands reaching ever for her face, her shoulder, until lethargy alone saved her from an answering insanity. The plan was half formed in her dull thoughts to administer this potion, then, when slumber overcame him, to close the shoji, and leave Pierre to sleep away the fiercest fever while she could think out a way of getting him from the garden. But for the political meeting, falling so strangely on this very day, the situation would have possessed no great peril. It would have been merely a sick man who, in delirium, had wandered unknowingly into Haganè's garden. The servants might have found him; Ronsard have been telephoned for, and Prince Haganè himself asked what was best to do. This was what might have been; but here was the matter as it really lay. A Frenchman, and attaché of the Legation,—ill or well no less a Frenchman—concealed in Haganè's garden, sheltered and protected by Haganè's young wife! Yuki gave a convulsive shudder. The sick man gasped, and clutched the air as if he thought himself falling from a height. Fate smiled a thin, hard smile down into Yuki's eyes.

The girl did not resent Fate's prophetic stare. Already she knew herself trapped. Her wild thoughts had run since the beginning of eternity in this same ring of fire. There was time for nothing. The one frail chance was that Pierre should sleep on through the meeting undiscovered. Already twelve o'clock had come. From the high land near the samurai Onda's home, a big bell boomed and quivered out over the city. The echoes stirred and shifted tranquil layers of the noon. Fear sank down like soot upon a crouching woman with the sick man on her knees.

Pierre, for some moments past, had gradually ceased the restless tossing of his head, and was forgetting to utter short, disjointed words. The fair hair, that had been so stiff and dry, clung now in moist locks about his temple. His delicate hands ceased twitching and picking at Yuki's gown, and fell over limply on the floor. Caught loosely in the right hand lay the broken hairpin. To any Japanese, of any class, this would be fatal evidence. Under her fairy-like touch he gave a start, clutched more firmly at the pin she was trying to take, and threw his hand upward above his heart. Again Fate smiled, and Yuki bowed her head. Now a soft, regular breathing began. The healing sleep was on the sufferer. His face was growing young and gentle. Yuki stared down into it, tearless. Her heart, like some living entity beaten and tortured too long, had lost the power of sensitive response. There was only a dull, incessant aching that was becoming, already, an acknowledged part of her.

He was safe. To-day's crisis, at least of the devouring heat, was over. He would awake refreshed and clear. As for her, everything had grown so vague and far-away she cared very little what might happen. The insensibility of reaction bore her outward on a warm tide. Danger lost its meaning, and grew but a shadow-play on life. A Frenchman in Haganè's garden, and a crucial meeting to go on in the house! There was something piquant, fetching, in the idea. Yuki nodded above it and smiled. Oh, she was so tired, so tired of everything! A little malicious something was tapping, tapping, just at the base of her brain. The ache at her heart benumbed her. A desire, dull and insistent as the pain itself, crept to her, just to lie upon the matting near poor Pierre and rest. They belonged together, the weak ones. Chance and disappointment had thrown them about like toys. What had such as they to do with the God Haganè? Yes, she had better fail once more, and it would be the last. Let the grave statesmen come and go, let Haganè seek her! She had nothing to do but the easiest of all things, just to do nothing, and all this benumbing misery would be at an end.

She wondered, still smiling, in what way Haganè would kill her. She fingered curiously the stops of a dozen fearful thoughts, and felt no fear. Had law permitted him to carry the two swords of his class, the short one would deal a quick and merciful death. Since he was unarmed perhaps he would simply let one of the servants slay her, not caring to soil his hands with such feeble stains.

An influence was coming over her in rhythms, like tepid waves. A delicious lightness blew upon her brain. She gasped for insensibility as for music, dumb, perfumed music, drunk in by pores of the flesh. One small nerve of desire began to tingle. "Oh, let it go on," she cried to her soul; "have no interference! Let me pass into nothingness by this heavenly gliding!"

As from a great distance came footsteps and the sound of commonplace voices. Yuki moaned aloud, and crept an inch nearer her companion.

"She was seen last coming in this direction," said a speaker; "I, the gardener, saw her."

"She is not in the adzuma-ya! Can it be that our gracious lady has gone for repose to the tea-rooms?"

"Baka!" exclaimed the other whom she now recognized as Tora, the butler; "is not that great official residence sad enough and lonely, that the poor child seeks a more desolate place? I pity her."

"Luncheon becomes honorably cold upon the table," murmured the boy, showing compassion in his own way. "And foreign food when chilled, with the grease becoming as wax about the edges,

is of all sights the most disgusting."

"Arà," sighed Tora, "she eats little enough even when the food is hot."

"Those many disgraceful things said of our lady in the newspapers,"—the younger servant was beginning, when Tora stopped him fiercely. "Gossip not of your betters, boy! You should not read such things. There are no truths in printed scandals. Come, not that way, she is not in the tea-rooms. I see a fresh disturbance of the gravel along this path."

To the listener's intense relief they turned sharply to the left. Wide awake now with an intensity of sensitiveness that made every stirring leaf an enemy, the young wife crept outward from between two shoji, closing them with the extreme of care. In full sight, on the veranda, lay her little foreign handkerchief. No other woman on the place used lace-bordered handkerchiefs. Tora must have seen and recognized it, and, in an instant, perhaps, of protection, have led the boy aside. Yuki's cheek burned. She dared not think Tora's thoughts. This humiliation was a wound made with a weapon of poor metal, yet she could not, even then, refuse gratitude for the delicate consideration.

As the two servants came again into the main part of the garden, their mistress walked quite leisurely a few yards before, stooping now and then to a flower, or gazing up with smiles to a blossoming cherry-branch.

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"Luncheon is served, your Ladyship," said Tora, gravely, and bowed before her in the path.

"I will come immediately," returned Yuki. She did not meet his eyes.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

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DURING the short, uncomfortable meal Tora stood like a painted stake behind his mistress's chair. The "boy," attempting to supply the watchful efficiency his senior for once appeared to lack, kept his small eyes darting from her white face to the "dirty wax" at the edge of her plate, until Yuki thought she must deliver herself over to an attack of laughing hysterics. Tora poured and brought her wine unbidden. Again she resented his presumption, again felt a cowed sense of thanks for his solicitude.

Abandoning the table at the first possible moment, she went swiftly upstairs to her own chamber and rang for the maid. The simple morning robe of smooth silk must be changed for a more elaborate afternoon toilette. She selected a curdled gray crêpe with tiny silver pine-leaves sprinkled through it. The under-robe was turquoise blue; her wide sash of blue-black satin brocaded in conventionalized silver pine-branches.

The transfer went on with breathless celerity, yet the hands of the mantel clock moved faster still. Ten minutes only lacked to the hour of the Rat. The sound of carriage-wheels crunching gravel rose from the drive below her. Yuki gave a restless motion of her entire body, and turned her face around to the maid, who now tied the great loop of the sash.

"Patience an instant longer, your Ladyship," smiled the maid. "Let me but girdle your illustrious person with the obi-domè and I shall be done."

"Here is the obi-domè," cried Yuki, her voice betraying her impatience. "I shall retain one clasp while you wind it around the sash." She took up from among the American toilet articles on her dresser the article desired, a flat, soft braid of silk with golden clasps. Yuki, as she had said, held one end against the front of her sash, while the maid dexterously threaded the high sash loop at the back, and brought the answering clasp to its mate. It clicked like an old-fashioned bracelet.

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A servant knocked on the door. Yuki herself answered. With mingled relief and perturbation she read on the cards the names of Mrs. Todd and Miss Todd. It was an unfortunate time for their visit, yet now as always the thought of Gwendolen's presence brought a little stir of excitement, a sweet glow of true happiness. During her flight downstairs Yuki formed the clearest resolution that had come to her in the distracting day. She would tell Gwendolen of Pierre's presence. If help were possible, Gwendolen would find a way. The new hope brought a little glow to the face which greeted her American friends. A little talk on unimportant, pleasant matters would refresh and steady her. For a moment only did the bright illusion abide. Gwendolen and her mother bore, in common, an air of hesitating excitement.

"Oh, what is wrong now?" cried Yuki to them both.

"Well, you *are* quick!" said Gwendolen; "have we become mere transparencies, or do your wits acquire a preternatural alertness in these big rooms? Yes, there is something wrong—not fatally so, only a menace."

"We felt it our duty, Yuki—" began Mrs. Todd, on her lowest register.

"Now, mother," Gwendolen interrupted, "you promised faithfully to let me tell Yuki in my own way. You sound as if you hooted from a cave. It isn't anything horrid, darling!" This last speech was directly to the princess. "Don't begin to fade away. It is simply that Pierre, who has been ill at the German hospital in Yokohama, escaped this morning, in delirium, and the authorities are after him."

"In delirium—raving in *delirium*—the poor tortured boy!" echoed Mrs. Todd's sepulchral tones.

"Oh, is that all?" breathed Yuki. Her face showed unmistakable relief. Gwendolen stared at her, incredulous.

Mrs. Todd put up her lorgnette. "All! Did I understand you to say all? Is it not enough? Have you known before to-day of his terrible illness?"

"No, indeed, I have not, dear Mrs. Todd. And by 'all' I did not mean the heartlessness, as you think. I only meant—I meant—"

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"Humph!" said the matron, suspicion deepening with the sight of the young wife's confusion. "Perhaps Pierre has been here already. Has he been here, Yuki?"

Yuki looked more embarrassed than ever. She hesitated the fraction of an instant. Gwendolen's eyes sent out one hazel gleam. "No, dear Mrs. Todd," answered Yuki; "Monsieur has not set foot in this house since my first reception, many weeks ago."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Todd again, and closed her lorgnette with a disappointed snap. "Well, there's time for him yet! You had better look out, for if he is found here—" She shut her lips with a snap like the lorgnette-case. Because of avowed sympathy with Pierre, the good lady had assumed an air of displeasure with Yuki which all the new rank and wealth could not overcome. Yuki, strange to say, liked her the better for it. She hugged the memory of Mrs. Todd's cool looks as a fanatic might have hugged his haircloth shirt.

Gwendolen had turned away. She did not wish either Yuki or her mother to gain a hint of her personal thoughts. At Yuki's last statement, her quick mind had supplemented, "He has not set foot in this house. No—but the garden is wide, the steps and galleries inviting." Yuki hid some gnawing secret, of this she was sure. More carriage-wheels crunched the gravel and Yuki's heart at once.

"Ah," said Gwendolen, coolly, now beside a window, "here's the Emperor come to see you, Yuki!"

Yuki ran forward gasping. Anything might have happened on this reeling day.

"No," laughed the other. "I just teased you. But it is some magnate, I assure you. My heavens, what a swagger!"

Mrs. Todd, hastening to her daughter's side, drew the window-curtain farther. Her face glowed with satisfaction. "Prince Korin," she announced, "he is a dear man! I shall be pleased to meet him again."

"Come along, mother," said Gwendolen, a little brusquely; "he hasn't called on us."

"I sha'n't do anything of the kind," said the matron, indignantly. "Prince Korin took me in to dinner last week at the German Legation. Doubtless he will be as much pleased as I to renew the acquaintance."

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"Please do not urge your mother to depart," Yuki flung back over her shoulder as she went toward the door; "I want to speak with you, Gwendolen, on some important matter." Without a qualm she delivered the wondering peer into the outstretched hands of the American lady. Drawing Gwendolen to a corner of the big room she said, in a low and agitated voice, "He—that one we spoke—he is even now asleep in this garden. It is terrible, but I could not send him off. I gave medicine; he was nearly to die of great illness. Make no sound or look of surprise; no one suspects, unless it is the butler, Tora. Perhaps you can help me. What makes all more dangerous, more terrible, is a secret meeting of state to be held here this very hour. Prince Korin is the first. You and Mrs. Todd must go before Haganè come, or he will feel great anger to me. Your father is

to arrive. Oh, Gwendolen, do you see any way to save?"

"It is the most frightful complication I ever knew in my life," said Gwendolen, awed for once into calm. "Why, of all days, should the meeting fall on this?"

"Some terrible crisis in war. All may depend on this hour,—our very national existence."

"I knew something was up. Dad is cross as a bear, and Dodge struts like a turkey. Yuki, there is but one thing. Your husband must be told the moment he enters this house!"

"Oh, if I could do that!" cried Yuki. "No such tearing thoughts could I have felt. But he has given orders to me not to disturb his mind on anything until this meeting has passed."

"Nonsense, you must disobey of course," said the other; "unless I myself could get Pierre out of the garden." Her practical American wits worked rapidly. "I can do it I think. You must have smaller gates to these high walls."

"Yes, yes, on all other days," said Yuki. "But not just for this one day. Everything—everything—for these few hours are bolted. I think it to be karma, Gwendolen. No use to fight for me!"

"Now look here, don't go into despair so soon. You say you gave medicine. Is it a sleeping draught?"

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"Yes, first the strong fever-cure; then, half-hour later, a sleeping potion. It is strong. It would keep the Japanese asleep for many hours."

"Go to your husband, Yuki. You must do it; never mind disobedience!"

"But if some strange thing that you, not being Japanese, cannot foresee should hold me back, do you think there is other chance?"

"Of course," said Gwendolen, "everything is in your favor. He will sleep until after the meeting, and then you can tell your husband. Only the risk—even a tiny risk—is so dreadful I shrink from having you take it."

"Yesterday Haganè said to me, 'A wise man never leaves something to chance,'—only in such way does chance surely serve him."

"You'll come through. Don't you fret, darling. The police would not dare search for him here. Ah, more statesmen!—this time in humble jinrikishas. The prime minister in a street kuruma! It is time for me to get mother away!"

Ignoring the scandalized side-looks of Prince Korin, Gwendolen stooped to her friend, folded her very closely, and whispered a low torrent of words of love, of encouragement, and of confidence that she did not altogether feel. Fate hung dark banners on the false battlements of Yuki's official home. The great square shadow, creeping now toward the east, gathered dampness. Gwendolen shivered violently as she passed under the porte-cochère.

"You needn't have been in such a nervous hurry, Gwendolen," said Mrs. Todd, with tart asperity. "Prince Korin and I were having a delightful chat."

A beggar, unusual sight for Tokio, crept in through the wide gates toward the fine waiting carriage. The driver leaned over, menacing the intruder with a long whip. Gwendolen stopped him. A sudden impulse made her open and invert her pretty purse. A few silver coins fell into one gloved hand. She leaned down, pressed them on the wondering supplicant, and whispered in English, "You are a Japanese. You have a soul in that foul body. Pray for my Yuki!"

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Yuki welcomed the new arrivals, repeated her password, and ushered them personally into the office. She stationed herself by a window, now watching and praying that her husband might come soon, and alone. Three more kuruma rattled in,—common street kuruma. In the first two were Sir Charles and a Japanese cabinet minister; in the last, Haganè. The three fell into deep speech before the drawing-room could claim them. Haganè led them, as if by instinct, to the office-door. None seemed to perceive the little hostess, clutching at a window-curtain.

"My Lord," she faltered, coming forward swiftly to within a few feet of her husband, "may I speak—"

He turned half-recognizing eyes. "Who already have seats in the inner office?"

She named the two men. "Two more of our countrymen and Mr. Todd to come," he murmured.

"That makes the number."

"Cannot I see your Highness a brief instant?" she pleaded.

Two more Japanese gentlemen entered on foot. Haganè conducted them to the door of the office. Yuki kept close to him.

"Lord, Lord—my husband!" she cried in desperation.

The note of appeal at last carried. "Any personal matter must wait, my child," he said, not unkindly, but with a decision that blighted hope. "I thought I instructed you as to this also."

Minister Todd arrived. He appeared both anxious and excited. In his hand he carried a leathern portfolio filled with papers. His nod toward her had absent-minded indirectness. "Oh, Yuki, it's you, is it? I suppose you have been coached. Have the rest come?"

"Yes,—in the office there, where I am to conduct you. May—may I speak a moment, Mr. Todd?"

"Is that the office?" he asked, pointing. "I tell you, little Princess Yuki-ko, big things are doing this day of our Lord. You wish to speak with me?"

Haganè's face appeared between the portières. "Ah, it is his Excellency of America. Now are all come. This way, if you please, Mr. Todd. Remember, Yuki-ko, leave not this room until I speak with you again, and, if possible, let no guest enter."

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"My husband," cried the girl, "this matter on my heart is no light thing. I must speak!" Both men turned, frowning slightly. "We cannot attend to hearts just now, my child," said Haganè. "You must defer your communication."

"That wasn't like Yuki at all to stop us at such a time," mused Todd, as he followed his host. "Your Excellency," he said to the broad silk-clad back before him, "are you sure that we did well to rebuff that little girl?"

"I am only sure, this hour, that our land is menaced." Salutations from the other statesmen interrupted this personal trend of talk.

They had passed into the office together. Yuki, standing alone in the centre of the big room, wan with the new rejection, watched them with a curious external interest, and dwelt in her mind upon the difference of character exhibited in the two vanishing backs. The hollow brass rings of the portières hissed and clashed together. A steady arm drew the wooden panels of the door. She heard a key turn. She was alone on guard. With a gesture so common to Japanese women she put both hands up lightly to her hair, patting abstractedly the shining loops. A dizziness crept under her eyelids. The ugly walls of the room began slowly to turn on axes of silence. She felt her head droop with the strange drowsiness she had known an hour before; a low moan came from whitening lips. Staggering to a window she threw up a sash, flung the blinds apart, and, clasping her clenched hands upon the sill, knelt, and let her head rest upon them.

The inrush of the sweet spring winds, and this interval of quiet, following so closely upon a series of bewildering events, brought soon a balm of healing. Yuki had a nature essentially calm and self-contained. Emotion stirred and sometimes swept her from her feet, but it was an emotion that had no surface-play. Each quiver of her face answered but weakly some fundamental throb of being. She had not the usual girlish terror to bestow on scampering mice and dark corridors. Excitement generally steadied her. The one unruly, unclassifiable influence in her life had been Pierre,—his strange love-making, his exotic fascination.

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In a little while she rose from her knees, drew a chair toward the opened window, and seated herself. Her eyes, instead of seeking the natural loveliness without, fell, in a new abandonment to thought, upon the great bouquets of Hanoverian roses woven in the foreign carpet at her feet. In the garden-bed just beneath her, bushes of daphne, of azalea and the golden yama-buki were in bloom. A bird, swinging on a spray of the weeping pink cherry just across the path, sang to inattentive ears. Bees droned incessantly. From the closed doors of the little office came a reflected murmur. Now from the blur of tone shot a sudden slap as of a hand struck upon a bare table. A voice cried in English, "Gentlemen! gentlemen!" and a chorus of voices, "Sh-h-h—." Yuki caught herself back to the terrific import of the moment. What were those great men thinking and saying behind the closed doors? And what was her small single danger to the issues they represented? She walked down the west wall of the room in the direction of the office. Two low French windows, opening, indeed, to the very floor, gave upon an uncovered balcony. She parted the glass door-frames of a window and stood still, gazing outward, this way and that, down and along curved paths where sunshine lay like yellow silk, and flying shattered waifs of blossoms made wonderful wind-blown patterns. Her eyes clung longest to a little path just skirting a great stone lantern, for this led to certain tea-rooms at the far end of the garden. Now she walked slowly all around the room, pausing at the main door which led in from the front hallway. Footsteps were

advancing. Yuki opened to them.

"The noble Sir Onda has arrived,—father to your Highness," said Tora.

Yuki hesitated. "Does my mother accompany him?"

"No, your Ladyship, it is Sir Onda alone. He desires audience with my august master, but I told him I had received orders to usher all visitors directly to your presence."

"Quite right, Tora," said Yuki, trying to smile in a pleasant, unconcerned way. "Now say to my father that his Highness, Prince Haganè is absent, but may return in the space of two hours. I am engaged on certain duties at my Lord's command. And, Tora—"

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"Yes, your Ladyship."

"See that the visitor issues well into the street on leaving, and close the iron gate."

"Yes, your Ladyship."

The man's words and his bow had been quite as respectful as usual, perhaps a little more than usual, yet Yuki could not divest herself of the impression that there lurked a threat of comprehension, of nearness. "When I have explained all to my prince, we shall, perhaps, send good Tora away to some country estate. I could not endure his presence if I knew he harbored such a belief, and equally impossible is it for me to condescend to self-defence," thought the young wife. In her morbid state of consciousness, she could almost see, as a clairvoyant, Tora creeping to the shoji of the tea-rooms, parting the panels with crafty, expectant fingers; she could hear his gasp of consternation, of not altogether displeased agitation, as he discovered the beautiful young foreigner asleep on the floor, as he gazed, grinning, upon the broken hairpin.

Since the butler's knock, and Yuki's few words with him, absolute silence had prevailed in the little office; the very door seemed holding its breath. Yuki heard the panel pushed cautiously to one side, and knew that her husband listened. She went to her former place by the window. Now the bees outside, and the buzz of human voices within, recommenced. Into the latter crept vivacious exclamation. The clink of glasses arose, and now the sharp detonation of a match; more than once a smothered laugh was heard. Yuki sat by the window in apparent calm; her agony of suspense would soon be over. Those were the sounds that come at the end of an important conference, not in the midst of it. She clenched her little hands together within gray sleeves, and faced the office-door, to be in readiness with her smile when the grave procession should emerge. Another ten minutes elapsed, and another; the garden shadows gained visibly in length. Like a little image of propriety, she sat, and, for all her preparation, a small shiver passed along her frame as the office-door at last went flying aside.

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So set had been her eyes, her thoughts, upon this door, that she had not heard the sound of stealthy footsteps without or the soft brushing aside of clustered shrubs. Pierre stood, bareheaded, under the weeping cherry. The drooping branches, each set along its entire length in single pink amethysts of bloom, enclosed him as in a fountain. The lower part to his knees was hidden in waves of yama-buki. The wind, now rising, concealed with tossing sprays his trembling nook.

First the doors of the office, then the thick portières had been flung aside by Prince Haganè. The notable company filed in, the Japanese not forgetting the slight, ceremonial bow to Haganè, who stood smiling to let them pass. The last to emerge was Minister Todd. He bore in his hand a paper folded and sealed. Haganè kept close behind him. As the rest of the company came forward, making adieux to the flushed and dignified little hostess, these two stood apart, talking in low tones. Todd now and again tapped the paper by way of emphasis.

Pierre, crouching among the sprays of yama-buki, saw and heard it all. His fever and madness were, for the moment, things that had not been. The price he would later pay for this immunity did not trouble him now. He seemed all mind and spirit and keen intelligence, with no encumbering body. Nothing was impossible. He would scarcely have been surprised had he begun to drift toward that inner room without effort, as one sometimes drifts in dreams, and to enter unperceived by any one but Yuki. There she stood, his sweetheart, his promised bride, kept from him by that great monster who towered near and kept talking to the thin American, and kept tapping a paper that bore a great seal, red like blood. It should be blood, Pierre thought, with a slight rise in his excitement,—the blood of that old toad who had cheated him of this flower. But did a toad have blood at all? Well, there was a way to find out! When the American left he would steal in, a new St. George pursuing an uglier dragon. He felt now feverishly in his pockets for a knife, a pistol. He remembered now that the pistol, a pretty toy of silver and pearl given him by a Parisian actress, had been left at the French Legation. A moment after, reason again grasped him. He smiled bitterly, calling himself a child, a fool. Nothing could be worse for France or Yuki either than the death of Haganè at his hands. Some other way must be found. The Japanese themselves had a saying, "If you hate a man, let him live." Yes, let the old man live. Yuki's true lover could yet win her, undrenched in any blood. That paper now,—if he could secure such a paper—Haganè

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would give any price for such a paper!

All the guests had gone but Mr. Todd. He smiled down at Yuki and said, "Well, little girl, I guess Uncle Sam has done your country a good turn."

"Madame la Princesse is not burdened by me with state secrets, your Excellency," interposed Haganè, with more than his wonted haste.

"I understand. I sha'n't say more," laughed the other. "What was it, Yuki, that you tried to tell us just before the meeting?"

Yuki now could afford to smile and look demure; her danger was over. The great strong rock of Haganè's presence was near. "The need is past now, I thank you, Mr. Todd," she said.

"Good-bye, both of you. You're looking mighty young and happy, Prince, if there are hard struggles in the nation!"

He was gone. Yuki, glancing upward to her husband, was surprised and then herself embarrassed to note signs of discomfiture on that bronze countenance. Was it possible that Todd's light words could move him? Yuki went closer still. She could not meet his eyes, but, oh, the restfulness, the relief in his splendid nearness! Her explanation rushed to her lips and hung there. After the manner of good wives, she must first show interest in what was uppermost in his thoughts, and afterward could gently incline him to her own desire.

"Is that the very wonderful paper just signed, Lord?" she asked, putting up a hand.

Haganè glanced at the document, then bent to his wife the look she dreaded, yet longed for. Under it she stirred and quivered. "You are a white flower," said Haganè. "Do you really care to know?"

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"I—I—wish not to be disrespectfully inquisitive," stammered Yuki, "only, if the importance is so great, is there not danger to your august person in bearing it about?"

Again Haganè smiled. His young wife hung her crimsoning face. He put out an arm and caught her to him. "Is that your fear—you thing of snow and plum-blossom? Ah, Yuki—Yuki—you are my wife. When this time of stress and peril is at an end, I shall try to teach you something of a brighter hue than duty."

Pierre, high on his knees among the yama-buki, saw and heard it all.

"If there be danger, you must not bear it! The risk is terrible. Think, Lord, how our country needs you!" Her apprehension lifted her a little from self-consciousness. Haganè's answer was calm, steady, with a thrill in it. "Then who is to bear it, small sweet wife, if I should put it down? But, no, there must be no thought of thee and me—not yet. I belong to the land. In all haste must I take the paper to our Imperial Lord. Every moment means a danger. Ring instantly for the carriage,—I must go!"

"The single horse coupé is now being repaired," said Yuki, in a troubled tone, "and, more unfortunate, one of the pair of carriage-horses is ill; but I can order your kuruma with two runners."

"Unfortunate," echoed Haganè, in a lower tone, "yet such small annoyances beset the way of all. Ring for my stoutest kuruma, Yuki, and have three runners. They will bear me as swiftly as any horse."

"Lord," faltered Yuki, not moving from him, "you assured me that after the meeting I should have speech with you. The matter is indeed of importance, perhaps of great danger."

"Well, I will listen, child, if you can be brief. But first touch the bell and give my order."

Yuki went across the room from him. He, frowning slightly at the delay, stood as he had been standing, his back squarely to the office-door, his left shoulder toward the opened French window. Yuki, not ten yards before him, had reached the wall where the electric button was set. She raised a slim hand to it, but before she could press it, a certain flicker as of an animated shadow moving in the room behind Haganè drew her curious and anxious glance. The outstretched arm fell, paralyzed. She attempted to speak, to cry aloud, but her throat had turned to cork. Pierre Le Beau was creeping into the room like a thief, a cat, skirting the wall in the direction of the office-door. He caught her frozen stare of terror, and made a defiant gesture, commanding silence.

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Haganè raised his head. The delay puzzled him. He had been examining again the crimson seal. The look on his wife's face, come with such terrific suddenness, sent something almost like

fear through his heart. He thrust the paper in his breast, and turned to scan the room. Pierre was in the safe shelter of the columnar, massed portière.

Yuki clawed and mowed her way through a jungle of fire toward her lord. "Master, master!" she whispered hoarsely. She could say no more, and fell prone on her knees before him, reaching upward for his grasp.

"What ails you, child? In the name of Shaka, what has hurt you?" He bent to raise her, but she grovelled, eluding his hands.

"I am ill, very ill; let us go quickly to our chamber," she managed to choke out. Now she fluttered backward, luring him, like a wounded bird, her long, gray sleeves trailing after.

"In Shaka's name!" he cried again, "I cannot understand the suddenness."

Pierre now left the portière, and stole softly toward the bent back of the prince. Yuki thought him mad, with a new strength and cunning of murderous intent. She sprang up to her feet, hurling all her slight weight against Haganè with such force that he swerved. With a movement like light she had passed him, set her back to his, and was facing Pierre. "Here—here—kill me—not him—" she panted. "I am ready; I do not fear. See how white my breast and soft! Oh, blood will look so pretty here,—like the red seal!" She tore aside the dove-gray folds of her gown.

Haganè, wheeling to them, half drew the paper from his breast. The Frenchman saw, and as Haganè turned, lowered his head so that his face might still be hidden, reached out a hand, and, with one demon-directed dart of the nervous fingers had touched, had clutched, had wrenched away the long white screed of fate that bore a single drop of blood.

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For one awful crash of time, the solid earth split beneath the statesman's feet. Pierre had gone through the low window like a breeze, and his flying track through the shrubs stirred them scarcely more. Haganè staggered as his mind confirmed this strange, annihilating loss. A moment more and he was again calm master of his fate. He took Yuki by a shoulder, held her from him, and scorching her eyes with the scorn of his, said steadily, "So this is what ailed you, Princess Haganè! Why did you give no warning? Tell me the name of the thief."

Yuki blinked and moved her head backward and forward through the air. She put up a hand to her throat of cork, and smoothed it.

"Answer me, Yuki, who was that man?"

She did not answer. Suddenly she sagged to his feet, wrapping her long gray sleeves about his ankles. "Oh, Master, do not kill him! He is a very sick person, yes! I will get the paper for you, Lord. I will get it for you, I will get it!" she chattered in English. Why, at this central crisis of her life, she should have spoken English to a Japanese was something that she never understood.

Haganè looked down upon her silently. He could not move for the coils around his feet. He saw clearly that she had reasons for detaining him, and his mind went naturally to the one solution. "This was a lover she protected." Yet he was calm, his grave dignity unassailable. His lips, his chin, his down-bent lids were of metal; only at the temples, veins sprang and stood like branches of dull red coral.

"I shall not ask again, Yuki; will you tell me the name of the man who has gone?"

Yuki stared up at him through flickering lids. The air snapped into little particles of jet and tinsel. Things were getting the queer look. She feared that she was going to laugh. "Was there a man, Lord?" she questioned.

"Gods!" said Haganè. His nostrils blew in and out, and still his voice was even and kind, "Yuki-ko, your country, the life of our Emperor, may be menaced by this theft. Can any bodily passion exonerate this ultimate crime?"

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A great spasm seized the crouching woman. "Lord, have mercy on my weak heart; but I can get the paper—I alone can get it; I will buy it for you with my life!"

"Bah—your life! We do not offer carrion to the Gods. Unloose my feet,—poor soiled thing. Do not touch me!"

Yuki hid her face against his feet. Her arms coiled like steel bands.

Slowly and deliberately he knelt and untwined, as he might the tendrils of a vine he did not wish to bruise, her clinging arms, the long gray sleeves. There was no roughness in any movement except at the instant when he snapped the obi-domè, intending to use it to bind her wrists. She felt

his intention, and waited craftily until he had almost drawn the first noose, then slipping her arms away, encircled again his patient feet, babbling, "Let me get it. He was ill; he did not know. Harm him not. I will get the paper." In her distracted thought some other self, anterior to this, seemed to be at a great distance, running side by side with Pierre, and jerking out to him through failing breath: "I hold Haganè back, but it cannot last very long. Do not harm him,—I will do what you wish, Pierre, I will be what you wish; already Haganè casts me off, but do not harm him. Quick, quick, poor mad boy, my strength fails! Haganè is coming—coming—"

His first failure brought no impatience to the statesman. With more elaborate care he again knotted the obi-domè and drew it. He succeeded now in securing the fluttering hands. His one sign of agitation was deep, heavy breathing. As he raised his head from the task, on the white balls of his eyes tiny crimson threads broke through. Yuki stared upward, dazed, into his face. "Look not on me," he said, as he prepared to rise. "Put your false face to the earth. If I thought a shiver of obedience, of loyalty were left in your cringing soul, I would command you to stay here quietly—and seek not to follow, and so make more open this disgrace. Hide your eyes, I say! Sooner would I caress a grave-worm than thee!" He pushed her down with some violence, rose, and hurried to the rear of the house. Yuki turned her face sidewise to follow him. "A kuruma," she heard him call, "and three swift runners! Ten yen each to the men if they start within the moment!"

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He stood bareheaded in the sunshine, his watch opened in his hands. As if by invocation, the kuruma and the grinning coolies appeared. Yuki crawled a few inches, and strained her dry throat outward, listening for the address he was to give. No effort had been needed for hearing. His voice had the ring, the resonance of a deep bell, as he said aloud, "To the French Legation!"

Yuki, when she was sure that the whole place had fallen quiet, slowly lifted herself to a sitting posture on the foreign carpet, in the very centre of a huge bunch of vermilion cabbage roses. She gazed with intense scrutiny at one of these unearthly blossoms. It reminded her of something, a very terrible something, which had happened to her long ago. She tried to put a hand out and trace the irregular circle, but something held her hands together. She stared now at the hands, at the twisted obi-domè. Its golden clasps, now broken, hung down and clinked together like the toys on a lady's chatelaine. The sight recalled her to the present, and solved the suggested mystery of the harsh red rose. It was of sealing-wax the flowers had reminded her,—of a great crimson seal, of enamelled paper.

"But I kept him back quite a little while," she said aloud, and nodded in satisfaction. "Less danger will come to both because I held Haganè back. How could he know it was Pierre? How could he think so quickly to go to the French Legation? Will Pierre be really there? Oh, he is a terrible man, that great Haganè! Even the voices of the air speak to him! He called me 'carrion,' rather would he fondle a grave-worm than little Yuki! Ah, his eyes said not so this morning, no, not this morning, my great Lord Haganè."

She moved her hands restlessly in their bonds. "Poor little hands," she murmured. "He tried to bind you. Shall I set you free?" She put her ear down against them. "Oh, yes, indeed I can release you," she smiled as if the hands had answered. "The obi-domè is soft and insecurely tied. Even a great prince like Haganè cannot tie a knot that a woman's fingers cannot unfasten!" With a few deft turns of the wrist she loosed the cord, letting it slip to the floor.

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For an instant she stared at the bright red marks on her wrists, then put both hands upward to smooth the loops of her hair. She seemed a little surprised to encounter such disarray, and began thoughtfully to coil up, foreign fashion, the blue-black hair which fell in streams along her shoulders. With a little shiver she drew her kimono together at the throat. "Why did Pierre wake so soon?" she whimpered. "He came and took something from Haganè. He did not understand his own crime, being so very ill. No, he could not have willingly slain Yuki, had he understood. Haganè said that my country, my Emperor, may be harmed through Pierre. I must get the paper back at once, at once! Why am I waiting? Oh, I must go swiftly, as they went!"

With spasmodic motions she lifted her trembling body upward. The gorgeous obi, stiff with silver pine-boughs and robbed now of the indispensable obi-domè, slipped down about her in coils, as of a huge wooden shaving. She grasped instinctively at the folds. Her eyes continued to search restlessly the corners of space.

"Oh, Pierre, naughty, naughty Pierre!" she went on whispering. "You promised to lie still. You gave your word to Yuki when she helped you. Now they may both need to die,—poor Pierre and little Yuki, too. They may die with the cherry-blossoms all dressed up for them to see! If only my poor head would stop moving, and I could think what I must do!"

She put one icy hand against her temple. With the other she tried to keep the falling robes from catching on her feet. Tottering and stumbling, she reached the hall-way. A frightened servant-

woman knelt near the door. "Mistress, Mistress, in Amida's name, tell me what terrible thing is here!"

Yuki half closed her lids and peered forward, trying to recognize the speaker. "Oh, Inè, is that you? Yes, a terrible thing, two terrible things! My hair has fallen and my obi slips away. Arrange me quickly, Inè, quickly, and call a swift kuruma like Prince Haganè's. I must go somewhere now."

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"Kashikomarimasu" (I hear and will obey), faltered the woman, but instead of advancing, crouched backward. She was afraid of the strange light in her mistress's eyes.

"Quick, I say! Did you not hear me?" cried Yuki, angrily, and clapped both hands together with a sharp sound. The obi fell, surrounding her in one great shimmering wheel. The terror in Inè's face brought the young wife to her senses. "It really is nothing, Inè," she said, trying hard to smile. "I had a little fall there in the drawing-room, and am dazed. Do not concern yourself or speak to the other servants. Go now at once and bring my long black adzuma-coat, another obi-domè and some foreign hair-pins. I have not the time to be entirely redressed. I will await your coming here."

Yuki stood at the foot of the steps. The servant sped upward. From the far end of the hall came Tora. The prearranged impassivity of his face was noticeable even to one in Yuki's excited state. "Well, Tora!" she said haughtily.

"Did you not wish me, your Ladyship?" asked the man, bowing in exaggerated deference. Yuki felt a hot wave pass along her neck and vanish against the pallor of her cheeks.

"I did not," she answered steadily. "But since you are here, I wish you to order my kuruma with two swift runners."

"Yes, your Ladyship." He did not move.

"You heard my order?"

"Your Highness," said the man, turning pale as he spoke, "I am only a servant, but I once lost by death a daughter of your age. There is something I would like to say."

Yuki bit her lip; a struggle went on within her. The dip of the scales came through Inè, who now hurried down the stairs.

"When I return, Tora," said the young princess; "I am sure you mean to be kind and not presuming. I will speak to you when I return."

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Tora shook his head as he turned away. As Yuki's kuruma rattled from the gate, he went back musingly alone toward the Cha no yu rooms.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

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MRS. TODD and her daughter, in driving away from the Haganè's official home, had given the order, "Suruga Dai." To be truthful and more accurate, this euphonious, topographical title, spoken in Japanese with a delicious softening of continental "u's," and blurred Italian "g's," was, under Mrs. Todd's crisp American tongue, transformed to the alert and inharmonious "Sew-roo-gar Da-eye." The driver, fortunately inured to these attacks upon national enunciation, drove as straight to the desired spot as if Yuki herself had named it.

Suruga Dai, so called because from its elevation can be seen the distant plain of Suruga with its glittering single treasure, Fujiyama, is a curious little welt of land, rising in a small loaf through the very heart of modern Tokio. Official residences climb the slopes, foreign homes perch at the top, Japanese villas and gardens crown it. A fashionable hospital, endowed by the Empress, has risen there within a decade; but, on Suruga Dai, the dominating presence is a huge Greek Church, built and utilized for her own purposes, by Russia. From far down the bay of Yedo, from car windows on the busy, curved track that leads from Yokohama, this edifice stands as a sort of saturnine beacon. Staring, treeless, defiant, with square white walls that hurt the eyes with their blank brilliancy, and a squat blue-tiled roof fashioned to a Byzantine dome, it rises above the verdure-hidden eaves of the Imperial palace, checks the vista to many a narrow street, and hangs, a menace and a humiliation, above the wide plain of alien interests. Boatmen on the Sumida River, poling down rice, and wood, and charcoal from distant villages, glance up toward it with a scowl and a prayer. If they were Romanists they would cross themselves and ask protection of the Virgin.

Being heathen, they merely invoke the great living national spirit of their race, bow reverent heads to the thought of their Emperor, and stop at the next police-station to register their names as volunteers for the army. Russia has claimed to believe that the commanding position of this church is indicative of future rulership. They have boasted openly, in the Far East, of this coming thralldom. What the Japanese will do with the inimical temple and its priesthood in case of their ultimate victory over Russia is an interesting problem. With their tolerance for all religious belief, their innate delicacy and dignity, the foreigners who best understand them would certainly predict an unchanged policy of forbearance.

Mrs. Todd did not take a great deal of interest in Tokio street scenes. Her mind generally streamed back like vapor to the exalted personage she had recently left, or blew on before to an anticipated welcome. This was the case to-day. Rudely torn from her Prince, she was thinking of the little Countess K—, now in the Suruga Hospital after an attack of appendicitis, to whom she had promised a visit. Count K—, one of the rising statesmen of the country, was a particular friend of Dodge; Minister Todd also believed great things of his future. Gwendolen, beside her mother in the open carriage, answered intelligently, but with obvious lack of interest, the commonplace remarks addressed to her. A foretaste, a prescience of tragedy, lurked like a fog in the air. Companionship Yuki's dilemma came her own,—recognized even in this moment of irritation as incomparably less important, though still maddening with the sting of nettles,—Dodge's foolish devotion to Carmen, his continued coolness to herself. She was not old yet, or experienced enough, to put herself in another's place. Dodge was trying to hurt and humiliate her. Worse still, he was succeeding. She needed to ponder no further. One does not write a geologic treatise on the pebble in one's shoe. Dodge wished to injure her. It was cowardly, unmanly. Dodge prided himself on his Southern blood. Gwendolen, with a sneer, thought him—or tried to believe she thought him—a degenerate specimen of chivalry. If at last he should attempt another overture to her friendship, she would know well how to scorn him!

A great jerk of the wheels, and renewed vociferation from the coachman, started the horses in a nervous scamper up the slope. Gwendolen's head went back, the hatpins tugged at her yellow hair. She clutched at the velvet brim of her hat, and at the same moment her lifted eyes fell on the white walls and sagging dome of the Greek Church. The scowl she gave it might have been borrowed from a rice-seller on his barge. "Detestable barbarians!" she muttered. "If they ever *should* dominate this land!"

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"Gwendolen," said her mother, also jerked and unnerved by the speed, "you are far too exaggerated in your expression of hatred to Russia. Even Cy says so. You are going to get the Legation into trouble yet!"

Gwendolen threw herself back into a corner and sulked—if a thing the color of light and flowers can be said to sulk. She went at least into partial eclipse, and retained her penumbric mood to the hospital and within it. The pleasure of receiving guests seemed, in the case of this little invalid countess, to be entirely cancelled by her distress at remaining rudely on her back, without a single bow. Mrs. Todd tried to put her at her ease, speaking very loudly, as she often did in talking to the Japanese, as if their ignorance of civilized languages lurked in the ears as well as the tongue. Everything in the room was foreign,—the white and brass bed, tables, chairs, spoons and medicine bottles, vases, even the lithograph framed portraits of the Emperor and Empress hanging on the opposite wall. The nurses wore gingham dresses, aprons, and white caps. The cloven hoof showed literally (and with opprobrious connotation deleted) in the thick-soled white, digitated socks on which they sped with the lightness and swiftness of a breeze in a meadow. Relatives of the countess came in presently, greeting and thanking the illustrious visitors in her behalf. In spite of efforts to be at ease, the whole visit crackled and creaked with starched formality. Gwendolen was glad when her mother rose to go.

In the short drive home they passed directly by the gate of the French Legation, and skirted the brick and plaster wall which hides a fair garden. "It is a shame for a bachelor to keep this lovely place to himself," observed Mrs. Todd, pensively.

"It would be a much worse shame for him to try to marry any decent woman," said the girl, darkly.

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"Gwendolen! Gwendolen! What on earth has come to you lately? You are not like yourself, these days! You seem to hate the French as much as the Russians. Neither nation is troubling you, just now, nor Yuki either!" The parent put up her lorgnette to study her daughter's fair, dissatisfied face.

Gwendolen went back to her corner and the sulks.

At the American Legation Mrs. Stunt awaited them. Mrs. Todd went with more than usual willingness to her friend. Gwendolen had not been an inspiring companion. The friendship between the two elder ladies, threatened as we have seen by certain events at Yuki's first reception, had received some skilful soldering, and, being new-painted by Mrs. Stunt's voluminous explanations, had a fictitious lustre. Mrs. Todd was neither far-seeing nor revengeful, yet, quite often now she passed a thoughtful finger across the soldered spot.

Gwendolen went alone to a smaller reception-room. She wished to know above all things whether her father was now with Prince Haganè. There was but a single source of information,—Mr. Dodge. At first she thought of going to him in person. What was that "snip," or his opinions, compared with Yuki's danger? Her courage faltered, and she compromised with it by a short note sent into the office by a servant.

"Mr. T. Caraway Dodge.

"MY DEAR MR. DODGE,—Kindly inform me whether my father, Mr. Todd, is in the office. If not, where he has gone, and at what hour he is expected back.

"Very truly,

"GWENDOLEN DE LANCY TODD."

In a very few moments she flushed, and bit her lip over the following reply:

"Miss Gwendolen de Lancy Todd.

"MY DEAR MISS TODD,—Your father, Mr. Todd, is not in this office. I am not at liberty to communicate the name of the place to which he has gone. He expects to return about 2.30 P. M.

"Very truly,

"T. CARAWAY DODGE."

"Pshaw! I might have known it!" said Gwendolen, under her breath, as she tore the note to small pieces. She looked at her watch. "Just one, and he can't get here for an hour and a half. What shall I do until he comes?" As if in answer, the luncheon-bell rang. She moved toward the big dining-room, dreading to see Mrs. Stunt. Yes, she was there, wriggling, smiling, opening her innocent blue eyes, as usual. Gwendolen's greeting was civil, and no more. She sat through the meal in silence, and ate practically nothing. Mrs. Stunt tried a few tactful remarks about the girl's "being in love," as a reason for the lack of appetite. After the unquiet meal, Gwendolen saw, with new dismay, that the ladies were to take possession of the main drawing-room. This deprived her of the solace of her piano. She wandered aimlessly about the big rooms, starting a letter to an American friend, and desisting, after the first page, pulling out bureau drawers, and forgetting why she had opened them, doing, in fact, all those vague, self-irritating things that indicate a perturbed and joyless mind.

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She longed for intelligent human companionship,—for her father. When dad should come, she told herself, she would lose this restless heart. She longed for him and his counsel with a physical hunger. Her mind veered again and again to Dodge, only to be whirled off fiercely. Mrs. Todd as a confidante was impossible, even had the wily Stunt not claimed her. Secure in the conviction of a commonplace mind, good Mrs. Todd would have rushed at once to the Haganè residence, demanded instant audience of Haganè, and failing in that have hastened to the Cha no yu rooms to rescue her ailing protégé. No, Mrs. Todd, with all her kind heart, could not be trusted!

The moments passed somehow. Gwendolen saw, through an upper window, her father's approach. He came in a hired street kuruma. Even at this distance she could see that the strain was gone from his face, if not the excitement. He caught a glimpse of her, smiled, and waved to her. Before the girl could reach him, he had entered the office and confronted Dodge. Now she was brave. With dad to guard her, she could brave a hundred such as Dodge. She burst in upon them, giving the coolest of nods to the secretary, and pouring, without warning, a series of petitions and exclamations upon her wondering father. At last he made out that she wished to see him alone. Dodge had been quicker. Already the inner door of the office closed behind him. Todd turned from the blank panel to his daughter. The teasing twitch was on his thin lip, the sparkle in his eye! "No, no, I can't stand it just now,—I'm worried, oh, so horribly worried, and you must help me, dad, as you always do. Am I not your only little girl?"

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"You rascal," said Todd, seating himself, and drawing her down.

"Anything but a rascal to-day, dad. This trouble is real. Yuki may be in danger,—I can't help her. I have thought and thought and thought, until my brain goes round like flying ants in the sun. I can't help. I am an impotent, miserable, feminine girl. What did you see at Yuki's house?"

"Why, I saw only what I went to see," answered her father. He gazed with some concern on the chatterer, as if indeed she were light-headed.

"The meeting is over safely, then, and nothing happened?"

"The meeting is over! How did you know of it? The meeting is over and everything happened.

History may be changed because of it!"

"Then Pierre did not wake up? Don't think me crazy, dad! I can see that you do. All that time, while you statesmen were closeted with Haganè, Pierre Le Beau lay asleep a little way off, in the garden. Now perhaps you will see what has worried me!" She gave a triumphant look.

"Good Lord!" said he. Then again, on a higher note, "Good *Lord!*" He put her from him, rose, and began walking the narrow room. Gwendolen nodded in satisfaction. At last he was stirred as deeply as she could wish.

"Yuki isn't to blame. He wandered to that garden in delirium. He must have gone there first thing, for she doesn't know how long he had been in hiding. When she discovered him, the gates were already barred, and Haganè had given her instructions. His fever was awful. She gave him medicine for it, and then a heavy fever mixture, and put him to sleep in the Cha no yu rooms!"

"Haganè being in ignorance?"

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"Yes. She said she was going to try her best to tell him before the meeting, though he had commanded her not to distract his thoughts. She was going to try anyhow, but if she failed, there was nothing for it but to trust the good Lord to keep him asleep until after the meeting, and then to tell her husband immediately."

Todd gave a deep breath as of relief. He pushed the hair back from his forehead. "God! It was a risk. She is too young to face such tragic responsibilities! Poor child! poor child! But I guess it's all right now!" Gwendolen heard him mutter.

She caught his arm. "You think she is safe? You left husband and wife together?"

"Yes, and he looked at her as though she were an angel just come down. I even dared to tease him a little. I told him he looked young and handsome! The old War God almost blushed."

Suddenly the smile on his face turned gray. He stood perfectly still, his long arms dangled. Life and youth ebbed from him.

"Father! Father!" cried the girl, in agony. "What is it? A terrible thought has come to you! Don't hold it back. I must hear. I will go mad!"

Todd seated himself, and touched his handkerchief to his lips. "I think I had better not speak it, daughter."

"Tell me, *tell* me!" said Gwendolen, fiercely. "Look at me,—look into my eyes, father. I have your own strong spirit!"

"As I was coming home," began Mr. Todd, obediently, through whitening lips, "I walked the first part of the way, you know, to cool my excitement. The meeting had been terrific in importance,—terrific—" he paused.

Gwendolen was now on her knees, reaping every look, every word, with her bright eyes. "Yes, yes; Yuki may be in danger."

"A group of fellows were standing in front of the British Legation,—Potter, Wyndham, and some others. They stopped me, and were chaffing and joking as those English try to do, when a rickshaw with three runners whizzed by like a Kentucky handicap, and there was Haganè sitting bolt upright, with a face like an old Nō mask. 'That's deuced odd,' says Wyndham; 'not ten minutes ago a yellow-headed foreigner without a hat went by at the same pace. Looks as if Haganè were on the scent.'"

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"Oh, oh; did he say that the first was—Pierre?"

"No, he didn't say it; he didn't need to. They all looked it."

For one instant Gwendolen cowered against her father's knees. Then she rose, straight, tall, self-possessed, and held a hand down to her father. "Come, dad," she said, almost with a smile, "we have no time to lose."

He sprang up, facing her. The faces glowed with the same purpose, a white fire reflected from surfaces of ivory. Both pairs of eyes burned to black jet. "Come, then," he said simply. He took his hat in passing. She was bareheaded. A sealskin cap was lying on Dodge's desk. She caught it up, as her father had done his hat. Hand in hand they hurried out, Dodge, in wonder, watching them. They went down the Legation hill and there summoned kuruma, with two runners apiece,

promising a good reward for haste. Only once the girl spoke. "Oh, dad, my heart weighs me to the earth with its whispers."

At the Haganè home they were told that every one was out. Gwendolen's quick eye saw that the servants were frightened, demoralized. She insisted on having English speech with Tora. He came sulkily, and at first refused to understand her words. This man's need for self-control gave Gwendolen her most unbearable twinge of apprehension. "Tora!" she cried aloud, "I love your mistress. I am good friend of Prince Haganè. We wish to do only good things. Don't you understand? I love—good—we will do *good*, not harm. Tell us where she went."

Tora studied the two faces intently. "Both Master and the Princess Yuki-ko went ve'y quick, French Legation. Mooch troubles, I think." He turned away, as if wishing to say no more.

The eyes of the two Americans met again. "That is a place where I cannot take you, unannounced, my dear," said Mr. Todd.

"It is a place, too, where I think I could do little good. But she is unharmed; that is certain. Ronsard cannot afford to have violence there."

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"Don't fancy things more terrible than they are," said Todd. "I myself am full of hope. If I can get in at all, I can help explain. In the meantime, be very cautious, and go home quietly."

"Yes, go home quietly to wait! Oh, I knew that was coming. To wait, to be stretched out flat on the rack of hours, with every little red-hot minute pinching me. But I will go. I trust you, dad, to do the best. I will wait patiently, as meekly as Yuki herself could wait. That is all I don't like about Yuki,—her meekness. Oh, my poor darling, what will those vile men do to you?"

Again at the Legation gate she dismissed her two coolies, paying them an incredible sum for immunity from bartering, and walked in, along the gravelled driveway, on foot. Dodge, who had never left the neighborhood of his office window, felt a renewed thrill of rapture at the sight of his cap, set like a brown, inverted bird's-nest, on her bright curls. It would be a different cap. No one should wear it after this consecration. He watched the slight figure with yearning tenderness. Something in her walk, a sort of suppressed excitement in her whole person, showed to him. The unusual hung about her. Deliberately he came out from his den to follow. She gave no backward glances.

Across the front of the Legation she hurried, taking a path that led into the garden and wide lawn at the right. At its rim she poised, uncertain; then, as if coming to a swift decision, took a diagonal course across the turf. Exactly in the centre of the wide, green space grew a clump of gigantic mushrooms with white tops and thick blue bodies. As she neared them the mushrooms began to bob and nod in an agitated fashion, while funny little hissing breaths came from the midst. They were the professional lawn-weeders,—little old women with round faces and high cheekbones, each armed with a pygmy sickle. They worked in a tiny grazing squad, devouring, root and all, each intruding tuft of clover, dandelion, pilewort, and even the spring messenger, tsukushimbo, beloved of Japanese children.

"Kon-nichiwa," cried the girl, in her high, sweet voice.

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"Kon-nichiwa (good day), o jo san," responded the little company, rising, as corks on a single wave, and bobbing down again as one.

Gwendolen, interested in spite of her anxieties, stood still to watch them. Dodge, unperceived, leaned against a kiri tree at the edge of the lawn, with eyes only for her.

Their blue backs with a white ideograph bore the unanimity of a pack of cards. "I feel just like Alice in Wonderland," thought the girl. "Oh, I know I am Alice. They have been painting all the dandelions white. Was this done by order of the duchess?" she asked aloud, and touched a snowy flower with her foot.

The little dame nearest sent up a shy, sparkling glance, "Hek! hai! Udzukushii tampopo gozaimasu!" (Ha, yes, unusually fine dandelion honorably is!) She flushed crimson, and went feverishly to work again in the shadow of the tall golden one.

Gwendolen watched them for a few moments longer. She seemed again to be undecided, for she looked first toward the house, then outward, to the far end of the garden, where a clump of young sugi trees made a fragrant, shadowy retreat. "That awful Mrs. Stunt must be gone by this. I believe I will go in and let Chopin make me more wretched still," she was thinking. She looked more wistfully toward the far corner. "No, I'll just go over there and have out one big, good cry, with no one to bother me. If I cry in the house, mother will bring me aromatic spirits of ammonia." Acting on the latter impulse, she started, running now toward the trees.

"Arà! it runs well!" whispered one of the grass-cutters to a neighbor. "These foreigners all have

big, strong legs."

"I never can tell the foreign men from the foreign women," remarked another.

"*Dō-mo!* you simpleton!" retorted the first. She was the one to whom Gwendolen had spoken directly, and though covered with confusion at the moment, now vaunted herself upon the incident, and prepared herself to take precedence in all comments concerning the strange doings of "I-i-jin."
"*Dō-mo!* it is easy to observe. The men have upper bodies square, like a box, and this box is tightly covered with woollen cloth. From the lower corners of the square come two stiff legs, like posts. Now the women show no legs at all, but the middle of the body is shrunken very small, like a sakè gourd about which a string has been tied when it is green. Poor things, it must surely hurt them to be so bound. It is a practice more strange than that of encasing feet, used by Chinese women."

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"They all look alike to me, I say," repeated the first, unimpressed by this erudition. Perhaps the boastful breath of the speaker awoke a small coal of obstinacy. "The children are small in size, so I know them to be children; but all faces are alike, as the faces of cows, pigs, and horses are alike, and all are hideous!"

"That one, now, was not so frightful of aspect," ventured a kindly third, and pointed her sickle to the spot where Gwendolen, having climbed a low hillock, just disappeared beyond.

"That one would have been almost good to look at, but for its nose!"

"The noses of all are like these sickles," said the dogmatic first.

"Buddha teaches us to be content with what cannot be changed. Perhaps to the foreigners themselves the sharp noses are even beautiful!" said the gentler critic.

A chorus of hisses and low laughs greeted this unheard-of generosity. The little speaker flushed under the shower of raillery, but did not abandon her humane position. Something in the American girl's face had flashed excitement, a new interest, a feeling almost like recognition, into her narrow vista. She hoped she would be called to work often in this huge garden, where the bright-haired o jo san might wander.

Upon the hillock which rose in front of the little sugi grove, corners of rough stone stuck out, and shrubs had been planted, chiefly of azalea. Mingled with the many-colored blossoms, there curved long wands of yama-buki, that most golden flower, the gorse of the Far East. For once Gwendolen passed these waves of beauty by. Down there, over among the tree-trunks where the ground was winter-strewn with fragrant brown shreds of leaves, one could sit and cry to one's heart's content. Deliberately she held back the fast-rising sobs until the haven was gained, and then, hurling herself to earth, gave vent to her grief and prophetic fears. "Oh, my poor little Yuki! What are those hard men saying to you now? What will they do if they think you wrong? And I can't help you! I can do nothing! Oh, I wish we hadn't come to this place! Will any of us ever be happy again? I have my own grief, but I hide it, ashamed, before your peril! Oh, my little sister, my only little sister! If I could only catch you up like a drifting petal, and hide you in my heart, and run away with you back to our other home, back to schooldays, and happiness! But we'll never be young again, we'll never be happy. Oh—oh—oh, my heart will break!"

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The azaleas stared down in stately dignity; the yama-buki tossed dissent. On a sugi limb quite near, a row of sparrows placed themselves, slowly puffing out their feathers in unison, like so many buns in a warm oven. They cocked their heads suspiciously toward the prostrate girl, and gossiped about her, saying she had stolen her hair from the sun.

Dodge, half ashamed of himself, but led on by something stronger than conventionality, passed the nodding group of weeders, answered their salutation in an absent-minded fashion, and continued a slow but unswerving route toward the sugi trees. At the hillock he paused. A curious sound on the other side drew him upward. His brown head pushed a way through the yama-buki limbs. Gwendolen was crying. He stared, not half believing his senses. Gwendolen, the gay, insouciant, defiant, enchanting Gwendolen, weep like this! Sooner should the stars send down beams of soot!

A big something that partook of the physical nature of a hedgehog burrowed upward in his throat. Something sweet and unaccustomed stung his lids.

"Oh, my heart will break!" sobbed the girl once more. "There 's nobody to help me! There's nobody to listen!"

With a single bound Dodge had cleared the hillock and was on his knees beside her. A startled, upward look met him,—expectation, a wild joy, new bitterness,—these flashed in turn across her expressive face. With a wide movement of resistance, she turned away from him and buried her tear-stained face upon her knees.

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Dodge stood instantly. "Do you mean that I am to go?" he asked.

Sobs alone answered him. She could not drive him away. His presence, his nearness, were appallingly sweet. Neither could she yield tamely where she had promised herself a policy of condescension.

Despairing of further verbal instruction, and glad in his heart that the repulse had not been more vehement, he walked off a few paces, and seated himself against a tree. Gwendolen held her breath until he was safely on the earth again. She could not have borne his instant desertion. All he had to do now, Dodge was well aware, was simply to wait, and be still. The one thing impossible to Gwendolen was indefinite silence. Even before he began to expect them, the hysterical words came fluttering, as on broken wings, to his ear. "I suppose you are glo—glo—*gloating* on this scene of my—*agony!* You li—li—like to see me hideous, with red-rimmed eyes and a gar—gar—*gamet* nose!" Again the head went down, and the tiny lace ball of a handkerchief came into requisition.

"I can't see your eyes, Gwendolen, or your nose, either. I am not looking for them. But if they were emerald green it wouldn't phase me. You are in trouble. I didn't know you could cry like this. I wish I could be of some aid, some little comfort to you."

Never before had he called her "Gwendolen" in this grave assured tone. No mere love-sick boy could have done it. The voice was that of a man, with a man's power and mastery and self-respect. The woman in her put up a protecting hand, but the deeper nature responded with smiles. Reason, instinct, affection; clamored, like insistent children, for the boon of grace. Her heart leaned down to them. "Recognize him,—confide in him,—win him now, forever," cried the voices. "Nothing can help you, in a time like this, as his love might help. You need him, foolish one,—why not admit it and have peace?" But Vanity and Pride put on horrid masks, and frightened the petitioners. She kept her eyes hidden.

"Well, shall I go or stay?" asked Dodge, calmly. The young man listened in admiring wonder at his own smooth tone. How could his thumping heart and brain direct that tranquil flow? [pg 36]

"You are wel—wel—welcome to stay if you care to. I don't own the grove," said the girl.

Dodge picked a bit of leaf from the earth and began to shred the frail, brown lace. "I was awfully sorry, Miss Todd, not to be able to tell you this morning where the Minister had gone. I am only a servant, you know, and must obey orders."

"Oh, it's no matter," said Gwendolen, airily. She was elated to find her spirits, her self-confidence, returning in a tide. "I know all about it now,—a good deal more, I dare say, than you yourself."

"I know nothing, except the place where Mr. Todd was to go and the purpose of the meeting. He was about to tell me the result of it, when you came in and carried him off in triumph!"

"Not in triumph,—good heavens, not in triumph. This is the most awful day of my life!" She lifted her head now, throwing it backward to the slight wind, and drawing deep breaths. She expected him to urge her confidence, to ask, at least, what trouble had come to her. Already she had more than half decided to tell him all. He was a safe confidant,—one of whom her father would approve,—and—she must admit that, at times, he had clear judgment. He kept an irritating silence. Gwendolen began to fidget.

"Well, don't you care whether I suffer or not? I thought you said you wanted to help me!"

"I want it more than I want anything else in the world, except one thing," said Dodge, and moved two trees nearer.

"Well, well," cried the other, nervously, "I shall tell you. I have been simply dying to tell somebody. To bear a suspense like this all alone is like keeping your fist in a water dyke,—or barring a door with your arm, or some of those dreadful heroic things." Hampered at first by a constantly recalled determination to maintain her dignity, she began the exciting history of the day, starting from the moment when she heard of Pierre's escape, and ending with the visit of her father and herself to the deserted Haganè mansion. [pg 36]

Dodge listened to all with an interest that a barometer might feel. He was silent, except for a very few terse, direct questions. Not an exclamation escaped him, and not a point. As she neared the end, Gwendolen's voice gave way, and the little handkerchief was raised. Dodge moved a tree nearer.

"Now tell me what you think, tell me truly. I have buried my own thoughts in the earth, and sit here on their grave."

"Let my thoughts go there with yours, dear," said her companion, mournfully. "The affair is as bad as it could well be. Luck alone is going to save your friend, and from what I have seen and known of Miss Yuki, she doesn't seem marked out by good luck."

She did not resent his hopelessness. Apparently she had foreseen it. The telling of her story had eased while it had wearied her. She gave a long, sobbing sigh, like a child, and let her head droop.

Before she knew it Dodge's arm was around her. "I'd give my life to keep this and all other sorrows from you, Gwendolen. But all I can offer now is—myself. Come to me, darling, put your poor tired little head against me, and let me try to comfort you."

The girl began to tremble piteously. In her nervous state, the brimming tears soon overflowed. "No—no—" she whispered, trying to push him off. "It is not me you love,—you are Car-car—*car*-men's! She said so. You belong to Car-Carmen!"

"I belong to Carmen's cat!" cried Dodge. "What am I to Carmen or Carmen to me?"

"Then you de—ceived her!"

"Pshaw! I'll make Carmen a sugar man in my image. She'll like that lots better. I love only you—only you, you beautiful, golden, tormenting angel of a girl! If you hadn't kept me on pins and needles, I wouldn't say it! I love *you*, I say. How could any man in his senses ever love any other woman after once seeing you?"

Gwendolen tried to be stern. "No," she said again, "you don't love, you don't respect me. You were horrid that day! You defied me to my face. You wouldn't apologize. Will you apologize now?"

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"Indeed I won't," he cried with a ring of victory. "I'd be a mucker and a sneak to do so, and you would never want to look at me again. Deny it,—and deny that you love me,—oh, Gwendolen, Gwendolen!"

With a little sob, in which a golden feather had been caught, she leaned to his arms.

He took up the little brown sealskin cap, flung it back to her head, and, in his most boyish, impudent, and ecstatic tone, said in her ear, "You know the penalty for wearing another fellow's hat?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

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IN his favorite small smoking-room at the French Legation, crammed with motley Japanese and Gallic bric-a-brac, Count Ronsard fumbled nervously with his nether-lip.

"You sent for me, your Excellency?" said the secretary Mouquin, at the door.

"Allons! Entrez! It is the devil!—what our English cousins call 'the beastly bore.' But for his mother, the Princess Olga, I would wash my hands entirely!"

He went through the gesture, revolving one fat pudding of a fist about the other, and closing with an outward fling of both, and a shrug that made his body quake. "No news at all, Mouquin?"

"Nothing decisive, your Excellency. A mere hint, a hushed rumor, that Le Beau was last traced to the neighborhood of Prince Haganè's official residence."

"Sacrebleu! You should have probed."

"I asked a few questions guardedly. Your Excellency, one hesitates to put a match to a powder-train."

"Quite true, Mouquin. And when did the hushed rumor have it that he was seen,—what hour?"

"Before noon,—not long, in fact, after his mysterious escape from the nurses."

Ronsard's head dropped forward an inch. A sickly glow drove the usual gray pallor from his

face.

"Doubtless," ventured the secretary, "Monsieur Le Beau will find his way sooner or later—to you!"

"Certinement! Certinement!" cried the other, finding relief in sarcasm. "He will come weeping to the arms of Mother France. Bah! I would that Mother France could greet him with the toes of these boots!"

He thrust forward pointed patent-leather tips, and stared at them, as if calculating the punishment they might inflict.

Mouquin, not being asked to find a seat, still stood by the door. The very air of the room held in solution, with its blue smoke, the dampness of foreboding. The first secretary's voice sounded thin.

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"The doctors think this mad exposure means his certain death, your Excellency."

"Death! H'm! He'll take good care to stay alive till we're all involved. It's too late for him to die."

The other raised his brows but made no answer.

"Have an absinthe, Mouquin?"

Without noticing that Mouquin shook his head Ronsard leaned over heavily and poured a little of the liquid into a glass, filling it up with water. Without drinking, he stared as if he saw a vision in its milky depths.

"Just a chance—the air is thick with plots—Pierre might be feigning—the Princess Haganè—who knows?—perhaps connives, betrays—Pshaw!" Count Ronsard dreamed under his breath.

"No further orders, your Excellency?" asked the younger man, patiently, his hand on the door.

"No—yes! Bring me the first news of that wandering lunatic—and avoid the police!"

The words fell before a fury of feet that bowled down the outer corridor. The door burst open, nearly flinging Mouquin to the floor. Pierre Le Beau reeled in, crimson, panting, wild-eyed, hatless, and waved at the startled minister a large paper sealed with a red seal, round and clear as a Japanese sun. Ronsard in the millionth part of an instant recalled himself. He sat erect, but his eye gleamed beady and keen as a rat's. He was holding back with impartial judgment a riotous flush of hope. But Mouquin, as if hypnotized, locked the door and backed up against it. Pierre's eyes caught the cloudy green of the absinthe, still standing in the minister's glass. He tottered toward it, tried to speak, but merely pointed in jerks with his free hand. Ronsard silently held out the glass and motioned to an empty chair. Pierre drained the drug standing, then fell rather than sat. A sweat sprang suddenly to his skin. The fair hair plastered itself in little brown sickles on his white forehead.

"What is it, Pierre?"

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Ronsard's eyes had not left the document half crumpled in Pierre's fist. His voice had a bracing echo. A returning wave of unhealthy strength warned Pierre to action.

"Yes!" he cried, swaying across the table, holding out the paper and shaking it up and down. "I've done it! What you wanted! Sold my honor to Hell for it! Quick! Quick! America! The war!"

Pierre's head, not yet balanced by the stealthy drug, reeled, and the large envelope dropped on the table. Ronsard recognized the great Cabinet seal. With a wolfish twitching at the corners of the mouth, which his utmost effort could not control, he slowly pushed his hand across the polished mahogany. Then two currents of thought met, and he paused. The fretfulness, the lax instability of flesh, were gone. He sat stiff, a compact mass, in his broad chair. One could see that behind the ample jowl stretched a great square bone.

"First, what is it, Pierre?" he repeated coldly.

Pierre rocked in his seat. "A state paper—of utmost import—signed by Grubb and Todd and all the Japanese!—It means alliance!—I saw them all as I crouched in the garden. Read it, quick! The wax is hardly set."

Ronsard's mouth watered, but his brain grew firm. "Wonderful! Past belief!" he said. "But tell me how did Monsieur—obtain possession?" He was measuring the depth of Pierre's insanity,

gazing desperately for signs of returning judgment. "Is it safe for *me*?" he continued quietly.

"Good God, man!" cried Pierre. "Here I win you, with my life, perhaps, the very key to this war—to history for all time—and you prate about safety! Is war safe? Is anything safe?"

Ronsard's voice came low and stinging. "Tell me! Where—and how—did you get it?"

Pierre was too over-wrought to lie, even had he dared. He swaggered. He stretched forth a hand and snatched the paper defiantly. "I took it—yes, from the body of Prince Haganè! Glorious, wasn't it? Mon Dieu! Think of it! In his official residence!"

"It means the Cross of the Legion of Honor," said Mouquin, weakly, against the door.

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"Haganè!" Ronsard had exclaimed in spite of himself. He knew it meant the utmost of something, but which—glory or dishonor? Either was incredible. "Yes, yes, Pierre," he said soothingly, as to a child; "Haganè's body—I understand. But why—didn't—Haganè stop you?"

"Why? It is droll—he could not! He was tied, tangled. His feet were tangled—yes, tightly entangled! He was too busy with that to follow."

Pierre's laugh turned Ronsard sick.

"What or *who* entangled him, Pierre?"

"You keep her name out of this, damn you!"

Ronsard's pendent underlip went gray to the root. "Then she will die, too." He breathed it to himself.

Whether Pierre heard or not, his tense attitude relaxed. He cowered back in his chair. Mouquin, thinking he had fainted, ran forward.

"No! No more absinthe! No medicine! Coffee! For God's sake, coffee! That may keep me up."

A new thought flashed to Ronsard. "Mouquin! Ring, and yourself receive the coffee—just outside the door."

His words rang quick and clear. "We must think, now, like gods or demons for swiftness," he went on to Pierre. "Haganè will be with us at once! How did you keep ahead? You must deny, *deny*! Don't you see, it compromises France?"

Pierre raised his eyes sleepily. "Haganè—come? No, Excellency! he did not see—"

"Madame will tell him, fool."

"Never! She will die first."

"Ah, allow me, then, to congratulate you," Ronsard permitted himself to sneer. Then swiftly, "You have been seen! The servants! The police—"

"Your Excellency," chattered Mouquin, darting a ghastly face through the door, "Prince Haganè is announced. He is coming down the hall—he is *here*!"

"I thought I heard footsteps. Hold him, just a moment." Ronsard rose to his feet. With a low whisper that stung with the lash of a knout he bent to Pierre. "Stand, you fool! And if you have never known what it is to be a man, try the feeling now! Hide the paper in your breast. There! Smile, though your face crack!"

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Pierre thrust the document into his coat and rose to greet Haganè, who entered calm, dignified, and stately, not a fold out of place, nor a hair ruffled. If any characteristic were intensified it was in deliberate tardiness of advance, an undue rigidity of self-restraint. He bowed deeply to Count Ronsard, ignoring, for the moment, the presence of the younger men.

"Your Excellency will be surprised, perhaps annoyed, at this unceremonious call. It concerns a personal matter which could not be delayed. There is nothing official, you understand. It lies between Monsieur Le Beau and myself." He turned now to Pierre with the slightest inclination of the head, and then bowed more deferentially to the flaccid Mouquin by the wall.

"Anything that brings your Highness is an honor," returned Ronsard, himself placing a chair

for the great man.

Haganè seated himself with the same painstaking calm. As he did not speak, his host continued, with obvious effort at composure, "What does slightly surprise me, your Highness,—if you will allow me to say it,—is—er—your seeming so certain of finding Monsieur Le Beau here, when your efficient police have been searching—"

"Le Beau has been here for some time," put in Mouquin, who was so nervous that he should have been elsewhere.

Ronsard winced. A sombre fire flickered in Haganè's eyes. "And am I to infer that the efficient police, of whom his Excellency so kindly speaks, have failed to keep in touch with Monsieur's Legation?"

The two young men crossed glances of dismay. Quickly Haganè turned his eyes to Pierre's flushed face. Each moist curl burned it like a scar. "And similarly, I suppose, I am mistaken in thinking that Monsieur Le Beau has but just arrived in great haste."

Before an answer could be found, footsteps and a timid knock made interruption. Mouquin craned his neck around to the aperture of the door, altering but slightly the position of his body.

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"A servant says, Excellency, that the American minister, Mr. Todd, telephones from his Legation that he must see you immediately."

"Go, Mouquin, and stop him," said Ronsard, glibly. "Say I am out. But if he is already started wait for him at the door, and be careful to usher him into the small drawing-room, and keep him there till I come. Conciliate him. Your conversation, you understand, is to be on the high C of flippancy."

In the short interval Pierre had regained self-control. "Lord Haganè, in what way can I serve you?" He made a great effort to be nonchalant.

Haganè leaned slightly toward Ronsard. "Perhaps you have heard, Excellency, that a few moments since, Monsieur Le Beau picked up, in my humble home, quite by accident, a private letter that I had carelessly let fall."

"A private letter!" Ronsard turned with well-feigned astonishment to his subordinate. "Oh, no! Monsieur Le Beau is the soul of honor!"

Pierre could not think how to weigh the naturalness of indignation against a gentlemanly magnanimity. "The prince is mistaken," he said weakly. "It must have been another man."

Without a flicker of anger or impatience Haganè, still facing the count, inquired, "Does the young man act with your authority?"

"Mon Dieu, your Highness! No. Monsieur Le Beau has a certain official connection—but in such a *private* matter"—Spread hands and a shrug completed the thought.

"Were you not at my villa this morning?" Haganè had turned suddenly to Pierre.

What could the Frenchman say? "No," came the pliant lie.

"Come now, Prince Haganè!" began Ronsard, genially. "You see it's all a mistake. Forgive the boy his embarrassment. He is ill. To accuse him of purloining a private letter! Mother of God! In France it means a duel—"

"Not purloining, your Excellency," corrected Haganè. "Taking by accident,—quite by accident. That is different. If our young friend was suffering from delirium he may have forgotten. Ask him to feel in his pocket."

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"It's a damnable lie, hatched for some personal reason," said Pierre.

Haganè slowly rose. It was as if bronze moved. Ronsard instinctively imitated him, watching closely. He was convinced, now, that Haganè knew; but could not guess his next move.

"My time is valuable to-day," said the Japanese, drawling a little. "I must speak with Monsieur Le Beau alone."

Blank silence fell on the group. Haganè looked from one to the other, a slight shade of contempt growing in his eyes. "Is Monsieur Le Beau afraid?" he asked politely. "I assure you,

gentlemen, I am unarmed. Even so, he might feel safer with a knife, a pistol. I regret that mine is at home, or I would be pleased to lend it. Perhaps one of these gentlemen can accommodate you."

Pierre's face was growing white in a circle about his mouth. He stepped to Ronsard's desk, took out a revolver, a pearl and silver toy, and slammed it on the table between himself and Haganè.

"Go, your Excellency!" he said, with eyes on Ronsard. "I, too, desire private speech with him."

"Pierre! Pierre! remember France," cried Count Ronsard.

Haganè bowed to the speaker.

As Ronsard hesitated at the door, Mouquin pushed it open cautiously and brought in the coffee. "Not yet, Excellency," he said. Haganè waved his refusal of a proffered cup. Pierre poured himself three cups in succession, draining quickly each scalding draught.

Haganè bowed again to Ronsard. "Now," he said simply.

"Get out, Mouquin. Remember, Prince, the boy is ill."

"I can take care of myself," Pierre said, his boyish head thrown back.

Left alone the two men faced each other. Pierre leaned with one delicate hand on the table. Nervously exalted and chafed by silence he hurled words at his sombre opponent.

"If your time is really valuable you waste it, my Lord. I advise you to inquire elsewhere."

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"Let us be seated," said Haganè, with a pleasant smile. Pierre, as at a physical thrust, went backward into a chair. "Now, shall we smoke?" continued the other, his tone deepening in friendliness. Its suavity had the effect of smothering. Pierre fought it off with a rude weapon.

"Certainly, your Highness. Cigarettes or opium?"

"Ah! Do you keep the latter luxury?" inquired the prince, with interest. "Have Frenchmen adopted this—vice—also?"

"I meant for you only," explained Pierre, foolishly.

"You must be a new-comer, unaware that I, myself, had the drug excluded from Japan. You Christian Europeans had already forced it on China."

Pierre did not look up or try to answer. He felt his every move a false one. The steadying of the coffee did not come fast enough. He was in a hurry to get in some telling thrust. He must defend himself and Yuki. Count Ronsard should, after all, acknowledge him a man. The smooth, cool tones of the other now flowed like a refreshing liquid through his brain.

"Am I right in thinking this your first visit to Japan, Monsieur?"

Pierre, half dazed, answered, with instinctive politeness, "My first, yes. But I have for years been interested."

"May I venture to ask what special phase of our civilization has been honored with your interest?"

Pierre's demon nudged him. "It's woman," he said, with a short, ugly laugh.

Haganè's smile grew almost fatherly. "In that you are no exception to the majority of your countrymen, Monsieur."

"To be accurate I should have said—a woman."

The nobleman took a long whiff at his cigarette before remarking thoughtfully, "It is an unending source of wonder to our students, Monsieur, that you of the West, even your greatest thinkers, take women so seriously. Now with us, apart from the one function of becoming the mothers of our sons, they are to men as playthings to children,—as flowers, or bright-colored birds."

"Am I to infer, then, that to your Highness one woman would be about as desirable as

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another?"

"Ah, Monsieur! You are caustic. Not quite that, I protest. There is discrimination, even in playthings. And we must always take into account the effect of physique,—and character,—upon possible sons."

At repetition of this sickening thought Pierre's rage gave a convulsive bound. The veins in his temples burned the skin. His delicate hands clenched themselves into steel. He grasped the pistol, brandished it wildly, and putting his face close to Haganè hissed, "Leave out the name of Yuki, and your satyr's thoughts of her, if you expect to live!"

The prince's raised hand concealed an expression of amusement. Sadness, not altogether convincing, took its place. Pierre sank back to his chair sulkily, ashamed of his violence.

Haganè's eyes lowered themselves, as if in embarrassment, to the table. He toyed with the brittle stem of a wine-glass. "It is unfortunate you are so excitable. For it was just about—Yuki—no, never mind the pistol—that I was thinking to take you into my confidence."

Le Beau stared. The prince continued thoughtfully: "You have been her friend—"

"I *am* her friend!"

"Exactly. I thought you ought to be told. After to-day there will be—*no* Princess Haganè. She leaves my roof and must publicly relinquish my name."

The prince spoke blandly. Pierre's eyes seemed to protrude. The shock of this menace counteracted the coffee. "She is innocent—" He corrected himself. "Why? What has she done?"

Haganè smiled pleasantly. "Her innocence, as you call it, is too dangerous. My duties, you know. She distracts me, tires me. A mere child!"

"You never cared for her. You took her from me to show your hellish power. Now you will cast her out, dishonor her—relentlessly, for a new whim!"

"Monsieur should know best why I cannot trust her."

A wild thought leaped like flame about Pierre's distorted fancy. "Can you mean that she goes utterly free—free to be happy—back to her father's home?"

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Haganè lowered his eyes. When he spoke his tone was conciliatory, even regretful.

"Onda, being my kerai, will scarcely consent to receive her."

"Monsters! both of you. I see—I might have known. But the Todds, thank God, are her friends!"

Haganè half lifted heavy lids. "Minister Todd,—who has signed that stolen paper,—may—er—hesitate."

"Mother of Christ! What will you have me think? What is to be her fate? Some foul black thought still bubbles behind those reptile eyes of yours! Out with it! Is she to be cast forth helpless, friendless, at the mercy of the first charitable stranger—"

Haganè lifted a hand. "Now we approach reason though by a somewhat frenzied path. You are the succoring knight. Merely return to me, with unbroken seal, the document I saw you take, and for reward I ask you to receive free, and untrammelled, the person of the present Princess Haganè."

Suspicion drove back into shadow a host of eager thoughts. After one incredulous look Pierre burst into a clamor of mirthless laughter. "So it is a bribe! What fools you must truly think all foreigners. Give the princess to me bodily? This is melodrama. Even had I the paper and should return it—I still deny, damn you!—you would take powerful precaution that she did not come."

"Do you so greatly distrust your powers of attraction?"

"No, nor her love, God bless her! But I distrust you and your Oriental subtleties. She would come—she loves me—but you would not let her. What guarantee can you offer?"

Haganè looked pained. "No one has ever doubted my word. But if you need it, take Japan's most sacred oath—by the life of our Emperor! Prevent her? Oh, no. I shall urge—compel."

Pierre struggled to preserve his balance. "Even in this barbaric country—have even—*you*—such power? Can you not be called to some account?"

"I regret the necessity of being vulgar," said Haganè, in a composed voice, "but I see I must explain. It is my—what you call position—my—er—rank. It might not be possible to every Japanese, Monsieur. But as things are, the woman is as much mine as a French spaniel would be yours. Again I assure you, by the life of my Emperor, she will come. Again I ask, Do you accept my bargain?"

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Pierre whispered to himself Count Ronsard's words, "Remember France!" He tried to keep his reason, but the wave of hope had surged high. He saw as in a vision Yuki, disgraced, rejected, wandering alone through the wind-swept streets. He saw her face sheltered upon his arm,—that little face so pure, so delicate, so well-beloved. Her desolation touched him for a moment with an unselfish grief. "She is proud—she is brave!" he cried aloud. "Even at your orders will she come?"

"I think so, Monsieur. She might possibly consider it a last chance to serve the country she has wronged."

"Yes, and she might prefer to die."

Haganè sent a curious, cold look to search the young man's thought. "Do Christians dare—to die?"

The acid scorn bit deep. "Yes," raved Pierre. "And they dare to live, and, sometimes, they dare to slay! I do not consent, remember. I believe it yet to be a trick, a mockery. If I find it so, I swear in the name of that Christian God whom you blaspheme—if I find that you are holding out the one bribe that you know I would sell my soul to the devil for—thinking to gloat over the new devilry of snatching it away—I'll—I'll—" He broke off, mouthing for words that would not come.

His hand unconsciously fingered the cold surface of the pistol. Again Haganè looked bored, and made a gesture of distaste.

"Don't sneer like that, you toad of hell!" shrieked his companion. "You think this bluster,—but I mean it. I mean it terribly!" A sudden sound in the outer hall cut short the threat. Footsteps, in stockinged feet, or in the Japanese tabi, came swiftly. Both men by instinct fixed eyes upon the door.

Yuki walked straight to her husband and stood still. Their eyes met. "I thank the Gods that you are safe," she said aloud. Her glance moved quickly to Pierre, surprising on his face a hurt, incredulous expression.

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"Monsieur, be comforted. It is for the country, not for me," mocked Haganè.

"And now, Madame," he said, with bloodshot eyes on Yuki, "have you explanation for this new act of disobedience, of affront to my dignity?"

Yuki did not hasten to reply. Whether the power had grown from without or within that childish form, a new strength was now hers. She had the look of one who, after long wandering in a dangerous forest, has spied a path.

The gray robe, hastily caught back to decorous lines, showed traces of rough handling. Over her head she had thrown a light wrap called a dzukin. It hid her forehead with a nun-like band, was crossed under the chin, and knotted loosely behind the head. Not a strand of hair emerged. Her face, in the dull silver setting, gleamed like a long white pearl.

Haganè observed the change in her. The repulsion left his eyes. He waited in patience, and with some curiosity, for her answer. "I came, your Highness," she vouchsafed at length, "because without me you cannot get the paper."

Haganè's eyes went instantly to Pierre.

"Yuki, for God's sake are you mad?" cried the Frenchman. "I know of no paper. I have assured him that I do not know of it!"

"Give him the paper, Pierre," said the girl, gently. "Through me it was lost, and if I am to have a human soul hereafter—give him the paper."

Haganè sucked in bitter triumph from Pierre's discomfiture. His eyes crucified the boyish face. Like a brood of dark vultures his conjectures swooped down to the cowering prey. Yet before Yuki's entrance he had, for a moment, felt talons at his own breast. Instinctively Pierre had clutched at his coat, where the document lay concealed. Haganè said softly, "Perhaps it is as well,

Madame, that you have disobeyed. Yet on your lover's countenance I do not observe signs of joyous welcome."

"I came looking for no welcome, Lord, nor has personal desire directed me. I have done great wrong. Again has my weakness proved my enemy. But a hope of partial atonement has not gone altogether from me." She stretched both hands to Pierre. "Pierre, if you have known love, give me the paper."

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"I do not understand," stammered Pierre. "Are you against me for that man? Here is the chance of our revenge,—our passport to happiness. I have not harmed him otherwise. Would you take this one possible chance from me?"

"I am not against you, Pierre. I am not for Haganè. It is myself, my wretched, shivering self, for which I plead. No, you cannot understand. I am Japanese. I must regain the paper. Through my cowardice you won it. At any sacrifice you can name I must get it back."

Haganè saw how she labored to keep her voice gentle and soothing. She had the accents of a suffering mother who tries to coax a sick child. The husband saw more in the calm, ashen face. "You have yet patriotism," he said, so low that she alone heard.

To these words she gave no recognition. She watched the Frenchman as Haganè studied her. The folds of her dzukin, heaped high and light about the slim throat, stifled her. She tugged nervously at it until one end came loose and fell. By inches the flexible fabric crawled down from hair to shoulder, then down her body to the floor. The disorder of the thick hair, one blue-black lock almost hiding her left temple and streaming to her breast, gave her an unfamiliar, a weird, even a supernatural appearance.

Haganè still held a cigarette in the death-mask of his face. He took it out now carefully. "You speak of revenge, Monsieur, meaning, of course, the personal revenge. Europeans conceive all offences to be personal. You weaklings have your code,—your jumping-jack ethics. Something touches a spring, and your honor leaps up and crows. You could hardly understand the language we now speak, though our words were purest French. I will attempt to elucidate. This woman refers to an—essence—underlying all personalities and all time. It is a stratum of substance which boils and seethes in our sun, which sets the planets swinging in their steady paths, which ebbs and flows, a thin, resistless tide, down through the world of ghosts. We call it 'En.' You have no better word, I think, than 'Necessity.' This woman had a trust and failed. Sometimes the sabre slash of fatal weakness lays bare a hidden source of strength. I believe it to be so with her. The gods have smiled a ritual of sacrifice! No,—you do not understand. If I sang an obscene song your eyes would sparkle,—now they are bits of dull blue clay.—Onda Yuki-ko!" he said in another tone, and with a voice slightly raised, "have you the thought that, in winning back for your land this stolen document, you become worthy again to be my wife,—to bear my name?" Yuki's head went up a little. If Death himself could smile he would perhaps own the gleam which for an instant lighted her dark eyes. "Lord, we agree that I have failed. There is no deeper degradation. As for resuming your name,—you should have understood, before this, that I shall not need it."

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Pierre wrinkled his forehead. The three stood. Pierre leaned against the edge of a massive table, and sometimes steadied himself with hands upon it. He bore upon the oaken surface now. The drift of their conversation, though in careful English, was indeed beyond him. Haganè did not menace Yuki. In her look toward him was no hint of fear. Yet between them, across from each to each, in all the space around them, the spider—tragedy—hurried unceasingly, and wove a closing web. They stared out from the black net with faces of calm nobility. An influence shook the Frenchman, vibrated through the particles of his brain, shrank and inflated his soul in its clay vessel. In bewilderment, as one reaches out in the dark, his voice cried, "Is this your sorrow, Yuki? Do you wish still to be his? If you bid me, perhaps I too can sacrifice. Shall I buy his mercy for you with this paper?" He snatched it out, but instead of presenting it, held the white rectangle again against his breast. The seal glared and winked like the inflamed eye of a pygmy Cyclops.

This was Pierre's supremest moment. Never again did he reach an equal height. The altitude turned him cold and dizzy. Blood surged in his ears, and tears of self-appreciation, of self-pity, sponged with a misty blur the room and its occupants.

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Yuki, catching her underlip between her teeth, and bruising her slim hands together for control, went nearer. "Pierre, I thank you. I shall never forget this greatness,—in another world or this. You do much to restore what you, too, have lost. But I cannot bid you sacrifice. Haganè would not take the paper at that price. I myself must find a way to win it."

Haganè sat like a mass of clay new fallen from a cliff. Yuki's voice trailed off. An angelic sweetness hung about the echoes.

Now the clay was troubled. It stirred heavily. Haganè rose with his usual massive deliberation. "Tell her, Frenchman, the price I had already offered you."

"I shall not do it with that pure face before me, Haganè."

Haganè bowed. No hint of sarcasm cheapened the salutation. "Then, Yuki, I must speak it. I offered him in exchange for the paper your fair, white body to be his, as a dog is his, as a snatched blossom. That was my bargain."

For an instant she swayed and leaned one hand on the table opposite from Pierre. Haganè placed a chair for her. Before sinking to it she spoke, her eyes set on her husband, her voice grave and contained. "Then, Lord Haganè, you have revealed a depth of degradation below the uttermost punishment which I should have thought you willing to bestow."

"Also," continued Haganè, "I ventured to declare, and to believe, that you would go to him willingly." Pierre quivered under this insult to the woman he loved. But Yuki did not look ashamed. Pushing back the hair from both temples she bent her eyes upward, as though invoking strength from unseen powers.

"Yes, Yuki, darling," cried Pierre, coming to her. "He will free you honorably. You shall be mine forever, and we shall soon forget these horrors of the past. I will give him the paper if you wish it. What do I care for Ronsard or for France if I, with this, can buy your life-long happiness?"

Yuki shivered in all the length of her limbs. Haganè turned away. His face could not be seen with the utterance of his next words. Curiously enough they sounded apologetic.

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"It was the only way I saw, Yuki, the only bribe that such a man might take. Your body, soiled already, have I offered. Do you understand?"

Pierre's gaze, too, had fallen. Shame weighed all lids. An abnormal silence came to the little group. Yuki broke it with a long, long breath, as of relief and comprehension. The men looked toward her. Haganè clenched a brown fist to a cluster of throbbing veins. But the Frenchman gaped, incredulous, and gaped again. For Yuki was smiling at something far away. A light already not of earth lay on her waxen brow. "Yes," she whispered. "Yes, now, at last, I understand. You will not force the gift, Haganè. It must be mine. Why, Pierre, look not so strange because, at last, I understand. You cannot know yet, poor Pierre, but soon you will know too. I must be yours, of course. Have you not planned, and spied, and—stolen for this?"

"Yuki," said Haganè, in a deeply troubled voice, "if Monsieur Le Beau by any chance should give the paper—unconditionally should refuse the price—"

"No! no!" she cried, with a quick note of terror, and sprang to her feet again. "Where would be my atonement, my reparation? Think it not, Lord. See that your great mercy be not merciless. I shall go, gladly, gladly, to Monsieur Le Beau; my heart falters not for myself,—but him. It is a cruel deed to him."

"And well deserved," muttered Haganè.

"Being myself weak, Lord," said the young wife, "I feel that the deserving is, after all, the hardest pang."

Pierre dashed his hand across his brow, and went to a small sideboard for a liqueur. Again these strange people were talking their mystic gibberish. Yuki was more clear, indeed. She had stated openly to her husband that she wished to be given to another man. Neither seemed to feel the least delicacy or shame. In Pierre's fastidious thought this fact made a tiny stain for Yuki. The old brute evidently wanted to be rid of her, and she, eagerly accepting freedom, did not shrink from claiming at once a more desirable companionship. At the last moment should he, Pierre, refuse to grasp the prize he had turned criminal in pursuing? No, a thousand times no! Yuki's friendless condition demanded his deepest pity. It was with a faint touch of condescension that he leaned to her, saying, "Do not falter now, Yuki. Our goal is in sight. I will be true to you. I will yet make you happy!"

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"Happy! happy!" echoed the woman in a ghost's voice. "All foreigners think and say only that one thing,—*happy!* Pierre, Pierre, I need so much more than—happiness!"

The pathos of her voice, her small face, touched him to a manlier emotion. She was so young, so white, so helpless!

"What it is possible for me to give you I live but to bestow, my darling," he said, and, kneeling, kissed a small, scarred hand. "I can promise love, protection, deep respect,—for the slime of this man shall not cling to you!"

Haganè snatched him bodily from the floor. His eyes blazed like a beast's. "Time will come for puling. A few things are yet to be said. Let us conclude the savory bargain. I must be gone."

"Yes, let us finish quickly," whispered Yuki.

"Gallant lover," continued Haganè to Pierre, "when and how do you wish to claim your prize?"

"Now, at once," cried Pierre, rallying a little under the scorn hurled toward him. "You have the eyes of a demon. She would not be safe alone with you. Take the paper now, and let me have her!"

Yuki shivered again, and hid her face in her sleeve.

"I shall not harm madame. This I can assure you. But the earliest possible hour for your ecstasy will be—to-night!"

"To-night—to-night!" moaned Yuki.

"It must be so. You cannot pass another night beneath my roof, and there is none who dares receive you but this brawny champion."

"To-night! It is an eternity away!" cried Pierre. "See, love, the sun already is low. I hear the moat-crows cawing. To-night we shall begin to live!"

"Kwannon Sama—oh, dear Saviour, help me to endure," said Yuki to herself.

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"To-morrow I join the army in Manchuria. Whatever is to do must be completed before the dawn."

"To-night! To-night, this very night!" sang Pierre, like a schoolboy. "They called me sick, but I am already a well man! That was a marvellous draught you gave me in the tea-rooms, Yuki."

For the first time Haganè showed a puzzled frown. Yuki explained quickly. "Oh, I had forgotten that you did not know. Pierre wandered delirious into our garden this forenoon, your Highness, just after your instructions to me. I could think of no way to send him off, so I took him to the Cha no yu rooms and gave him a fever mixture and a sleeping-draught. I believed he would remain asleep until after the meeting."

"But I didn't," laughed Pierre. "It must have been the God of Good Luck that woke me when he did."

"I tried to tell your Highness before the meeting, although you had given me orders not to disturb your mind," went on Yuki to her husband in the same quiet way. "Perhaps you will recall my effort."

"I do," said Haganè. "It goes far to exonerate you. Tell me more in detail." Yuki closed her lips. She did not wish to be exonerated, at least by Haganè. This was her one supreme opportunity for full expiation,—for sacrifice. No one should wrest it from her.

"I woke in good time," babbled Pierre, to whose brain the liquor was giving a strange lightness. "I saw the statesmen come and go. They whispered and leaned down. I saw Todd, and Sir Charles, —and Yuki by the window. I saw my Lord Haganè come to her with the great paper in his hand. She was going to betray poor Pierre to him, but first the great lord must have his say. He told her of the paper—and then he made iron love—that old lord. I could hear his joints rasp. 'Yuki, you are my wife! When this time of stress and strain is over I shall teach you something of a brighter hue than duty!' Ah, ha! making love, like any schoolboy! She never kissed you as she has kissed me, Haganè. Oh, she cared for me in the little tearooms. We played we were married. Go there; you will find the cushions, the trinkets strewn around, the broken hairpin."

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A dull purple tide rushed upward to Haganè's face and stayed there. No battle-wounds could sting and torture like the mincing mimicry of the Frenchman's words. His control was superhuman. He leaned an instant nearer the fireplace to flip off a cigarette ash, then faced his companions coolly. "I must remember to investigate the scene of romance."

Yuki bowed. If she had craved martyrdom, here were assuring circumstances. Pierre's thoughtless words, Haganè's passionate calm, were prison manacles. They snapped on wrists already scarred. She welcomed the cold compulsion.

"Well," Pierre hurried on, "let us get back to business. To-night, you say? I agree, but where?"

"Should the noble count permit such base use of it, the most suitable spot would be your Legation," said Haganè.

Pierre gave a hiss. His head was on fire again. He must hurry and have things settled before

the full conflagration came. "More melodrama! I feel the sincerity of your suggestion. Shall I summon the noble count to be asked?"

"Certainly. I shall await him here. Kindly hasten, as the day already wanes."

Pierre fell back a little, half in derision, half in apprehensive credulity, like a harlequin in two shades.

"You really mean it! Well, I shall go. I will get him if he is to be brought. He must come,—I shall be in need of him. It is all a dream, a fever dream. Will you give parole to stay here till I come back,—you and Yuki?" His bright eyes shot suspiciously from one to the other. There was still so much he did not understand.

Haganè sighed. He assumed the expression of one who has had an insect light upon him and whose dignity forbids him to brush it off.

"Answer the Frenchman, Yuki-ko."

"We will remain, Monsieur Le Beau," said Yuki.

Left alone, the husband and wife instinctively drew nearer. After gazing for a long moment Haganè suddenly put out his hands. Yuki thrust hers within them and lifted wide eyes. Her face had a look of blurred moonlight. Out of the mystic whiteness her eyes gleamed like deep spiritual wells, where hopes and possibilities, already death-shadowed, drifted in a spectral sheen. Haganè tightened his clasp, and at the same instant let his own soul come full into his face. Yuki shivered. Her lips parted. Virtue flowed in upon her from his touch. She thought, as in a vision, of the Kioto statue worn smooth by the touch of dying men. What ghostly comfort that image could have held was but a feeble emanation beside the blinding power of this living god.

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"All things are not yet clear to me," said the man. "Something is hidden, and you jealously conceal the hiding-place. Yet you sheltered that spy. You prevented me from following. Speak your whole heart, Yuki."

"If I have a secret, Lord, it is one which aids to purify and consecrate my sacrifice. I long for that sweet hour, Lord. My parched spirit strains toward it."

Haganè's lips twitched once. "Yuki, as to the ear of your ancestral gods, tell me, should this paper be regained by means less terrible,—are you worthy to be my wife?"

Thinking of her weakness, her great and not ignoble efforts doomed always, it would seem, to failure, and with the knowledge of this man's greatness full upon her, Yuki answered simply, "No." Her very innocence betrayed her and sealed the doom of death.

Haganè had a man's thoughts. Pierre's boast—the disordered rooms of the tea-house—the broken hairpin—lashed him with a fiery hail. He groaned and dropped his face.

"Yuki, Yuki!" came a voice as though from a mangled soul. "Did you not begin to feel it? I love you! From that first instant in Washington—I have loved you more dearly than I ought. The Gods punish me for my infatuation!"

Yuki's cheeks grew faintly tinged. "Once, nay, twice, Lord, my heart bespoke it, but I dared not listen. If a star had slid through the night to my hand, I would sooner believe that I dreamed, awake, than that the heavens had lost a star."

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"A soul—a face—a heart like thine, Yuki—to be befouled by a Frenchman's love!" he cried in agony.

"Dear Lord," whispered the girl, "perhaps by suffering greatly in this life—perhaps in my completeness of expiation—I shall, in the next life, be near thee!"

Haganè could only groan. The black spider busied itself about them. A strange stillness fell on Yuki. She put up a hand to her husband's shoulder, drawing him closer. "My soul is like a quiet pool, my husband. Gaze in, softly, and see your own face there. Nay, break not the shining by thy tears. You must help me to suffer greatly. Let no interference come. This last treachery to the weak boy who has loved me is part of the pain. He will forgive me and forget. He will even be happier than for me to live on as your wife—your loved wife! That is too heavenly a thing for one so frail as I. Let me die, Lord, as you and I, though without speech, have agreed upon. At last I shall serve. Will you promise to befriend me to that hour, my husband?"

"To that hour and beyond!" groaned Haganè. A moment after, he said, "Do you realize, my Yuki, what may be the power of a soul freed like yours,—shot suddenly from the bowstring of a

fixed purpose? It is a thunderbolt of the Gods! Not only in your body's death, but through your free soul, after, shall you aid Nippon!"

The wonder in her wide gaze grew. A dawn, it spread circling to outer rims of darkness. Currents of unseen force seemed to whirl in the air about them.

"Soul of my Yuki, I shall summon you to fields of death. Stand near me in perplexing hours, cleave to him who is to be thy mate in a nobler rebirth! Breathe your power through me in moments of despair, lift up your voice when a thousand guns roar death, when ghosts spring up like flames, and the commander sobs to hear the cry of 'Victory!' So shall you be worthy!"

"Lord! Lord! Already art thou a God, and I thy chosen comrade! Wield my freed spirit to our country's need! At last I shall be strong. Into thy hands—Lord—"

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Things of the flesh flared up and blew back forever, like scraps of burnt moor-grass. The white flint of her soul had struck from him its spark of immortality!

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

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PIERRE'S visible return was preceded by a great chatter of his voice, now in English, again in French. Evidently he had more than one companion. Haganè and Yuki drew apart. Pierre stood at the door which, with a wide French gesture, he had flung open. The tall figure of Minister Todd entered, followed closely by Count Ronsard. It was the latter who saw to the careful closing of the door.

"Mr. Todd!" Yuki faltered, under her breath. Here was a new and terrible trial. Haganè gave her a glance. He saw her slight figure stiffen, and her face grow still again. The light upon his stern countenance was almost as beautiful as her own.

Pierre began a hurried and vaporous explanation. "Mr. Todd was here, your Highness, as you were already aware. He desired greatly to come, and his Excellency, the count, wished it!"

"Entirely unofficial," Ronsard hastened to add. "It is a personal misunderstanding, nothing more. I have been assuring Mr. Todd that it is utterly unofficial!"

Todd raised his thin hand. Reassurance had already come to him. Yuki was safe, and Haganè had the look of an altarpiece. No personal harm, at least, was to be done. "Before this goes one step further I want to say for myself, that unless Prince Haganè is quite willing to have me, I leave at once. I don't pretend to understand what has happened, but I have full faith in Yuki and her husband. There, your Highness! I am through with my little stunt. Shall I strike roots, or reverse the throttle?"

"Unless against the wishes of Madame la Princesse, I desire you to remain."

"Madame la Princesse!" mocked Pierre, angrily, under his breath.

Yuki's dignity equalled that of her husband. "Kindly remain, Mr. Todd," she murmured, with a slight bow.

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"Your Highness," said Todd, still addressing Haganè, "now tell us how many grains of wheat are in this chaff of foolishness Pierre is giving us! Something about your going to send my little Yuki off like a piece of broken china, for him, Le Beau, to patch together at his leisure. Pshaw! Of course the boy is out of his head!"

Haganè thought deeply before he made reply. His sobriety and deliberation gave unusual weight to speech always impressive. Each word was a nail driven straight into the lid of an abandoned hope.

"Madame la Princesse has offended in a way peculiarly Japanese,—difficult, I think,—too difficult even for your sympathy and kindness to comprehend. There is no need to dwell upon it. She leaves me of her own free will. She and I understand each other perfectly. That is all! We shall detain you two gentlemen but a moment."

"Entirely unofficial, your Excellency will observe," whispered Ronsard, nervously, to the American.

"Yes, yes, I made that much out for myself," said Todd to Haganè. "If you intend to separate, it is deplorable, but clearly none of my business. It's the other heinous suggestion, that of handing her over to another man, that makes me hot in the collar. Don't tell me I must believe this of your Highness!"

Neither Haganè's eyes nor voice faltered. "The man, Monsieur Le Beau, has a service to perform for Japan. He asks a certain price. Yuki alone can pay that price."

"It is simple enough, Mr. Todd," Pierre burst in. The discussion went in a direction distasteful to him. He did not wish the matter of the paper, and its means of acquirement, laid bare. "I can do the prince a service. For it, Yuki becomes my own, as from the beginning she should have been. This little talisman merely rights the mistakes of Fortune." He held out the document, shaking it to attract attention.

"The very paper I helped to sign, this day!" said Todd, wondering. "What, in the name of Beelzebub, are you doing with it? Haganè was to guard it with his life! There's something queer in this. I smell foul play! Did Yuki,—could Yuki have—?" He checked himself, reddening at the baseness of his quick suspicion. Yuki, facing him, gave no answering flush. She was white,—white beyond belief in a thing that lived at all. Her low voice gave each syllable full measure. "I was partly—to blame—that Monsieur Le Beau secured that paper. I shall pay his price."

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Todd's eyes still hung on her, fascinated, incredulous. He could not believe her capable of vileness. He knew that no depth of personal degradation could begin to compare, in the Japanese mind, with an offence against loyalty. It was to them, truly, the sin against the Holy Ghost. Yet, by her own words, Yuki was condemned. His stung thought flashed to Pierre, and fastened on him. "Then, man, it is a double wrong! I do not know yet how you got the thing; but if she is implicated, you owe it to her, far more than yourself, to be decent! In the name of morality,—of honor,—do not sell the thing; give it back without condition! Your proposition is damnable!"

"His Excellency Mr. Todd was one who signed the paper; he pleads for its return," murmured Ronsard to the air.

"Never mind that!" flashed Todd. "The paper doesn't trouble me a little bit! I am thinking of Yuki!"

"But—Mr. Todd—Yuki, she wish to pay that price. She wish to be given—so—to Monsieur!" said the Princess Haganè.

Pierre flashed a look of triumph into Todd's dazed eyes. Defiantly he went to Yuki, caught her hand, and kissed it. "You see and hear her for yourself!" vaunted Pierre. Todd appealed dumbly to Haganè for extrication from this amazing skein of tangled interests. Haganè brooded on his wife with tenderness,—with the ache of love,—as over a dying child. Yuki drew her hand from Pierre and went to the minister. "Don't try to understand," she urged him, piteously, "don't defend me! You cannot understand,—not even Gwendolen could understand!" She caught her breath sharply, with a new and untried pang, "Oh, Gwendolen, my dear one!" she moaned, "I had forgotten you. Gwendolen—Gwendolen!"

"If I might be allowed to say a word in behalf of France," ventured Ronsard, hesitatingly.

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"Your Excellency," interrupted Pierre, "let us have no further discussion. I cannot be interfered with, even by you. The thing is done! I have agreed! Prince Haganè protects us all! All are satisfied. Cela!"

"Yes, yes," echoed Yuki. "Everything is settled!"

"Here's one thing that isn't!" flared out Todd. "I say to you men, French and Japanese alike, damn you for a set of cold-blooded, fanatical politicians! Out of the bunch I respect—no, I despise a little less, Le Beau, for though an egoist and a fool, he is at least on fire with love. As for you two statesmen, there's something rotten in your refrigerators! I know what Le Beau has to sell, of course; and it is not worth the sacrifice of this poor shivering child! Ronsard, speak up for France, without permission or apology. Where is your honor, where that little cross with the red ribbon, that you stand by and see this wedge of opportunity driven by a boy's lust into sand!"

"Your Excellency!" thundered Haganè. "Though you signed the paper, it is not yours. I claim it—for Nippon! I alone am responsible!"

Yuki cowered an instant, pressing both hands against her ears, then she rallied, and crying, "Do not interfere,—it is Haganè's concern and mine," went up to Todd, and seized his arm for emphasis. He pushed her off. "It may be Haganè's business, but I make it mine! God! These are not the Dark Ages. I'm not the man to stand aside and have a woman burned at the stake of political exigency. I'll turn traitor myself! I'll tell the purport of the paper! I'll wire my resignation to Washington next day! But I won't keep still!" His lean figure flashed with indignation like a gleam

that plays along an unsheathed sword.

Yuki, wheeling back to him with incredible swiftness, caught down the upraised hand, and strained it to her breast. She threw herself against him, praying, it would seem, for eternal life. "Oh, my friend, you are noble, but you make the terrible mistake! You will kill my soul, which has but just come alive. Let me go to Pierre, as is now planned. You think, maybe, that I do some great sacrifice for my country, like that good girl, Jeanne d'Arc. But you think too high. I am bad! I am the cat! I have no love for Nippon or for Haganè! No, I have the one wish now,—to go to Pierre—to Pierre! I was close to him a moment, and now you come to drag me away. Keep me not from Pierre!"

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Todd scrutinized her from between stiffening, half-closed eyelids. The gathering corner-wrinkles had the effect of sparks. "It's no good, Yuki!" he said quietly. "It don't work a little bit! I've known you too long!"

"Oh, but I *is* bad, very bad! You didn't know, of course not! I was sly to hide everythings. Pierre and I have arrange so that, in spite of cruel father, and Prince Haganè and all, we comes together at last! Ah, push me off again!" she cried convulsively. "That is right! I care not if I lose you, and Mrs. Todd, and Gwendolen, and my good name,—everything! if only I can go to Pierre this night! Just let me do what I wish, as all have agree but you. Try not to prevent!"

At the wild light in her eyes, the impassioned ring of her voice, Todd, his faith for the moment quailing, had pushed her off a few shuddering inches. She clung still to his hand. By this he drew her near again, and probed. Before his first word, she must have surmised the change, for she swayed in his hold, shuddered violently, closed her lids, and let her lips form a few dumb words of prayer.

"Yuki!" Todd began, in a voice so low that the others scarcely heard. "Yuki, this is a part you are playing. Eternity is your stage, and tragedy your curtain. The room smells of it. You are not bad. You harbor now a heroic design. I cannot understand, but I believe it to be supreme! Before God, look into my eyes, and tell me the truth. I will not betray you!"

She lifted calmly, now, the great, dark orbs. He gazed down into them, to the thought that lay, like a white rock, in the clear depths. In absolute moments the human soul has a speech of its own and an ear to listen. Her lips moved no more. She was not conscious of further effort to make him see. Without grosser statement, knowledge came to him. This life of earth already had lost its hold on her,—Pierre was less than a shadow on a stream. Todd knew that she was to die,—that the discarded shell of the thing he loved would be Pierre's prize. By the same ghostly prescience Haganè knew that certainty had laid her cold touch upon the American. He averted quickly his dark face from the sight. Ronsard, who was nearest, saw a mighty shudder blow upon him; then the face, now twitching, lifted toward the light. His lips moved. Ronsard could not surmise the trend of the broken, muttered words; but Yuki, who had neither heard nor seen, knew that he was praying.

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Todd loosed the girl's hand now, not in rebuke, but as one incapable of sustaining longer the fragile burden. The alertness, the eagerness went from him. All at once he was a middle-aged man. "And I must stand by and do—nothing!" he whispered, half to himself, half to her.

"Oh, you can still do much. You can believe in me,—and Gwendolen will not need to scorn me. I will thank you always, if only for what you have just understood."

"Come!" said Haganè, sharply. "A woman's endurance has a limit. The paper, please, Monsieur Le Beau."

Ronsard touched Pierre's arm. "Not until you have received your price."

"When Yuki comes to me to-night, and not before," said Pierre, valiantly. He was pleased with the sound of his own bravado.

Yuki threw a piteous glance toward her husband. "Then shall I accompany, now? I think I can do all, alone."

Haganè did not answer her. He held Pierre in a hard gaze. "To-night?" he questioned. "How can I be sure that the seal will be intact?"

"Sir!" said Pierre, indignantly, "your suggestion is an insult!"

"Ah! do thieves who enter other men's homes to rob them still wave the flag of honor?" Pierre drew back, flushed and scowling, with a muttered curse. Todd gave a great start. It was the first time he had heard the specific charge. How then, if Pierre were a mere common thief, could Yuki be involved? Again he was baffled. He shook his head sadly, and kept silence. Haganè had begun to speak again. "I am willing to refer the matter to arbitration, but shall not consent to the document

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remaining here. Let it be put into the hands of a third party, until to-night."

"Yes," said Yuki, eagerly. "Mr. Todd will keep it. All trust him!"

Pierre and Ronsard exchanged apprehensive glances. To refuse was impossible. "An—an—excellent plan," said Ronsard, with a watery beam. "But, since Russia is our ally—"

"Utterly unofficial, you know. A purely personal misunderstanding," reminded Todd, not without a gleam of malice. "In your present attitude, Count Ronsard, you can scarcely claim anything further. France's honor hardly rests on—felony! I am willing to hold it; and, if the prince should fail to drive in the sacrificial lamb, otherwise Yuki, France gets the paper, I presume."

"Exactly," said Haganè, and Ronsard in a breath.

"Only," interpolated Yuki, in her low, clear voice, "no sacrificial lamb is to be driven, your Excellency,—only a woman gaining her soul's desire."

Pierre triumphed in glances about the room. Couldn't the fool American see that Yuki was simply dying to get away from old Haganè and come to him! Why this continued talk of sacrifice? It sounded like the Japanese themselves. Pierre sent an ardent, encouraging look to the girl. To his surprise, her face was set steadily upon Haganè, and in his answering gaze was the same embarrassing rapture.

"Well," said Todd, sharply, "am I to keep the paper or not?"

"My dear colleague," stuttered Ronsard, paddling the air with gestures of concession, "of course, in your keeping it is as safe as—say—in my private desk. Pierre!—" There was a sharp tang to the name.

The young man reluctantly handed the envelope to Todd. He took it with a crooked smile. Haganè and Yuki remained calm as statues.

"Madame," the host said, with fictitious gayety, "perhaps, as a matter of delicacy, congratulations are not in order; yet allow me to assure you of my good-will and homage!"

Yuki met his look. Her face was still expressionless, like a Japanese painting of a high-born lady where repose is the desired essential. Something underlying the white calm disturbed him. After her few gentle words, "I thank your Excellency," he was glad to turn away.

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"To-night at eight," said Haganè, moving toward the door. "Can all be present at eight?"

The three men bowed gravely. Ronsard for once had forgotten etiquette. He was allowing his visitors to leave alone. Yuki, with no further look for Pierre, prepared to follow her husband, but Todd came to himself with a queer, choking little sound. In two long strides he overtook her.

"Yuki,—how can. I stand it? You are like my other child! I am in a bed of nettles, and you have tied my hands! I have agreed to take this paper chiefly on the hope that I may stir Le Beau to a nobler issue. You must agree,—you *must*—to a less awful price."

Yuki's lifted face was whiter now than any death, but somehow, under the icy surface a flower was frozen. "Pierre will not agree, because I have said I wish to go to him. You have understood the Japanese heart strangely; but even yet,—there are spaces you have not dreamed. I pray God for you to fail, dear Mr. Todd, but I ask his blessing on your kindness. Give to those dear ones at your home, my Sayonara, and my undying love!"

Todd writhed as if stung by an unseen serpent. "And yet, within my bounds of confidence and honor, I must reason with Pierre, must speak more fully with Ronsard!"

"I trust you utterly," said Yuki, as she faded through the doorway.

Ronsard, recalled perhaps by the mention of his name, hurried forward now, and accompanied the noble guests to the portico. Left together, Pierre and Todd eyed each other. On the younger, more beautiful face, vanity and self-satisfaction were spread as scented unguents. The hour was his. He had triumphed! Yuki, in spite of all these grave men, was to be his own. Oh, he would make her happy!

It is said that the colorless color 'white' is merely a cunning admixture of all hues. In the same way, the iridescent struggle of contempt, pity, incredulity, disapprobation, whirling together in the American's mind, coalesced into blankness,—the consciousness of a situation hopeless, irremediable. Without a word or exclamation he sank to the nearest chair, put his long, lean arms

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out upon the table, and laid his face upon them. So the two men remained, until the heavy footsteps of Ronsard came back into the hall,—until he entered, and, casting an eye on the prostrate form, asked of Pierre, in a whisper, "Is his Excellency ill?"

"No," said Pierre, irritably. "He is not, but I am. Nobody seems to think of the strain I've been under all this time. With your permission, Excellency, I'll have one of the servants telephone for a physician. This hellish fever is on me again. I must keep my reason until this night is over!"

Ronsard, without answering, waddled to a chair, moved his short legs outward, and let the attraction of gravitation do the rest. The room shook with the impact, jangling empty cups and glasses on the table. He drew out a silken handkerchief, and with it odors of violet and vervain.

"Oui, oui," he made answer at length, "have your physician. You will need him before you are through. And when the servant comes, kindly order tea, sandwiches, coffee, liqueurs, anything which may strengthen. Bah! It is vaudeville tragedy!" He settled himself with grunts and short groans of distaste. Todd was deliberately overlooked. The silent form gave both observers a sense of uneasiness.

Pierre's orders given, strength suddenly deserted him. He went to a couch, where pillows in Japanese brocades were heaped. "With your permission, gentlemen," he muttered. He threw himself down upon his back, bending his head upward into the soft squares, until the profile was drawn thin and clear, as that of a mediæval figure on a tomb. All day long, ever since his escape from the hospital (and could it be possible that his flight had taken place since dawn of this very day?), illness had toyed with him as a jungle tiger with its prey, letting him go free for a moment, only to spring back, fastening deeper claws. Now the fever held him, and moved like a tumultuous sea across which was hung a molten, blinding sheet of brass. Down in the valleys of the waves it was dark, and cold, and terrible. Sea-creatures grimaced at him, holding out long, wavering arms. Oh, the valleys were terrible indeed! But up on the swelling crest was far worse, for there he burned. Sometimes his brain went wild in the torment of flame. His lips blistered and cracked. Once, when he threw a hand suddenly upward, a pink finger-nail split to the flesh. The intervals had a rhythm, a relentless, horrible recurrence. He knew in anticipation the agony of each moment just before it came. Now,—now he was beginning to rise, to be borne up from the liquid, icy trough toward a plane of fire. He groaned aloud, and cowered. Soft footsteps went around the room. Porcelain or some such brittle substance went clashing gently. To him it was as shells of the sea, caught up with him in the wave; caught up from slimy depths, like him; torn from a nether world of cold despair and whirled upward, as he was being whirled! Soon they would crack, too, and the pretty colors be burned and blackened. A voice came out of the water. It sounded like Ronsard's voice. "Look at the young Monsieur! Diable! Fever is gaining. I would he were safely back in the hospital."

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"Then why not take the responsibility of sending him there?" drawled the American's voice,—that thin, nasal, self-confident voice that Pierre hated. It lashed now, like sea-nettles, in his face.

Pierre writhed, and tried to toss aside the pillows. "I won't go back! You need not plan! You cannot force me!" he tried to scream. His parched lips opened. A hissing noise came from his throat. He thought he had really screamed the words, but the quiet, uninterrupted flow of conversation, behind the wall of the wave convicted him terribly of delusion. He gnashed his teeth, struggling to rise.

"Good God!" cried Todd, reaching him at a bound. "The man is in convulsions. A doctor, quick, or he'll die here!"

Ronsard pressed a bell in frantic haste, and sent all the Legation servants forth in search of physicians, warning each to go in an individual direction. As a natural consequence, they went in a frightened phalanx. Police-officers, seeing the confusion, hurried in. Everywhere was dismay and disorganization. Todd alone retained a little judgment, giving the sick man ammonia to smell, and bathing his forehead with cold water.

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It was a young American practitioner who first gained the house. Had it been a German (of whom there are several of world-wide reputation resident in Tokio), he, in behalf of his reputation,—not to mention common sense, would certainly have insisted upon sending the invalid back to Yokohama, where, indubitably, he belonged. The American being younger, more imaginative, and with less reputation to jeopardize, might lend himself the more readily to the unusual. Ronsard and Todd, each in his own way,—both, of course, intensely desirous of getting Pierre safely in hospital walls,—nevertheless advanced persuasions to keep him away from the desirable haven until the following morning. The physician was evidently puzzled by the presence of conflicting motives. As a final statement of his own position, he said, "I insist that you gentlemen recognize the measures I must employ to give him an interval of strength and lucidity must take away at least fifty per cent of the patient's chances of recovery!"

Todd answered for both. "We understand. It is the dickens of a thing for us to have to decide on; yet, since the man, if in his senses, would consider us traitors to shut him up before eight tonight, I don't see anything else but to let you dose him until that time."

"Exactly," corroborated the French minister.

"And, doctor," added Todd, in a slightly embarrassed tone, "it is a mess. We can't explain. Mum's the word, you know."

"Oh, I knew before you told me," said the young doctor. Then he went to work.

An hour later Pierre, gasping, and pouring out from his entire frame the very sap of vitality, still lay on the sofa, his fever gone, his mind clear, uplifted, pellucid, as it had been on awakening in Yuki's tea-rooms three hours before.

The doctor had departed. Neither Todd nor the French minister had left the room. The two politicians tacitly understood that neither trusted the other, yet, strange to say, neither resented it. The issue at stake was too big for personal irritation. In the reaction of his excitement Todd pondered anew, with ever deepening foreboding, upon the thing that Yuki's eyes had told him. Ronsard, overflowing in his cushioned chair, brooded of France and her already humiliated ally, Russia.

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"Le Beau," said Todd, at length, rising and walking in the direction of the sofa, "you're too sick a man to be pounded by all the arguments I have been getting together for you, but there are just a few things I must say, and which his Excellency Count Ronsard here should hear me say."

"Speak," said Pierre, languidly; "it will make no difference at all, Monsieur, but I shall listen."

"I want you to return that paper quietly, as a gentleman should, and I want you to go back to the hospital, as a rational being should. You are precipitating a crisis that Napoleon in his best days might shrink from, and you are too ill to stand on your feet. You don't know yet what you are doing. Rely on stronger men, just now, and in all your future life you will thank God that you listened!"

Pierre shifted his position slightly and tried to smile. Ronsard placed himself at the other end of the couch. His eyes held Todd. "Before Pierre tries to answer, it is but right to him, to France, that I should speak, your Excellency." He went close to Pierre and touched him. "Pierre, I urge, with all the fervor, all the loyalty, all the passion of a son of France, that you give up—not the paper; that is ours,—but the woman. None but a coward and a sensualist would sell away from his country a paper which commands so terrible a price."

"I am impaled upon the diameter of widely differing opinions," said Pierre, sarcastically.

Todd's next words were very quiet. They were addressed to Ronsard. "The advice of your Excellency is both just and creditable. You speak as a diplomat; I merely as a man. I know what was in the paper, and I know also that a man's honor, that nameless, indescribable essence which makes him a man, once blackened, with the stain eaten in, can never be brightened. Pierre has but an hour or two to change himself from a low thief to a man. Give up the paper, Pierre, and save the woman you say you love!"

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"Bah!" Ronsard interrupted with a rudeness the others scarcely had believed possible to him; "you accuse Frenchmen of sentimentality, Mr. Todd. What is this desire of yours but sentiment, false sentiment, puerile, absurd? You spur the boy's honor in order to save a woman who probably does not wish to be saved. You play upon him! I see a tear in his youthful eye. He thinks of Madame, deserted,—in need of comfort! Who should condole with her but he? Pouf! If you yearn to be a hero, Pierre, make of that very desire a nobler sacrifice for France! Break your heart if you will, but with the shattered fragments trace the name of France! Upon this paper that you hold, the future of a great war may hang. It has written instructions,—values,—perhaps a secret treaty. Think what it may mean, not only to our own land, to Russia, but to you!" He leaned to finger a little red ribbon dangling from a cigar-box on the table. Pierre's eyes shot a dull gleam. "When Haganè comes, defy him,—break your word, retain the paper, but give back the wife he so easily discards!"

Pierre had fallen back in his pillows. "You don't know what you are talking of,—neither knows," he said, tossing his head feverishly. "You will set my veins on fire again with your chatter. Yuki, Haganè and I understand each other—" he broke off with a querulous gesture.

Todd had begun to bristle. Sneers were rare to him, but now his lean face assumed one. He caught up the red ribbon which Ronsard had let fall, and cried to him, "You scorned the motive of honor, of pity for a woman, yet wave the red flag of personal ambition. Pierre, can you not see for yourself how flimsy is his argument? You think you understand Yuki and her husband, but you do not. A terrific tragedy hangs over us all. I insist, I implore you, Pierre, try to reason this out for yourself, not as a Frenchman, a lover, or a diplomat, but just as a man,—a man, and what makes him a man, with a little fuse of God sputtering in him, and not an animal minus the fuse, made up of intellect, tastes, and inclinations! Think of that shivering, white-faced girl,—that Oriental Jeanne d'Arc who faced us all so bravely an hour ago. I tell you, man, if you loved her decently, you would

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turn sick at the thought of receiving her at the hands of her lawful husband. Boy, try to think for once in your life of some one besides yourself,—and may God have mercy on you and my little Yuki."

His voice broke on the last word. Ronsard jerked his body, and gave a low sound of irritation. Pierre flared up into feeble passion.

"And I tell you, Mr. Todd, that you talk nonsense! I have thought of Yuki,—only Yuki! I think now of no one but Yuki. I too pitied her, and did what I could. I offered to give the paper back into her hands, with the one condition that Haganè should pardon what he fancies her offence and should receive her back openly as his wife. They both refused!"

"You did what? Haganè refused *what?*" exclaimed Todd. He thought that the fever was again upon its victim. Ronsard looked concerned and felt Pierre's white forehead. He met their eyes triumphantly. He was pleased at the effect of his words. Something in his boyish face impressed the diplomats with the truth of the unbelievable statement just made. "Now, perhaps you will let me alone for a while," he said disdainfully, and turned his back.

The elder men exchanged glances of dismay, and by a common impulse left the couch. Pierre felt himself again a conqueror. His words, like a querulous barking, followed them. "I really do not feel able to endure more talk, or more tobacco-smoke, just now, gentlemen. The doctor said I must have sleep before to-night. If I could only sleep! After a fine deep sleep I should be strong again, the doctor said it! But they will not let me alone,—they talk and argue, but they are ignorant. Yuki and I understand each other." With little childish, spasmodic movements he settled himself among the sheens of brocade, keeping his face to the wall. Small sounds of discontent, passing into moans and feverish starts, came from him.

Todd stood, perplexed, by the table. Ronsard, in equal agitation, hovered near, and then with a side glance at the sick boy, crushed his cigarette into a tray. Todd's lean shoulders bent over as with a weight. "After that last," he muttered, "I guess I might as well clear out. Is there anything further to discuss, your Excellency?" he asked of Ronsard.

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The Frenchman's eyes shifted. His protruding underlip trembled until he felt it shake, and raised a perfumed laden handkerchief for a screen. Todd saw the uncertainty, the battle between etiquette and fear in his colleague's face, and, with a dry smile, took the paper from his breast, slapping it down upon the bare table.

"My dear sir, my most valuable friend," began Ronsard, in his oiliest manner, "you tear my heartstrings with the implied doubt. Your honor is not to be questioned. Yet I would be glad to know just where you intend to remain this fateful afternoon." The contrast between his tone and the relief in his fat face were too much for Todd. He threw back his head to laugh. Pierre, already dragged far out in an undertow of sleep, did not turn, but Ronsard glanced up suspiciously. His half-buried eyes had a tinge of red.

"It's just this way, Count," said the other, easily. "I know what is in this little billet,—you don't. I assure you that the price is not big enough by half for the promised reward. Yet if it were a thousand times bigger, and if I dreaded and disapproved of the whole business ten thousand times more than I do, yet, having given my word to Prince Haganè and Yuki, and having accepted the—er—shall I call it confidence?—of you and Le Beau, I should keep strictly both to the letter and the spirit of my bargain. I can't imagine, to be frank, the inner workings of a man who could do anything else. I am an American. I have been a senator, and I now represent my Government in a land which fills me with the most intense admiration. Does that put any lubricator on your troubled waves?"

"My dear sir," purred the Frenchman, "let us be seated for a moment more. I thank your Excellency for these new assurances, and appreciate the generosity of them. This has been an afternoon of trial for me,—of deep humiliation. Your nobility adds but one more pang, and, in the name of France, I can bear it! I shall give five hundred yen to the poor of Tokio when this most detestable affair is at an end. It is my first experience of the kind, and shall be my last. Pierre's public dismissal from the service of this Legation will be in the morning papers. I shelter him no longer."

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Todd made no comment. He had refused to take the proffered seat. "Your Excellency, I feel the need of fresh air. I must go. But before leaving you I have two questions to put,—answer or not as you think best."

"At your service, Monsieur."

"Have you any knowledge of the motive which prompts Yuki to take so strong, so vital a part in this hellish arrangement—and—do you know her offence?"

"I can answer both. The first is obvious enough. Madame has the natural desire to pass from

the arms of winter to that of spring. The other query,—I cannot give a positive reply, but will share the data."

Todd waited in silence. Ronsard arranged his words with some nicety. "In the first excitement of Le Beau's arrival,—as he came in like a maniac, waving a white screech, and gasping out to me its nature,—I cried, 'Then where is Haganè? He must be close behind you!' Pierre, with a meaning glance, assured me that the great man could not follow, being—detained."

"Detained? Well, go on!"

"I marvelled, as you do, at the phrase. 'Detained,' Pierre said,—entangled, tied, quite cleverly, by Madame and her long gray sleeves. Did you not notice the disarray of Madame's toilette?" Ronsard looked up now full at his colleague, as if to enjoy the effect. Todd steadied himself. He would not give this man the satisfaction of gloating over new wounds. The whole terrible thing came clear to him. He saw why Yuki needed to die. It was no punishment inflicted by Haganè, but a last desperate self-atonement.

"Ah!" he answered Ronsard, with wonderful coolness, "I thank your Excellency for the elucidation. It is complete. Now, with your permission, and if your mind is entirely at rest, I will say 'Good-bye until to-night at eight.'"

"Certainly," bowed the count, who did not relish this acrobatic reversion to tranquillity. "The disclosure, I trust, makes no difference in your—sentiments." [pg 40

"Heavens, man! how could it? I'm not a tin fish on a red barn, to wheel round with every wind! Don't you see it is as much to me as anybody else that the thing gets back, unopened, to Haganè?"

"Yes, yes, I presume so," muttered Ronsard, and accompanied his colleague to the door. The American went out on foot. Ronsard slowly retraced his heavy steps to Pierre. Stopping beside the sleeper, he stared down, first thoughtfully, then in growing antipathy and disgust. France, America, political acumen, possible distinction for himself or Todd,—all were blocked by this sick animal who lay, inert as a log, clear across the current of affairs. Well, endurance came with the thought that a few hours more would see the end!

Ronsard turned away at length, moved restlessly around the room, and at last, with a resigned sigh, took out a pack of cards, drew a table before a long pier-glass, and, solemnly dealing two hands, played piquet with his silent, gray shade, until the day went out, and the first purple waves of night came rushing in across a soundless shore.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

It had been said of Mr. Cyrus C. Todd that one might recognize him for an American half a mile away. The alertness, buoyancy, and self-confidence of a growing nation had expression through him. He held himself like a flagstaff from which waved the Stars and Stripes. To-day the bright invisible folds clung about him like a shroud. He felt the weight of tears upon them, tears that soon must be shed. Look where he would, no door of escape for Yuki opened. After all it was so much more Haganè's affair and Pierre's and even Ronsard's! But what comfort would this reply bring to Gwendolen? Ah, there was the pang! Gwendolen, who had known no sister but this frail bit of pearl and moonlight that held so deep a soul! Todd's head sagged between his shoulders. His step lost firmness. He was a man aged, to outward appearance, ten years in a day.

An inspiring bit of news had come during that forenoon from Manchuria. The land-engagements by which Russia was to restore her prestige lost at sea, and inflict a terrible retribution on her audacious enemies, had begun, and Japan, as on sea, was victor. At another time Todd would have rejoiced with the nation. Now the whole campaign became to his fevered imagination a colossal juggernaut destined to crush one little girl,—a wheel of fate (karma, Yuki would have termed it) on which a white moth should be broken.

Todd seldom gave himself over to self-communion, yet those long days in the bright loneliness of his wheat-fields had once bred the habit. An ominous and most mysterious factor in his thought was a sense of pre-knowledge, of a relentless inevitability, of the desirability, even, of the sacrifice. The thing came, like a predestined growth, from the soil of necessity. "Joint knit to joint expands the full formed fate." As if, indeed, some ghostly counsellor leaned to him, the event, from which his human, his conventional selves recoiled, shuddering, seemed to his spirit a thing designed, not cruelly, by the Gods themselves. Yet to think of Yuki—his little Yuki—dead with her youth folded like helpless wings about her! The man groaned and stumbled in his path, as, weeks before, Pierre [pg 40

Le Beau, dazed with a more ignoble grief, had groaned and stumbled on these very stones.

The day was Friday, the hour approaching five of the afternoon. Little girls in brilliant-colored kimonos played ball, or hop-scotch, or hide-and-seek around the corners of the streets. Solemn-looking babies, with a mat of black hair tipped to the backs of otherwise smoothly shaven heads, loitered, engrossed apparently in Zen meditation, in the vicinity of their elders. The clothes of these pygmy abbots being wadded both in front and back, one, in his abstraction, toppling over, might regain his equilibrium with a single bound, like round-bottomed toys that always stand on end. Infants of a size smaller had warm swallows' nests slung from the backs of elder sisters. These living burdens made no difference at all in the freedom of sports, or in the slumbers of those carried. In hop-scotch, the heads of the babes went up and down with each hop, until the slender necks should have snapped. But, no, babies were meant to pass most of their existence in this manner, and being Japanese, they took it philosophically. Sun, wind, or even a light snow might fall on the upturned faces, and sleep still line the swallow nest.

Schoolboys, in little squads, passed at intervals. Some among them must have been of the very lot who had once informed Pierre of the meaning of "Ikusa!" Many wore the foreign school uniform of dark-blue woollen cloth made into scanty trousers and "bob" jackets. With this outfit went, inevitably, coarse leather shoes. Other students had been to their homes to change the regulation school garb for the more comfortable wadded kimono, held in place by soft white girdles in endless yards of cloth, and completed with Japanese geta or clogs. All alike wore dark-blue military caps with the names of their school across the front in Chinese ideographs of gold. Their faces were smooth and brown; their eyes like dark jewels. They looked fearlessly upon the tall American. A few lifted their caps lightly, in token of respect, but many more stared, and often turned away with an independence very close upon audacity. Todd, in spite of his troubled reverie, was beguiled into smiling at them. Few indeed responded to his pleasant look. It savored to them of condescension. Abreast with a small battalion of young swaggerers, Todd, for an experiment, said distinctly, "Banzai Nippon!" The boys stood as if electrified. Todd pointed to his button of the Order of the Rising Sun. Suddenly caps and voices went high in air. "Banzai Nippon! Banzai Nippon!" they shouted. They crowded now about the minister, their faces all smiles, the mistrust vanished. They examined his button eagerly, then his watch-charm, his necktie, pin, and signet-ring.

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"A-rr-e you the A-mer-i-kan?" asked one, in rheumatic English.

"Yes," answered Todd. "I am the new American minister,—A-mer-i-ca no Kōshi." This was one of the few Japanese phrases he had acquired.

"Banzai Nippon! Banzai Nippon!" came the renewed shout. "American good friend to Nip-pon—yes?" asked another lad.

"Huh! We all same lick off Russia's boots," growled a surly youth.

"Well, I hope you do,—though you mustn't say I said it!" laughed Todd. "Good-bye! Good-bye! You are fine boys!"

"Good-bye! Good-bye, sirr!" called out the boys after him, with caps in hand. It is to be regretted that most of them said, "Gooroo-bye-roo!" but the sentiment, at least, was faultless.

Todd, looking back to them, wondered whether there were any incipient Togos, Kurokis, and Haganès among the striplings. He sighed. The untarnished enthusiasms of youth are always saddening,—though very precious. One of the boys looked like Yuki. The likeness led him back, like a jailer, to his dark cell of meditation.

"What am I to say to Gwendolen?" was now his despairing cry. Gwendolen's eager questions, Gwendolen's clear eyes,—they would soon be torture-irons. She knew enough of the situation to have a right to all, yet how on earth was he to tell of a thing which no one had stated to himself,—a fleck of terrible certainty drifting to his gaze from Yuki's soul? Now a revulsion against the whole morbid situation flooded his being. He felt as he had sometimes felt in dreams when a horrible thing crept near, and he, though half-conscious that it was only a dream, still sub-consciously must endure the pangs of reality until he could wrench himself awake. Perhaps this also might prove a phantasm of the night! He snatched at the delusion. The voices of young children, the whirr of the low red sun through fleeting jinrikisha wheels, the gentle, restraining touch upon his hand of falling petals, jeered softly at the self-deceiver.

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The city streets shortened now to purple vistas. Across from the smouldering west a single planet, isolated by its own brightness, preened itself with feathers of light. Todd's thoughts moved on like the shadow-pictures of a revolving lantern. Each was a silhouette, black, angular, menacing. If Yuki had indeed held Haganè inert, if an impulse of love, even of pity for a sick man, had prevented the instant regaining of such a paper, naturally she must get it back, though at the price of her life. But what did the babbling sick boy mean by saying that he had offered to return the paper to Haganè, if only Yuki would be forgiven, and that both as with one voice had refused? Here was the knot that pulled.

Haganè did not hate or scorn his young wife; Todd would stake his honor on that point. Never had a human countenance shone with deeper tenderness than that which Haganè had turned on Yuki within a few moments, too, of her wrongdoing. The more urgently she had insisted upon fulfilling the bargain, the brighter the faith in her that Haganè's eyes had betrayed. Yuki's secret was plain enough. She was to die by her own hand, giving her hostage of a soul to Haganè, the body of her death to Pierre. Both she and Haganè had been assiduous to use the one term "body." Todd could understand this much, but what was Haganè's hidden source of light? Here conjecture failed. If Yuki's death were the only possible way of redeeming the paper, all motives would be plain; but Pierre said that he had offered to restore it. This was a great thing for Pierre to have done. Todd's heart ached for the poor, weak, tortured boy, so soon to be overwhelmed in an iridescent wreck of his own making.

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Yuki was to die! This one thing alone was terrible enough. His weary thought went on in a creaking treadmill. To Haganè the mere fact of death would, of course, be less terrible and less important. Mere animal existence, for its own sake, no matter how pleasant the surroundings, is scorned by a true Japanese. They have other lives to live, even on this old planet. They are to come again, soothed and strengthened by the few years of interval, each in the fresh, new body of a little child. In such tender blossoms of their own race they re-enter a world from which, smiling or shivering, as karma may have tended, they departed. Returning, they are dazed, a little wistful, a little timorous, yet grateful for the new chance. Believing that great sorrow and great temptation come always from the deeds of a previous existence, they meet them bravely, carrying their own burdens, clear in determination to retrieve that past, and mark out for the future a straighter and a higher way. The gentle Amida, Kwannon of Mercy, Jizo with the tender smile,—all may help them. Fudo Sama, immovable in a torment of flame, Monju, Aizen, and the old Shinto Gods may give them strength; but each human soul has wrapped in itself the power of growth and of decay. So, mounting, striving, failing, reconquering, at last the pilgrim may approach that shining mystery the world calls "Nirvana,"—that glare of glory where the soul is swallowed up in light, and so passes on to new realms of a radiance so ineffable that human thought falls helpless and blind before it.

He had heard Yuki tell all this to Gwendolen before the days of her Christian conversion. His listening had been more eager than he cared to show. Gwendolen had voiced his thought, as she replied, with a long sigh of wonder, "It does seem reasonable. So many things that we have to guess at are explained by this thing you call reincarnation. Love at first sight, sudden aversions, family tendencies, that queer feeling of having been in a new place many times before—I think I'll turn Buddhist, Yuki; but don't hint it to mama."

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Yuki had become a Christian. She believed her early religious training to have passed forever. She was sincere and earnest in the new faith. Her face turned, as by a gentle instinct, to the Star of Bethlehem. All that she professed, she believed truly and without question. Yet this life of hers was, after all, but a flower sprung from an eternal stem, whose roots were packed, burrowed, and buried deep in centuries of Eastern mysticism. She had drawn her convictions from her mother's breast, while, to belief of the tender nurse, ancestral spirits hovered and smiled above them both. She had breathed it in each year at Bon Matsuri, the Festival of the Dead, when little boats, laden with prayer and incense and the warmth of human food, went forth to comfort the souls of those who had died at sea, when each hillside cemetery stirred with the soft clashing of ghostly lanterns, luminous in a spectral ether, when little steaming cups of tea, and flowers, and children's toys, were offered to the dead ghost-people. Here were the meeting-places of the living and the dead. Here the two worlds answered, face to face, as reflections in still water. Yuki, in those childish days, no more doubted that hordes of spirits moved about her, lifting her hair, creeping into her sleeve, reaching even to the shelter of her faithful heart, than, later, in America she had doubted the presence of her human schoolmates, sitting in rows before wooden desks.

And now, above the blood-wet battlefields, the spirits of the great heroes of the past, worshipped by generations of the Japanese faithful, were hovering, to test, by their supreme standards of valor and endurance, the gray hosts of new aspirants for immortality. Yuki would feel that they were her judges also.

And the gentle Gods would be near,—Kwannon, Jizo, Amida—standing in great shining nebulae of faith on the rim of night.

These sweeter visions passed, and the dark monitor in Todd's brain set him the task of fathoming Pierre's deed. The boy had stolen. Contempt swept from the thinker's mind its late compassion. Illness alone might partially excuse it; but in delirium, as in drunkenness, the latent impulse often shows itself. And Pierre, a young French dandy, a thief, expected to make, that night, such a woman as the Princess Haganè utterly his own. Yuki had probably saved his life at the expense of hers. His grateful reward would be to defame her. Then why would Haganè not take her back? Was she unworthy, simply through the act of saving Pierre, or was there a lower reason? No—no—no—the man cried out to himself. Yuki could not be evil. If Haganè believed it of her, he could not have so smiled; he had the look of a high-priest bent upon a beloved penitent. And that Ronsard should have believed,—a man who could speak and understand the Japanese language, who had lived among the people for eleven years! Having faced another blank wall, Todd turned.

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He fell now to wondering in what way Yuki would choose to die. The long strain began to tell on him. Morbid thoughts and fancies assailed him. He almost gloated over the anticipation of

Pierre's agony when he should be paid his price. But how would Yuki die? Would she be alone, or Haganè with her? Would her hand or his deal the final blow—give Death his first sweet sip of her? The two would be together; yes, it must be so; and the scene, unwitnessed though it was, one of unrivalled heroism, the silent speech of two Gods alone on a cloudy mountain-top. And what was he to say to Gwendolen!

The treadmill creaked again, and registered the notch of another empty revolution. Now Todd shook himself and raised his eyes to see how far he had come. Not a hundred yards ahead of him began the slope of Azabu. Blackening swiftly against the copper sky loomed the great Japanese entrance to his Legation. Evidently he must decide swiftly what to tell or not to tell his daughter. He thought of Dodge. Dodge knew the Japanese better than he; maybe he knew girls better. In the breaking of the news to Gwendolen he might be of great help. Then the tiny flicker of comfort died. Dodge and Gwendolen were playing at being enemies. They scarcely spoke. It was a lover's quarrel, Todd supposed, for Dodge certainly loved her; and the sudden friendship, on the girl's part, of a successful rival betrayed clearly her sentiments. Lovers' quarrels were well enough in their way; but why should this have come just now when Dodge could be of use?

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He drew a sigh that racked the meagre frame, and started up the slope. "Kuruma, Dan-na San! Rickshaw,—Dan-na San?" cried a group of coolies who had a little station at the base of the hill. Their accents were persuasive, even plaintive. They moved forward in a body, the empty black vehicles (inseparable from them as shells from snails) rattling behind them. They clamored like crows.

"No, I don't want you. No, I say, I-I-yè! Go back," he cried, and waved them off, with some irritation at their persistence.

The smooth gravelled driveway of the hill might have been a trough of viscid red clay, to judge from the slow and dragging steps of the one who now ascended it. The rejected coolies, staring up from the street level, assured one another that the tall foreigner was both sick and stingy. For the latter fault they hoped he would fall down before reaching the top of the hill. Then they would run to him, and charge a yen apiece for picking him up. They began to ascend, stealthily, like human vultures.

The dark spot of his ascending head could scarcely have been seen through the opened gate, when, in a whirl of rustling skirts, Gwendolen came down upon him. "I cannot tell her," he muttered between clenched teeth, as she came. "I shall die. She must not know what I believe!"

Gwendolen did not reproach him for being late, though he had thought her first words would be a playful chiding. She did not speak at all, only took his arm, pressed it lovingly with her own, and with cheek sometimes laid for an instant against his shoulder made the rest of the ascent with him. The tenderness, the consideration of her manner, touched him profoundly. He looked down into her face, white and fair even in the dying light. She smiled up at him. He saw a new beauty, a hint of new strength in her. For a moment his harassed sense clutched the impossible. Maybe good news of Yuki had come to her!

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"What is it, child? You look different? What has happened?"

She gave a low little laugh, and did not answer. They had nearly reached the gate. In the great shadow a smaller shadow stepped out to join them. Gwendolen put out a white hand and drew it near. "This is what has happened, father—" she whispered. "We are—friends again."

"Friends?" echoed Todd; "you and Mr. Dodge,—thank God!"

"Friends!" came Dodge's pleasant voice; "well I rather guess not!"

"Gwendolen," said her father, drawing her close, "is this true?"

She clung to him, crying just a little in her excitement. "Yes, dad, if you are willing—if it will not make you unhappy. He has talked with me,—of the other thing; he has comforted me,—though he believes it to be, oh, so terrible! Are you—willing, dearest father?"

Todd put an arm around each, pressing the brown and the golden heads close. "I wish it of all things," he said. "Dodge is an American and a gentleman; nothing is better than that. Just now this—happiness of yours is a gift of God, for I bring nothing joyous."

"Tell us everything," pleaded Gwendolen. "I can stand anything now; my heart couldn't break with you one side of it, and h-him the other." Dodge went around to his side.

"I—I—guess it would be safer to tell it in the private office," said Todd, beginning to fumble for a handkerchief. "To tell you the truth, Gwen,—I'd really like—if you don't mind, my dears,—to turn woman and have one good cry."

"Come on," said Gwendolen; "I'll cry with you. I am so mi-mi-miserable and hap-hap-happy, I just can't—" She broke off in tears.

"I'm in!" said Dodge, pulling out his handkerchief.

Laughing and crying together, with arms around one another, they went in at the tall gate and to the ambassador's little den. [pg 41]

In the big house, in the drawing-room, Mrs. Stunt and Madame Todd exchanged mild confidences and cooking recipes. The latter had refused for once to discuss the affairs either of Pierre or Madame Haganè.

And so the night came in.

CHAPTER THIRTY

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NIGHT in Japan, when the day has been all or partly clear, is a deepening mystery, a revelation of purple tones and velvet shadows. In the French Legation garden (designed originally for the delight of a feudal daimyo and afterward given as part of the French concession for official buildings) the soft blurred dusk concealed all but the vaguest suggestions of copse and path and hillock. A wanderer on the dew-drenched gravel might perceive about him, as by instinct, the beauty of line and mass. The smell of daphne and azalea flowers rose with pungent sweetness. Higher trees and mounds, set with rolling shrubs, rose against the sky-line and the stars like great crouching earth-clouds.

Pierre moved up and down the driveway just below the steps that led down from a balcony on the quiet west side of the house. Ignoring the doctor's orders, he had come a full hour before the appointed time. Ronsard, seeing his intention, had expostulated vehemently, using both language and gesticulation, but soon shrugged off the obligation with the reviving thought, "Only an hour more, and it will be over!"

So Pierre had walked at will. He drew in heavy breaths of the scented, humid air. He believed himself impervious now to further illness. He would not have listened or believed if one had told him that his present interlude of fictitious strength was like the shade of a upas-tree in a scorching desert. One cigarette after another was smoked and thrown at random among the shrubs, where each in turn lay like a malicious glow-worm, hissing and winking away an acrid spite. In the west a faint shining stirred the advent of the moon.

At ten minutes to eight o'clock Mr. Todd arrived. He was ushered at once, by order, into the small drawing-room where Ronsard sat. His face had new lines of struggle, and was very pale, but self-possession was evident in every gesture. His first act on reaching Ronsard was to draw out the paper, saying, "This, sir, has not left my body, or been touched by any hand but mine, or been referred to by any speech, since the moment, a few hours since, when I left you." [pg 41]

In his long, earnest explanation to Gwendolen and Dodge, Todd had, indeed, carefully refrained from letting them know that he was personal guardian of the document. It might have opened for them another blind trail of argument. During that agonizing interview he had thanked fate a hundred times for the part that Dodge had so opportunely been qualified to play. The clear judgment, intense sympathy, and clever resourcefulness of the young diplomat delighted him even in the midst of tragic exercise. It had taken the utmost skill of both men to overpower Gwendolen's first keen desire to go to her friend, to make the girl see that interference on her part had become impossible. He had left her half-fainting, though still insistent in her belief that God could not allow such a crime!

Ronsard rose as the guest entered. He, too, had gained a certain fatalistic calm. In reply to Todd's elaborate explanation, he had said simply, "Return the paper to its place, your Excellency. The farce will soon be over. Shall we not join our young imbecile in the garden?"

They paced together wide dimly lighted rooms, and emerged upon the uncovered western balcony. Pierre looked up and, wordless, continued his rapid, nervous strides.

"He'll kill himself, the fool," muttered Todd. "The mist piles in like thin cotton."

"It is too late even for his death to be of assistance," said Ronsard, with bitter animosity. His small eyes darted loathing after his young compatriot. He thrust pudgy hands deep into pockets

below the equator of his belt, and rocked to and fro on his heels. Suddenly the pent-up discomfort, the apprehension, the strain of the situation clutched him anew. "God!" he cried aloud, and shook himself until the fat trembled. "As you say, Monsieur, no man is worth all this, nor woman either, least of all that puling hind yonder! Only a great cause is worth it,—the service for one's native land. I have tried to think of France—of France only. My country is to be cheated. I can do nothing; yet still I wallow in this tepid slime! How has it come about? You will give Haganè the paper, if he brings the woman with him!" He broke off, and after a keen look into Todd's unresponsive face began to walk in short, broken steps up and down the stone flooring.

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His words had rung out clearly. Pierre must have heard each one; but if so, he made no sign. Pierre had now but one thing to think of,—his price, the woman that would soon be here.

Todd leaned against a corner pedestal, and Ronsard, after a moment, paused in his meaningless exercise, and stood again before his colleague. The two pairs of eyes met and fenced. Todd might have been made of wood. After a long glance Ronsard freed his right hand from its pocket and began pulling at the moist, red underlip. "You will of course, in any case, give up the paper at first appearance of Haganè and Madame?" His voice slid querulously upward with interrogation in the pause.

"Yes," said Todd, distinctly. "I conceive it to be my part to return the paper at that moment."

"Er—had we not better pause to see whether Madame tends to prove after all—recalcitrant?"

"The bargain said nothing of that. Pierre gets his price,—the person of Yuki, so they always worded it; Haganè gets the paper. It is simple enough. We don't need a lightning-calculator."

"Hark!" said Pierre, pausing, stricken, just beneath them. "Is it not the sound of—wheels?"

All became silent, alert, intent. The faint, low crackle and clatter of a kuruma on gravel, a vehicle slowly drawn, came apparently from the far end of the garden, just under the spot where the moon rose.

From the battlements of the white house beside them, the great pale house standing upright like an opened volume in the night, a queer flutter came, swart wings went beating against the stars, and a crow laughed aloud with raucous joy.

"A crow at night! It means, among these people, death!" said Ronsard.

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Pierre started violently, and dropped his last cigarette. "Damn the flying fiend!" he cursed aloud.

The crunching of wheels drew near. They moved with increasing sluggishness. Each click had a sound of protest. To Pierre's tortured hearing, all noises crawled backward.

By this the moon was in the tops of enoki, camphor, and tall camellia trees. Where its light touched curves of shelled and smoothly gravelled paths, the spaces were of snow.

Out from the great red pagoda of Shiba temple, not half a mile away, came the first stir, the throb, the murmur of a great bell struck tentatively by its swinging cedar beam, before receiving in full strength the initial stroke of eight. "One!" the great bronze pendant boomed. "Two!" came more slowly and on a higher note, sending swifter ripples to overtake the first scurrying elves of sound. "Three!" "Four!" It swung majestically until the last stroke, piling echoes deep, filled the whole shell of night with discontent, and sank, a dew of sound, on listening leaves.

With the first tone, the jinrikisha wheels had stopped. The great crow, shaken from his height, had fled. Pursued far off by melodious echoes, he flapped his wings and screamed. A cricket near the steps awoke, jarred from his winter sleep by vibrant summons. The needle of his shrill, incongruous song pierced to the listeners' hearts.

"Mother of God!" cried Pierre, smiting his clammy forehead, "how is it that I live at all?"

Around a curved hillock directly bordering a path, straight into unhindered light, came the white hat and stooping shoulders of a coolie. Behind him dragged the dark bulk of a covered vehicle. Pierre half fainted against the steps. "She has come alone—alone—" he cried in exultation. Regaining his feet he wheeled to the two men watching from the balcony. "Gentlemen," he cried with a gesture, "may I entreat you to leave,—for these first moments?"

The coolie came on like a heavy machine.

Ronsard, at Pierre's question, transferred his weight from one foot to the other, and then looked at Todd. The latter deliberately walked down the shallow steps and stood on the gravel

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beside Pierre. The white hat of the coolie fronted them like a silver shield. Pierre scowled upon the American, and gave a sound of anger.

"I'm sorry," said Todd, calmly. "But I promised to be present during just these first moments. Prince Haganè has my word."

"Prince Haganè!" echoed Pierre, with a hoarse laugh that was kin to the crow's. "Where is Prince Haganè? Backed out at the last, as I thought he would—like the coward and bully that he is! There has no Haganè come, don't you see? Only Yuki—my darling—my poor little love. I see her white dress yonder!"

The coolie straightened himself, flung the wide hat sideways with a single fierce sweep of arm, and turned to the wondering observers the set, livid face and burning eyes of Haganè.

"Prince Haganè is here," he said quietly, and tried to smile.

His peasant hat, skimming along the gravel, touched now and again with a hissing sound the surface of small stones. At length in a small patch of moonlight it came to rest, and lay rocking slightly, and gaping upward like a mendicant's bowl.

Pierre cowered. Ronsard nearly fell. "Prince Haganè in coolie's garb! What new horror is this?"

"Suppose we call it—delicacy," suggested Haganè. "Could any secrecy be too great for such a meeting?"

Todd narrowed his lids. Haganè kept a hand close upon one shaft of the little vehicle, conserving the upright posture. The black hood, bent far over to the front, completely concealed the occupant; but the dazzling white of a gown with pale embroideries, and the faint odor of flowers and of sandalwood now stealing upon the night air, should, in any case, have betrayed her sex.

"Yuki—Yuki, you have really come!" cried Pierre, and would have rushed to her but for the obstruction of Haganè's arm.

"First, the paper," said Haganè.

Todd jerked out the document. Ronsard held him.

"Wait; there is something damnable in that still white thing there in the rickshaw. Wait and see whether it is really Madame la Princesse, or a substitute."

Haganè stared one moment upon the speaker with lips that writhed backward, showing teeth like a baited boar. "His Excellency is always prudent. See, gentlemen, for yourselves, that I have brought my wife. Mr. Todd, have the document ready!"

With an almost imperceptible motion Haganè slipped from its nail the black, taut twine that held the lowered hood. It rattled back with the noise of the spokes of a giant fan. Yuki sat upright,—the full moon just behind her,—smiling. The little hands were clasped tightly in her lap. The coils of her orchid hair had the glint and sheen of the crow's wing.

"It is Yuki,—certainement!" screamed Pierre, in ecstasy.

"Hold back that paper!" roared Ronsard.

Todd stood on tiptoe. One long thin arm went up like the derrick of a dredging-machine. His hand held something square and white with a black blotch on it. The arm lowered. Haganè reached up, took the paper, and thrust it deep into the breast of his coolie robe.

"The paper—" groaned Ronsard; "it is gone forever!"

"But Yuki," cried Pierre, "has come to be mine forever!"

"One moment, gentlemen," said Haganè, again restraining Pierre. "You were all present at the agreement between Monsieur Le Beau and me. The paper is now regained, and here is its price; here is Onda Yuki-ko." He placed the shafts of the little vehicle on the lowest stair, and stepped out sheer upon the walk. Pierre, like an animal released, sprang to Yuki, knelt by her, caught her hands, and began whispering words of love.

Now for the first time Todd groaned aloud, and walked to a little distance. Ronsard followed him. But the Japanese stood immovable, his eyes on Yuki's face.

"My beloved, my beloved,—I know now that I have not believed in this ecstasy! But you are here! Come, dear one, you must be chilled in the night air. How quiet you are and pale! It must be the moonlight. And your little hands are cold! Why do you not speak, love! Are you trying to frighten me? This is not the time for dainty trickery! Speak, for God's sake! I have been so long on the rack my very soul is sore! Why do you smile so, and never change? Your cheek is colder than your hands.—O God, a thought is coming that will turn me, too, into ice! Yuki, Yuki, what strange thing is this rooted in your heart,—what grim hilt with twisted dragons? I see the crest of the Haganè clan! Yuki—Yuki—"

"She wishes the dagger not removed, Monsieur. It keeps her sacrificial robes—immaculate." Haganè spoke like a machine.

Pierre, the other side of Yuki, rose to his feet. His eyeballs swelled and rolled in the moonlight, giving him a look of frenzy. "Who is that that speaks to me? Has night a voice? What spirit hides behind that mask?"

"Death," said Haganè, calmly.

Pierre writhed beside the vehicle, and then became very still. The other listeners turned, expecting an outburst of maniacal grief,—perhaps a murderous assault on Haganè. Pierre's composure was more terrible than any speech. He smoothed one of Yuki's hands, and, after a pause, began speaking directly to her.

"So this has been his plan, dear? I might have guessed. He knew he was to kill you. Oh, the deed suited him! He called me a thief; but what has he not stolen? Wait for me somewhere, darling,—I cannot say just where it will be; but after—I will meet you. If sickness does not free me, I myself will loose this tortured soul and find you."

"She died by her own hand. That dagger was already in her heart as you, with the stolen paper, left my room."

"Oh, he is trying to hide,—to shield himself behind you, poor little one!" said Pierre to the dead woman.

A shadow on the nearest hillock moved. Todd went nearer to examine it, but could see no living thing.

"Time presses," said Haganè, speaking always in the same dull, hopeless way. "Our bargain was clearly stated. Shall I now leave with you the body, Monsieur Le Beau, or shall I retrace my steps as I came, giving honorable burial to the Princess Haganè?"

"Le Beau, you cannot hesitate at such a question," cried Todd.

"Pierre, Pierre, in the name of France, compromise us no further! You have done harm enough. Let the poor sacrifice go in peace!"

Pierre caught Yuki to him, his arm about her shoulder, her glossy hair, with the white flowers, strained against his heart. Like a trapped beast he defied them all.

"No, I'll not give her up. You are all false,—all have betrayed me. If I am to have nothing else, I keep at least the frail shell of what she was! Oh, I shall kiss—kiss—kiss—her into life, or myself into her cold, white death. Yes, go, you toad of Hell!" he screamed toward Haganè. "Leave my price with me."

"Though dead, she still has reputation—family honor," Haganè said.

Pierre threw back his head for a derisive laugh. Just then a strange thing happened. From the hillock nearby a crouching shrub seemed to detach itself and spring. It was a man,—the old samurai Onda. Haganè had told him to be there. Before interposition could be made, he had thrown himself on Pierre, taken Yuki from his arms, thrown her back in the kuruma, and stood in an attitude of menace between them. "Keep your hands from my daughter! Keep your devil's hands from the Princess Haganè!"

"Shall we interfere?" whispered Todd to Haganè.

"No, I can do all," he said. Then to Onda, "Keep back, old friend. It is his right,—the price that we have paid."

"Master, Master," cried the kerai, almost sobbing in his excitement, "let me slay him—let me slay all three! I will die the self-death, or be hanged, with equal satisfaction. Only let me slay!"

"These others are just men, and my friends," said Haganè gravely. "The young madman yonder is protected by my word. We must think, too, of Nippon."

Old Onda's breathing rasped the silence.

"Monsieur Le Beau," said Haganè again, "you are fully determined to retain the body—and give her name to public defamation?"

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"What else is there for me, devil?"

"That you have been her lover,—that you have so deeply injured me,—is that not enough to gloat over?"

For an instant Pierre stared. The meaning of the words came to him with a relish. Haganè really believed this thing; then of course he suffered! Very good! A look of malignant triumph grew in Pierre's face. Haganè drank the bitterness with his eyes. Here, at last, thought Pierre, was the undipped heel, the pervious crown. Yuki's body sagged an inch. Pierre stooped to it. Again she was in his arms, and he devoured, with despairing looks, the small, dead face.

Haganè, by a fierce gesture, commanded Onda to be still. Todd felt his heart stop, then rise slowly to his throat, and Ronsard, shivering, gripped the American's arm. The moon sailed full into a cloudless sky. Beneath it the great tragedy lay bare.

The trend of Pierre's thoughts at this moment he could never afterward recall. His flesh felt as though it melted from him. His brain stirred and pulled at possibilities before unfelt. Voices not of earth said strange things which he almost understood. Yuki's dead smile changed. He saw her lips quiver. Her white face grew to one still prayer. Something like a cooling fluid went into his hot and empty veins. He felt strong again and noble. He regarded Yuki's accuser with a new look.

"You lie in saying that thing, Haganè. Is it not enough that you have used, and then slain her, that you now traduce her name? No, you dare not resent my words, coward, liar, slanderer! What is the theft of a paper compared to this? For Yuki's sake, I tell you that no flower hidden in green leaves, no girl-child at its mother's breast, no flake of snow, new-fallen, is purer than this woman. Yes, grin now and tremble!"

He went swiftly to the stricken man, and dealt him a blow upon the lips.

With gasps of horror the others rushed in. Haganè caught Pierre to his side, and fought off the frenzied Onda. "Back, all of you, stand off, I say!" he thundered. "The man gives me life. Let him strike. Yes, yes," he cried to Pierre, all the hauteur and the terrible bronze composure melted in this new fierce joy; "tear my eyes from their sockets, my tongue from its base,—only repeat that she is pure! How could I know? She let me think it,—your boasts, the broken hairpin! Did she not give you the pledge of the hairpin?"

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"I took it myself," said Pierre, "and would not give it back, though she pleaded. How could I guess the gross sentiment that is attached to the silly business by such minds as yours? She was pure, I say; give me her body and let me go!"

Haganè followed him to the kuruma. He stretched out both hands, now as one entreating mercy. "Poor boy, bound with me on the wheel of fate, listen just a little, if you can command your strength. She shielded you. Then, with her life, she rebought the paper. When you had offered to give it back, if I would consent to the restitution of her wifehood, I asked her if she was worthy to return, and in her conscious innocence, she gave the answer, 'No.' She thought only of the unworthiness of weakness—she whose soul, diluted into eternity, might stock a Christian heaven. In her self-death, she deliberately let me believe her evil, that her atonement might have this added bitterness. Also she may have feared that, being undeceived, I might falter in my promise not to restrain her from expiation. She knew of my love, and we have pledged ourselves to reunion and joint service after death. You cannot understand these things, Monsieur."

"No!" said Pierre, in bewilderment, putting his hand to his forehead, "I cannot understand, of course; she was always saying that. I cannot understand, but something whispers—"

"Monsieur," cried Haganè, "I am an older, graver man. I have suffered as I think you cannot suffer. Give me back the boon of her body!"

Pierre blinked and wavered in the path. These sudden shifting currents of purpose dazed him. The strain was tightening again, and he felt the premonitory breath of fever. He grasped outward into the air. He looked at Yuki, as if for the first time, and moved dumb lips.

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"You believed this of your wife, yet forgave—helped—loved her—You look forward to having her as your wife in a coming re-birth?" asked Todd, wondering.

"Had it been true, it was but sin of the flesh. By death and expiation, she would have cleansed it. The soul would have risen, free."

"Mon Dieu, what people!" gasped Ronsard. "There stands the man Onda, scowling at us all,—and not even resenting, from Haganè, his only daughter's death."

"Onda will sacrifice to the Gods in gratitude when he knows the whole," said Haganè.

Pierre was trying to speak. He vacillated, soul and body, between the dead woman and her husband. "Do not refuse me," murmured Haganè, stepping nearer.

Pierre did not shrink. Instead, he, too, went near, as if fascinated. He cleared his throat, pushed back the damp hair from his girlish forehead, and smiled up at the dark, eager face. "Haganè is a great man," he said, tapping the other's arm. "Oh, he is a terrible man! I can refuse him nothing. Yuki says that the Gods of this land speak with him. I believe it. One is standing just behind him now; that is a terrible God, too. He looks like Haganè. He sits like a white flint in a ball of fire. On his arms are the coils of rope that bind the passions; in his right hand is the wheel of fate. No, I will not refuse. Old God must have flowers on his altar. Take white flower, old War God. There she is,—my love—my darling. If only she would not smile!"

Haganè caught the boy as he fell, transferring the burden quickly to Ronsard's outstretched arms. He gazed then anew at the face of his wife.

"Yuki," he said, as if to her listening spirit, "you are soul of my soul through ten thousand lives. I let you die. It was karma. A flower! A flower! Alas, that a flower should be stung by immortality!"

"Get her away, your Highness, before we call the servants and a doctor for Le Beau," whispered Todd, after an agonizing interval. Haganè rose from his knees.

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"Yes, little Yuki must go with me," he muttered; "I will take her at once, your Excellency." He went toward the coolie hat and stooped. Onda was before him.

"It is not seemly, Lord, for you to bear so foul a burden. I will wear the hat, and I pray you take these shoes of mine, giving me the straw sandals."

Haganè obeyed passively, his eyes fixed always on Yuki's moonlit face. Now and again he felt in the bosom of his robe for the paper.

"Loosen the robe from your girdle, Master," pleaded the kerai.

Haganè did so, releasing the caught-up ends. The long, dark garment, though of cotton, restored to him the height and dignity of his usual presence.

"Shall I draw the hood of the kuruma?" asked Onda.

"Yes, cover her face,—her small white face; the very night may weep and falter at that smile."

Onda tucked up his robe, put on the wide hat and the straw sandals, placed himself between the shafts, and started along the driveway.

Haganè, moving always slowly, abstractedly, folded his arms, bowed his head, and followed in the attitude of a mourner immediately behind the covered vehicle.

"Take my burden for a moment," pleaded Ronsard, when the sound of wheels had quite died away. "I can support—no longer. Let me summon aid. Mon Dieu! this night has made of me an old man."

"It has made of me a prophet," said Todd, "for I have met Immortals face to face."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

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THE sumptuous obsequies of the young Princess Haganè, become so suddenly and so securely a leading figure in Tokio's official life; her mysterious death (heart failure, the obliging papers called it); Haganè's immediate departure for the seat of war; Pierre Le Beau's re-capture and long,

desperate illness (with relapses brought on by further crafty flights, terminating always in a certain hillside grave),—these events co-existent, co-related, formed, inevitably, dazzling bits of speculation pieceable together into various strange patterns.

Outwardly the tragedy was as free from suspicion as any such shocking occurrence well could be. The funeral, in deference to Yuki's Christian conversion, was held in the little American Episcopal chapel in Tsukijii, Tokio; the American Bishop, assisted by members of the native clergy, conducting the ceremony in Japanese. Haganè, ponderous, brooding, and self-contained, had walked immediately behind the flower-laden burden. The scowling Tetsujo, with Iriya, followed him. Suzumè was there, alone, for she had refused the petition of Maru San. Next to the family came Gwendolen, shivering, slender, wound in crêpe, on the arm of Mr. Dodge. Behind her walked Cyrus Todd and Mrs. Todd, both in mourning.

The strained decorum of the crowded congregation was threatened twice; first, when old Suzumè, bearing a sprig of the mystic mochi tree, tottered up the aisle, and began praying aloud to the black thing into which her nursling had been nailed; and later, just after the words of the Bishop, "I am the Resurrection and the Life," when Gwendolen fainted quietly away.

After the prescribed nine days of gossip and conjecture, ill-natured ones turned their eyes to the Todds, and chiefly to Gwendolen. The deep withdrawal of the two ladies from the social world of Tokio, the mourning garments worn by them, were interpreted by some observers as mere stinginess, an excuse to abstain from lavish Legation hospitality; but by a larger number as "bids" for Japanese popularity. Also many of the fair sex among European Legations declared (Mon Dieu! it was obvious!) that Gwendolen had seized upon this dank method for the securing of Dodge,—the young American attaché known to be so madly in love with Carmen Gil y Nierstra. Gwendolen's ever-growing intimacy with Iriya Onda, and the pathetic content shown by the elder woman in the company of her dead child's closest friend, were charged to the columns of the former category. "The Hawk's Eye" expatiated upon these congenial themes. The Misses Stunt gave an afternoon tea with all of the catering done in Yokohama.

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Later on, when cherry-blossoms covered the whole land in a perfumed glory, Mrs. Todd answered timidly by a bunch of artificial violets on her spring bonnet. Gwendolen still kept to simple black, and it was averred that she did so knowing how marvellously it contrasted with the pearly tints of her flesh and the nervous gold tendrils of her hair. Never had Gwendolen been more beautiful nor, in a strange, deep, half-comprehending way, more tranquilly happy. The light of heroism had come too near ever quite to fade. Love, also, had come, and on the very wings of despair. Yet, behind these facts, was a something unspeakable, precious, vague,—a something apprehended by Dodge also. Even as the two happy ones stood together with eyes looking level toward vistas of almost certain human joy, each felt that compared with the passion of the two immortals, now gone from their lives, this rapture was like the glad hearts of children. Often they spoke of Yuki and her husband. "Oh, but they knew that they were to meet," Gwendolen had cried again and again. "Yuki is with him now,—and after this war, after his last duty to his country and to his Emperor,—they will find each other!"

Of poor Pierre, after his departure for France accompanied by Count Ronsard, none of the Todd household ever spoke. Once, some months after the return of the latter to Tokio, Mrs. Todd, in a hushed whisper, as if she were guilty of an indiscretion, asked a single question. The answer was as brief and furtive. In a certain sense it relieved the conscience of the interlocutrix, while it shadowed her complacency. Neither question nor answer was ever retailed to Gwendolen.

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But all this came much later. The spring immediately following Yuki's death went by in a shimmer of winds, scurrying clouds, and whirling petals. Summer smiled her deeper green in rice-fields under the glint and blur of rain. Then, like a stately deity for whose feet the shining carpet had been spread, a golden autumn came.

On the hills vermilion maples burned, each leaf so deeply dyed that its shadow on the sand was red. Hedges of dodan ruled fiery angles over the green lines that summer had drawn. Small carts, man-pulled, with pots of sunny, stiff chrysanthemums, crawled in by dewy morning lanes toward the focus of the capital. Harvesting of grain began, and, presiding over it, the deity of a large, slow moon. In suburban districts the people held festivals and made offerings of tea, vegetables, and money to Inari Sama and her two lean fox-spirits, for the slaying of rice-insects, demanded by the summer's agricultural toil.

Meantime war had raged on land and sea. The slopes of Port Arthur had been drenched already in insufficient blood. Great battles on the Yalu, epoch-making in enormity and heroism, had been not quite great enough. The Russians, always strongly fortified, numbering always more than the army of their opponents, were able to keep decisive ruin for themselves at bay. The Japanese people did not know a wavering strand of faith. They believed always in their ultimate victory. Each hero, checked in his duty by Russian steel, became on the instant a flaming spirit of war. The mangled body might be tucked away in Manchurian clay, or sent, as a sacred relic, to the beloved homeland; but the freed spirit hung about its brethren, and fought with invincible weapons for the common cause. The women of Japan worked indefatigably. Few lamentations rose from them. They would have considered tears disloyal. The Emperor, behind his gray moat-walls,—half man, half God to them,—sent down his heart among the people. His was the suffering and the loss,—and victory, when it came, was to be his.

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Late in October, at the American Legation, the doors once more stood wide. Pots of chrysanthemums in full bloom crowded near the entrance, and climbed, in groups of two and three, the edges of the stone steps, as if leading a golden invitation. Gwendolen, that morning, standing among them, had dwelt in thought upon another time, scarcely a year past, when she and Yuki had laughed together among such shaggy blooms, when their hands had been tintured by the stems of them and the air of long reception-rooms flooded with the medicinal fragrance. She did not weep, only stretched her arms outward, whispering, "Yuki, Yuki,—I know you are with him; but just this one day,—my wedding-day,—come back to me!"

The marriage ceremony was to take place in the drawing-room. After a luncheon to a score or more of intimate friends, the young couple were to go for a quiet sojourn to Nara. This was the first occasion since Yuki's death that the American girl had worn a color. At the appointed hour she stood within the green-hung window recess like an Easter lily, all white and gold,—a broad white cloth hat, touched with knots of amber. The silent little wedding company drew close. The Bishop cleared his throat professionally. One heard the words, "Dearly Beloved" before he uttered them. At that moment, a bird, attracted maybe by the tall white flower within, flew straight against the pane, and beat against it with fluttering wings. Gwendolen looked up quickly. Her lips moved. "Yuki! Yuki! is it you?" she was saying. Dodge pressed tightly the arm within his own.

In spite of strong efforts on the part of Mr. and Mrs. Todd to be at ease, a vague mist of sadness floated in the wide rooms.

"There's something awfully doleful about things here," confided a guest to the ubiquitous Mrs. Stunt.

"Oh, it's that Haganè woman who died—or was murdered in her bed—last spring. The Legation has been about as cheerful as a morgue ever since. Very inconsiderate to us Americans, I take it!"

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Mr. Todd saw the faces of the whisperers, and could guess the trend of their words. He shook himself together, and swore that in some way he would manage to dispel the gathering gloom. Now he rushed from one guest to another, his dry wit and quaint remarks soon attracting general attention. Dodge understood, and seconded him with zest. Mrs. Todd stopped the sniffing she had just begun, and produced a diluted smile; the company, catching the infection, tumbled, one over the heels of another, in the race for a precarious joy. The rooms began to echo laughter,—servants smiled as they stole about. A twig of mistletoe, sent all the way from North Carolina, was discovered hanging from the tongue of the floral bell. Kissing of the bride was attempted, and the time-worn jests, pertinent to the occasion, indulged in up to the point of friction.

It was at last a company of real wedding guests that took places at the table. Japanese flower symbols of wedded bliss touched elbows with still American vases jammed thick with stemless flowers. The favors were chrysanthemums in enamel, gold, and topaz. Todd saw that the champagne was not delayed. He knew the potency to scatter thought sent up by those springing globules of mirth. "Fill,—all!" he cried, standing, "a toast, a toast to the bride!"

Laughing faces turned as one toward Gwendolen, enthroned in a great teakwood chair. She flushed to a rose, under the big hat, but murmured, so that her words could be heard,—"I accept, and drink with you,—against precedent!"

As the others lifted brittle stems, she, emptying swiftly the sunny fluid, poured a little water into her glass. The drinking of water as a pledge is used between Japanese as a token of death, of love, in death and beyond it. Dodge, his bright eyes swimming in tenderness, did as she had done.

While the company drained the conventional felicity,—this young couple, in silence, unnoticed by those who crowded most closely, drank the pledge of love and loyalty to Yuki's freed spirit. Had it been possible for any face to be more beautiful than Gwendolen's, she—on catching sight of her husband as the water touched his lips—now outrivalled herself.

Todd had seen but could not join them. He was self-constituted master of ceremonies. "Next, my new son, Mr. Dodge!" he cried aloud.

"Hear! hear!" clamored the company.

"And next," said Todd, "to that great man, the Japanese Emperor!"

"The Emperor, the Emperor!" ejaculated Dodge, with such vehemence that the assembly had to join or be deafened. "Banzai Nippon!" roared Dodge. "Banzai Nippon!" vociferated Todd.

"Banzai Nippon!" the servants echoed in excited underbreaths as they hurried back to pantry and kitchen.

"Banzai Nippon!" cried the waiting betto and the kuruma men outside, at first hint of the call.

"Banthai Nip-pon!" lisped the the cook's baby, who sat well under the kitchen-table to escape being trod upon, and scraped out a foreign cake-bowl with a single chopstick.

But Yuki—a snowflake fallen on the windy slope of Aoyama—slept on, smiling, with Haganè's dagger in her heart; and on a rocky promontory across from the impregnable fortress of Liau Tung, a grim, quiet warrior sat alone, with field-glasses dangling limply from his hands, and eyes that saw only a white, white face upturned to his, and lips that murmured, "I know you now, my husband,—and shall wait! Banzai Nippon!" while the cold steel crept nearer to a warm and shrinking heart.

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Transcriber Note:

Throughout the dialogues, there were words used to mimic accents of the speakers. Those words were retained as-is.

The illustrations have been moved so that they do not break up paragraphs and so that they are next to the text they illustrate.

Errors in punctuations and inconsistent hyphenation were not corrected unless otherwise noted.

On page 6, "unforgettable" was replaced with "unforgettable".

On page 40, a double quotation mark was replaced with a single quotation mark after "Call me thine own!".

On page 96, a period was added after "or with stone".

On page 164, "fusilades" was replaced with "fusillades".

On page 269, "Here she patted" was replaced with "here she patted".

On page 274, a quotation mark was added after "allure thee!"

On page 284, "unforgettable" was replaced with "unforgettable".

On page 288, a period was added after "Mrs".

On page 291, "nationalties" was replaced with "nationalities".

On page 301, "English" was replaced with "English".

On page 393, a single quotation mark after "homage!" was replaced with a double quotation mark.

On page 407, "Hagane" was replaced with "Haganè".

On page 421, "near by" was replaced with "nearby".

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BREATH OF THE GODS ***

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