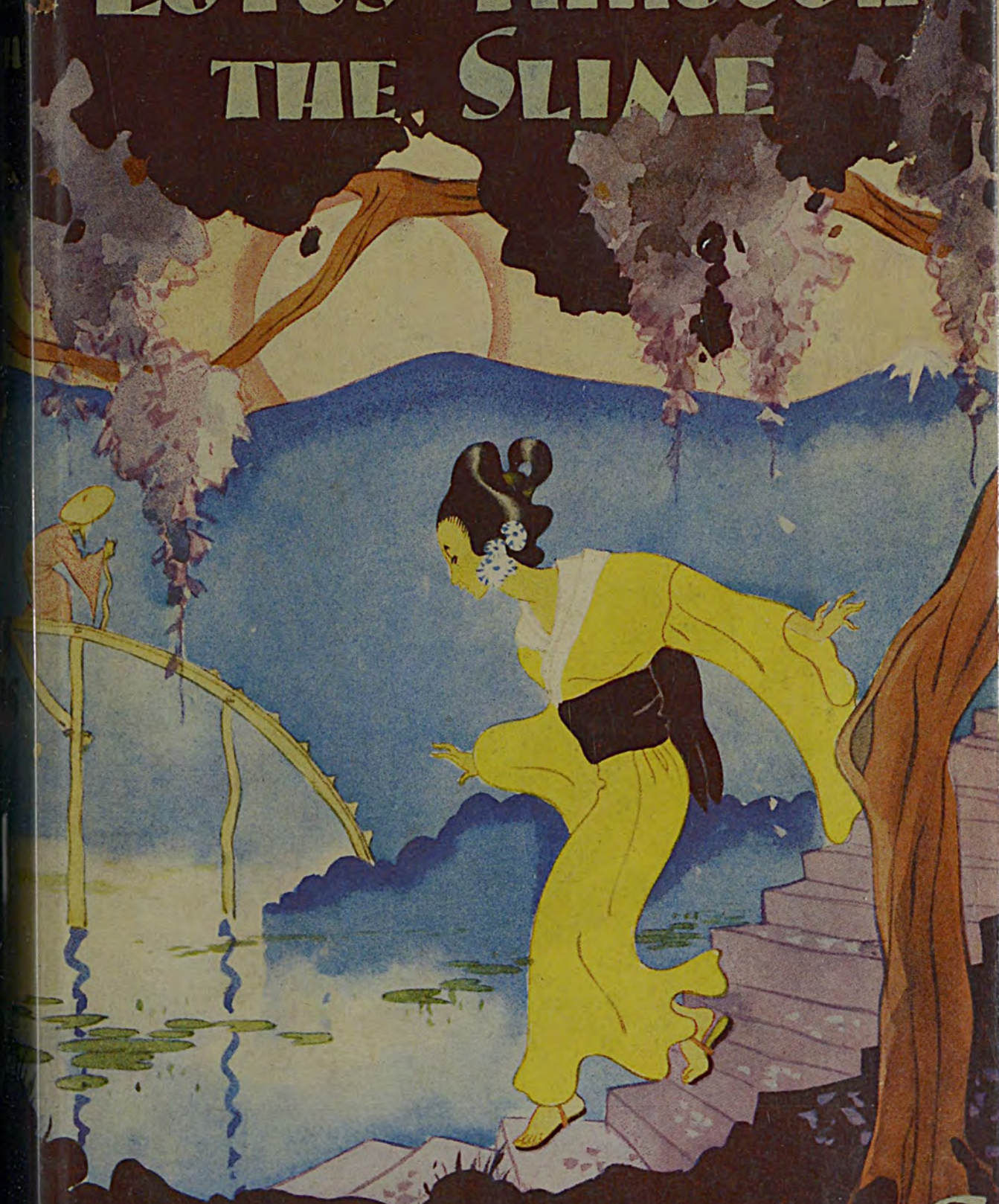


LOTUS THROUGH THE SLIME



OMORI HARRIS

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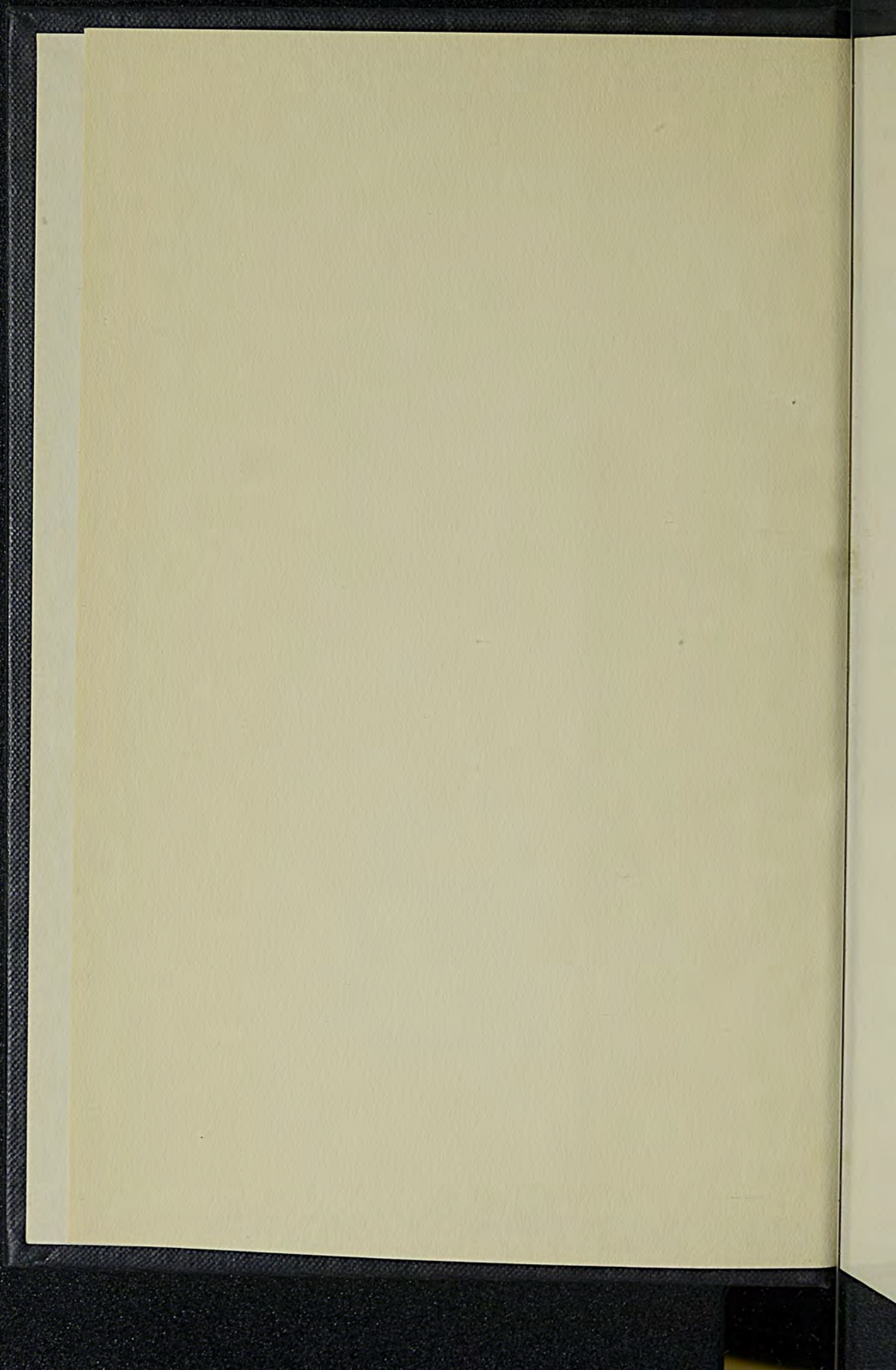
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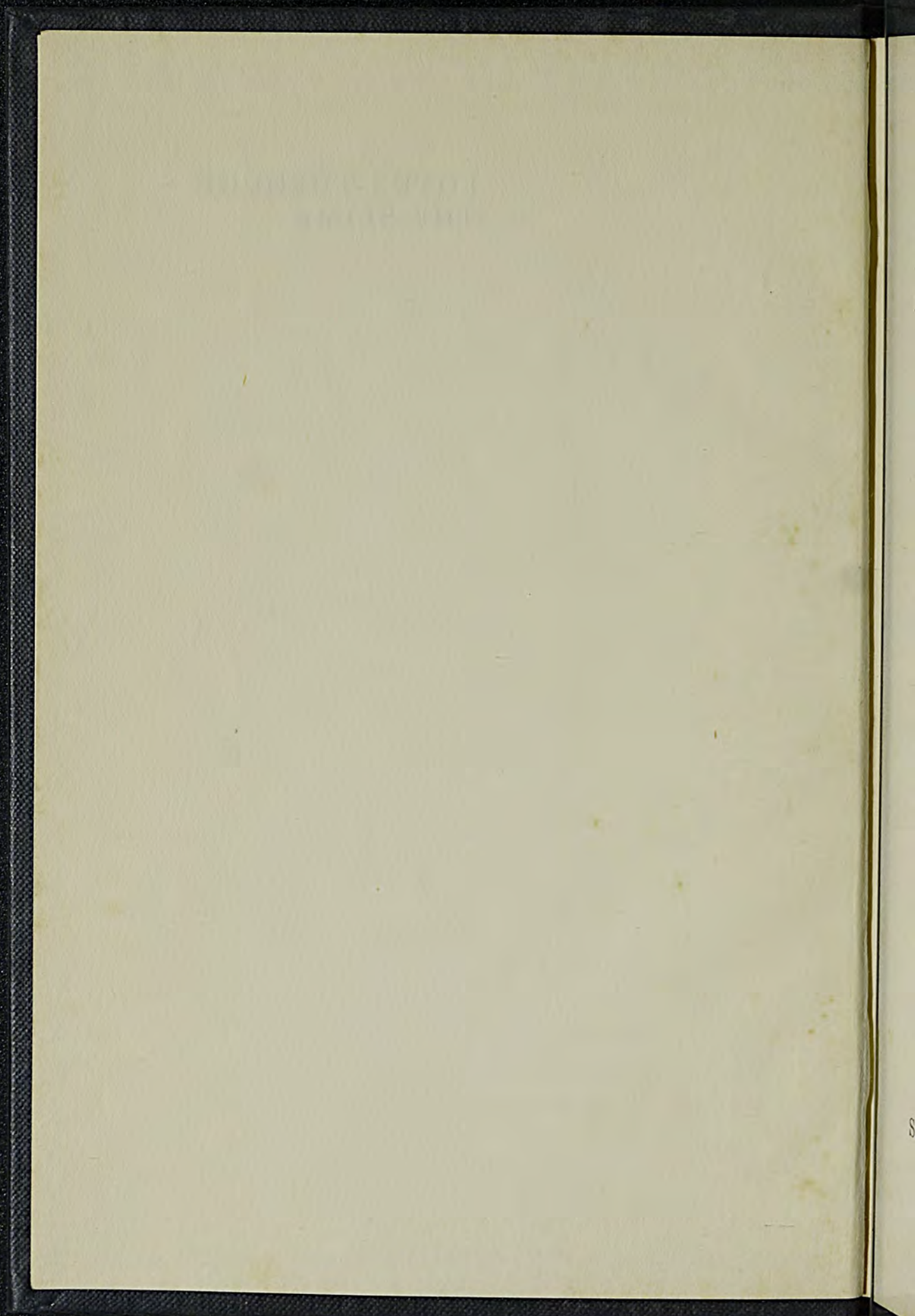
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LOTUS THROUGH
THE SLIME



OMORI HARRIS

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THE SLIME

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LOTUS THROUGH THE SLIME

CHAPTER I

AMONG THE GOLDEN CARP

FUJIYÉ went up into the dark temple courtyard.

At the top of the steep flight of worn granite steps, worn by generations of clattering clogs, clogs that had clattered into the stillness of long-past centuries, an oil lamp threw a flickering light downwards.

Among the dark cedars the night wind souged continually, rising and falling like an echo of distant surf—the surf that whitened, a thin, ragged line beneath a drifting moon, in the Bay far below. Somewhere a drum beat tunelessly in a dull monotone and at intervals, as though the drowsy drummer awoke and fell asleep by turns over his task. The air was damp, not freshly, but with the mouldering damp of dead leaves and of the graveyard beyond.

Across the court the massive doors of the main building, heavily studded with nails and surmounted with grotesque carvings, were shut.

Everything was quite still. Only the stone foxes that guarded the entrance writhed and grinned in the flickering light.

June nights are warm in eastern Japan, but a little before dawn there comes a chilliness that seems to

draw out the perfume of flowers, even of those that by day are odourless: then little wreaths of mist dance elf-like along ebbing beaches, and the first complaining call of shore-birds is heard.

To the left of the terrace, by a pond whose sluggish waters lisped at times as the breeze rippled over them, rose a great wistaria, its branches twining over wide bamboo trellis-work; the smell of a few late blossoms, just noticeable, reached Fujiyé through the darkness as she sat resting after her climb.

She walked over to the pond and fingered the long tassels, breathing in the faint scent of her namesake-flower: for Fuji means wistaria. Among the water-weeds the big carp made a sipping sound as they came to the top.

Just returned from school life in Tokyo across the Bay, the girl had come up here to watch the sunrise and to think.

Down below by the shore her father still slept in his lonely house, though his fishing-boats had put out to sea an hour or so before.

A streak of pink warmed the distant sky, and under the cedars the darkness thinned. The pond outlined itself in silvery grey. Darkness clung still to its banks, clumps of leaves shadowed the surface here and there, and near one of them a patch that had been black showed gradually crimson.

It caught the girl's eye; lotus buds do not open in early June, and no lotus ever flaunted so bright a red. Fujiyé walked quickly along the bank towards it. The first ray of the sun, glinting from the square glass of a lantern on a post, lit up the patch. Half-resting on a broad leaf, with pale fingers limply

stretched, was a little cheaply-jewelled hand; for the patch was the lining of a woman's sleeve.

Ninety-nine girls out of a hundred, on realizing this, would probably have screamed—possibly have run down to the village street for comfort and someone to share the horror. Fujiyé gasped a little, felt, struggled against, and conquered a feeling of faintness, and looked round for something with which she might tow the body to the shore, though the utter stillness and clearness of the brown water showed that life must have bubbled itself away long before.

She wrenched a stout bamboo from the trellis. It just reached the sleeve. By a deft twist or two of the pole she entangled the drapery, and slowly drew the body in.

A sudden splash and spatter of water almost threw her off her balance, but it was only a patriarchal carp, surprised from his reverie under the floating sleeve.

Now the body was under the bank. Fujiyé threw back her own loose gown from her shoulder and bent down, but to draw up that oozy, dripping, weed-entangled thing taxed all her muscles.

The long hair soaked her feet.

Carefully she laid it on the mossy shingle, face upwards, among the fading iris blossoms: irises always grow by temple ponds. She looked at the face, decked with ribbons of weeds.

It was a face that she knew: that she knew—in spite of that rigid, unearthly stare, that elfish look of something a little less than human that comes to clay when the spirit has faded out of it.

Now indeed Fujiyé sank down with a startled, gasping cry, and covered her own face with her hands, while every nerve tingled from the shock. A girl—a girl of her own age or a little older. Those glassy, blurred eyes had once gleamed mischievously into hers across the dormitory dining-table, or over school-books in the class-room.

Yes—Teru-ko had been her name: had been—for can a corpse have a name?

Her people lived in Fujiyé's own village, Hojima, in Boshu Province, the village from whose busy kitchens the sounds of early-morning life were now rising up to the grey temple among the cedars on the hill.

Together, a few years before, they had left the village, crossed the Bay, and entered school. For a time they had been chums. Then Teru-ko had taken up with a girl a year her senior, rather pretty, rather fast, rather well-to-do. They had gone in for music a good deal, and had made the acquaintance of some young men, students of the Uyeno Conservatoire. Teru-ko had dropped out of Fujiyé's circle, which was a studious one.

Flirtations in this part of the world are rarer, but when started go further than is common in the West. Presently a scandal broke out—Fujiyé never quite learnt the details—and the two other girls left the school. But they did not return to their homes.

And now poor Teru had returned. Her parents were old-fashioned folk, of good blood for farmers, very strict. Perhaps the girl had gone to them in her distress and been cast out, or perhaps she had only looked forlornly at the familiar homestead

across the barrier of her weakness and folly, and then come up here, to make an end in the pool.

Glancing at that inert shape, its contours defined, crude, naked, by the clinging wet kimono of thin cotton, Fujiyé read all too clearly the crisis that had arisen in her former schoolmate's life, and, sympathy being denied, had so brusquely ended it.

But why in this pool? Had she not all the interminable beaches of the sea to choose from? There she might have slipped away, spirit and body, from the stony, bruising world and memory of men.

The momentary shock of discovery past, Fujiyé mused pitifully while wakening sparrows chirped and the slow light broadened downwards through the cedars. That gay and thoughtless maid—this leaf-covered pool close-shadowed amid lichenous trunks and pillars, where only the fat carp made ripples! Had such defeat come to herself—almost unimaginable thought to that ardent, confident young soul—how freely would she have flung herself into the clear blue turbulence of the taintless waves, dissolving self in purity, not choking it among tangling stems and floating scum! Poor Teru-ko—her struggle with life had been brief. Was life as cruel to all—except to those who only cared to vegetate at home?

She turned the body on to its side, and threw over it the wrap that she had picked up on leaving her house.

Then a noiseless grey shadow detached itself from the gloom of the cedars, and a priest came toward her, an old man whose shaven pate gleamed curiously in the shifting light that trickled through the branches.

Fujiyé rose, walked a few trembling steps to meet him, and pointed wordlessly to the corpse. He looked down in the dead face and passed his hand over the cold body—then turned to the weeping girl, in whom emotion now at length found vent.

"How did it happen? But you know nothing, I suppose?" he asked gently.

She clenched her small hands, as though to crush emotion, and her voice, faint at first, grew firmer.

"No—nothing. She was in the water. I came up here in the darkness to see the sunrise—only yesterday, yesterday evening, I came back home from Tokyo—and when it was light I found—this."

"It was in there—and you pulled it from the water? Poor child, she must have been dead some hours. Yes; I heard a splash just after midnight, but thought it was the carp. If I had gone out then! And yet, perhaps, do we——"

The old man, his fleshy chin sunk on his breast, his wise old eyes brooding over the scummy water, murmured half to himself; then, turning to the girl he asked, "She was at school with you, was she not? I remember her—she used to come with her mother to the festivals—such a little, simple thing, like a green lotus bud. Why did she do this—do you know?"

"I think—she had some trouble: she left school over a year ago."

"A foreign Christian school, was it not? Ah, you young girls, you wander away from the old paths, so eager for new ways and thoughts. The old

faiths are worn out, only good enough for your fathers. The world seems very bright, but you don't see the dangers. Poor Teru—how her parents will grieve! And you—have you troubles too? You have come as far as the temple—now come to the priest."

As Fujiyé looked out over the Bay a flock of purple pigeons swept down from the broad eaves, fluttered around them, and settled on the ground near by. Then a childish treble voice broke the morning stillness, and a little girl clambered up the steps, singing as she came:

"Pigeons, coo—coo,
Pigeons, coo—coo,
Flying from the temple roof,
Coo—coo, come and feed."

Little brown-face, fat as butter and gaudy in cheap colours, rolled over the top step, and gave a small shriek of glad surprise at seeing Fujiyé. The elder girl went and took her hand.

"Come, Hana-chan, the priest is busy this morning; come down again with me," and she drew the child away.

"Oh, Fuji San, I'm so glad you've come back. Are you going to stay here always now?—and get married? You know my sister got married two—no, three weeks ago. It was *such* fun! Oh, *do* tell me about Tokyo. Have they many motor-cars? A motor-car came through here last month—it made such a smell! I never saw one before; all the chickens were scared out of their lives: I did laugh to see them jump."

The child's babble echoed among the black cedars, and the sunshine brightened. Fujiyé looked back at a sudden thought.

"Must I tell them——?" she hesitated. "Or——"

"No, no, my child," said the old man. "Go your way into the sunshine. I will do what must be done for that poor shell. Her people—yes, I will send a messenger. Do not grieve too much: perhaps she has worked out some Karma, and is freer now."

Hand-in-hand, small maiden and tall trotted down the long flights of stone steps, past the Shinto shrine in front of which the carved foxes still grinned with sharp, malicious eyes, though motionless now in the calm light of morning. Shinto and Buddhism, though rival religions through the centuries, are tolerant, even hospitable, towards each other. They have still much to learn from the West.

At the bottom of the temple steps a grassy path brought them out into the road that runs along the beach. From far and nearer came the cheerful sounds of morning—men singing at the wharf by the little steamboat office, the chatter of children passing on their way to early school, and the grating swish of fishing-boats being beached on the shingle. Small carts, hand-pulled and laden with stuff from the fields, rushed rattling down the lanes that branched off steeply up the hill side.

Fujiyé's thoughts, oppressed by the silent tragedy among the temple cedars, lightened a little. When we are young, Sorrow's shadows, other than those that touch us very nearly, pass like April clouds.

They met a couple walking towards the village, one a girl just out of her teens with a baby on her

back, the other a young man, tall, lively of eye and aquiline of feature.

"Ah, there's Natsu San and her brother. Isn't he handsome?" said little Hana.

The two girls exchanged a smile and a bow of greeting, slightly constrained on the part of the baby-carrier. The youth, halting an animated sentence, stared blankly at Fujiyé as though she had been a market-cart.

Fujiyé was not unduly vain, but having read daily in her mirror that her skin was very fair, and learnt from the sideways glances of many in the Tokyo streets that her face was the kind that attracts and holds men's eyes, she felt a little piqued.

He was handsome, certainly; nearly six foot, and finely built, and his eyes and mouth showed character such as rural faces commonly lack, but there was really no need for him to be so supremely and disdainfully indifferent to the fact that a pretty girl in a Tokyo kimono is a sight worth looking at, and looking at twice, in a fishing-village street.

Then another idea crossed her mind, at which she raised her eyebrows and nodded once or twice; ah, yes, that might be it. The young man looked too sensible to worry about things that happened fifty years (more or less) before he was born, but then—you never can tell.

Three hours or so later—the village agog by then with the latest tragic tit-bit: and only those who have lived in villages know the blessedness of even the most heartrending bit of sensation—Fujiyé, sitting indoors with the old servant, a distant relative, was asking questions about bygone events. The woman

kept house for her widowed father and had been nurse to his only child.

"This morning when I was walking with little Hana after coming down from the temple where I—— where poor Teru's body——" She broke off, with a sudden catch in her throat and dimmed eyes filling, as that piteous dripping form among the irises floated through the darkened room.

"Yes, child?" asked old Kiku, trying to distract her thoughts.

"Oh, yes—we passed Koyama's Natsu—I forget the name of the husband she married last year—and that lanky brother of hers. I might have been the smallpox from the way he glared at me. Tell me, Kiku, what is the trouble between our two families?"

"Koyama? What Koyama?" responded Kiku vaguely. "The greengrocer at the corner shop by the wharf?"

"No, no, Kiku. He hasn't got any sons since the two boys were drowned. I mean that rich farmer who lives away at the far end of the village. I'm sure you know all about it, else what's the use of being so old? I remember, when I was a tot, once meeting their boy and playing with him and father came along and saw us, and nearly frightened the life out of me. I've heard the reason, I think, but I was too young to understand, and you know for most of the past five years I've been away at school. Something about a marriage, wasn't it? Tell me."

Rocking herself gently on her heels to encourage the flow of memories, Kiku plunged into her tale with melancholy enjoyment.

"Well, you see, it was like this, though it's a rather long story and I've forgotten some parts of it. The last time I heard anyone talk about it was when we were at Tanaka San's little girl's funeral—no, little boy's: they lost the girl——"

"Kiku, stop maundering and get to the story!" gritted her impatient mistress.

"How you do jolt me! Well, I was saying that Koyama's family is really a very old one—for goodness knows how long they've been headmen of the village, and as proud as samurai."

("That boy looks rather like a samurai," murmured Fujiyé to herself.)

"And for generation after generation," continued Kiku, "they had always had a son, a real son, to inherit the rice-fields and the homestead and all, and carry on the family worship, without having to adopt one as most families have to do from time to time. But when the present farmer's father was headman it seemed that the rule would have to be broken. First a daughter and then another and then another, and never a sign of a son. Most people thought he would send his wife away and get another who might do better, but old Koyama was very just and kind-hearted, and he forgave her."

"I should think so!" broke in Fujiyé indignantly. "It wasn't the poor woman's fault. She had just as much or more right to complain."

"You young maids and wives think much more about your rights and wrongs nowadays than we used to in my time," said her old nurse. "But, anyway, the mother wasn't divorced, and when the eldest of the three daughters was fourteen a husband

was chosen for her who should be adopted into the family: and that was your own papa."

"My father!" exclaimed Fujiyé. "But we are not——"

"Wait a minute; you're so impatient. He was chosen, but there was no marriage. It was to have been the next year. Then the farmer's wife found she was going to have another one. And when it came—it was a son."

"That boy I saw in the road this morning?"

"No: don't be foolish. His father. All this was fifty years ago, nearly—or more, perhaps. I was a maid of twenty then. Old Watanabé, your father's father, expected that the marriage contract and adoption would still be carried out, that his son might be heir to the other family; but the Koyamas refused—I think that the mother was really at the bottom of that; she's still alive, you know, and tough and self-willed, though nearly eighty. Well, there was fuss, and all the village set by the ears. People took sides about it. Of course our family had no legal claim: the other side were still willing to let your papa—he was then three years older than you are now—have their daughter, but he must take her to his own house. They offered a fair dowry, too, but he wouldn't accept—or rather his family wouldn't."

"Poor father: I wonder if he was fond of her."

"Fond!" snorted the old nurse. "In those days young people had no business to be fond of one another until they were safely married—and then the woman had to think more of obeying and satisfying than of being fond. You girls are getting a lot too fond—and that's how you get yourselves into

trouble, some of you; and when it's too late you wish you had kept to the old ways, like that poor Teru San——”

Then, vexed with herself for having turned the talk back to last night's tragedy, old Kiku moved off about her household business.

CHAPTER II

OLD FEUD

BUT Fujiyé was not thinking now about dead Teru.

She wandered half-dreamily down to the beach, and her fancy, as she sat on the pebbles looking out across the shining water, slipped back through the long years to her father's youth.

He was old, old enough to be her grandfather. Fujiyé recalled now other stories that she had heard, one by one, when she was very little, heard and barely comprehended. Now she pieced them together.

Long ago, when Perry's "Black Ships" were riding at anchor off Idzu Peninsula while in Yedo the Shogun's government were at their wits' ends to decide how these uninvited guests should be received, two families were returning from the feast of St. Nichiren, held yearly at that old grey temple on Mt. Kano, standing amid fat "Icho" trees far inland from the sea. And then occurred that event that was to breed feud between these families for fifty years, while Japan was growing up to be a world power.

Along that road, which still stretched unchanged, winding out of sight among the hills! Empty now under the noon sun, the girl peopled it with little moving figures, clear as those of the wonderful cinema that she had lately seen in Tokyo. Old

gossips' talk, unconsciously remembered, painted the very colours.

The old farmer Koyama (a stolid, upright man, long dead now, though his wife still lived), striding along as a man should do in front of his female folk. Then a little knot of women, sisters and cousins and aunts, chattering together at intervals like rooks returning to their elms, all loaded down with varied paraphernalia, kimono tucked up thigh high, and with broad mushroom hats that kept off alike the summer shine and rain, much as you may see them to-day in Hokusai's inimitable prints.

And somewhere in that throng marched her father, a black-haired boy—Fujiyé had known him only as bent and prematurely grey.

And the little bride-to-be: what was she thinking as she trudged along demurely? Did she venture at times a sidelong questioning glance at her future lord? Was she wondering dreamily how life would be for her with this quiet, impassive youth forever by her side through long years of night-times? Was there no rebel strain in her blood to cry out, stifled, when the sea-gulls wheeled and tumbled in the keen breeze and shot out of sight over the foam?

But it was not a bad match. His father was a man of standing in the place, owner of fishing-boats and nets, and a little land; she had seen him maybe a dozen times, for he had lived at the far end of their village; they might have spoken together once or twice; and now she had been told she was to be this boy's wife. Was she content? Fujiyé, the maid of to-day, looked with puzzled eyes at the little

trudging figure among the automatons she had conjured up.

Yet such weddings took place—take place—by the hundred thousand every year, even in these still later years of Tokyo dance-halls and the “mo-ga,” or Modern Girl; bride and bridegroom hardly knowing each other’s features until they meet on the bridal night: and turn out, perhaps, indifferently well—as well, maybe, as in your Western marriages, where scope is given for choice, and where fancy, a tenor voice, the tilt of a nose or a good batting average, may settle the destiny of those who are to produce your future race. Is it the wiser who kick against Custom? In the East men were learning slowly to kick, and women more slowly still.

Fujiyé leant back in the angle of a boulder, wrapped in the scene her fancy conjured up. As the little cavalcade approached the homestead another group of women stood talking at the doorway in excited voices. One ran to greet them, calling shrilly,

“Koyama San—O medeto! O medeto! Joy for your home-coming!”

The baby’s coming had been unexpected, a month before his time: *his* for—it was a boy.

The background changed. Saké flowed freely that evening in the farmer’s guest-chamber, and friends came in droves to felicitate the good man and his wife; but the gathering that began in neighbourly rejoicings broke up amid dissension, and by midnight the seeds were sown of that quarrel that was to outlast the lifetime of almost all.

The scene dissolved, and the watcher reviewed, in glimpses, the following and changing years: the

central figure, her own father, growing slowly from black-haired youth into morose and wrinkled age. Young Watanabé, dull and slow of nature, heavy and retentive like the clay soil, nursed his grievance through the long seasons and neither forgot nor forgave.

Poor father! Was it for the inland fields and farm, so nearly his, now stolen by a baby, that the young man mourned? Or did he sorrow as well for the maiden whose shy glances had quickened perhaps his stolid soul on the slopes of grey old Kano Mountain?

In any case he soon buckled to work again. The fishing prospered. The years moved on. Changes came.

Before grey hairs had mingled with the black, he and his fellows were sending the daily catch, whether of line or seine or deep-sea net, to Tokyo by steamship, little top-heavy steamships smelling strongly of fish and tarred rope and all things that men use in 'long-shore commerce with the sea. They start from Reiganjima, these little steamships, in Sumidamouth off Tsukiji, and run first across the Bay to Yokosuka where the big war-vessels lie, the Portsmouth of Japan. Then on to Uraga, anchorage of Admiral Perry, now clanging day-long and night-long with the hammering of armour-plates and rivets; then over to Boshu, the great peninsula that shuts in Tokyo Bay to the north-east.

They browse along the cliffs and shingles of Boshu from one tiny port to the next: Hojima, where a baby heir, the apple of his parents' eyes, was growing up to manhood: Katsuyama, Nago, and so on to

Tateyama and Hojo on the Sea of Glass, at the peninsula's end.

Soon the old fisher patron died, and his son reigned in his stead.

Three boats drawn up on the shingle below the sandy beach-road represented the main worldly wealth and food-winners of the Watanabé folk. Around them you might see (and smell) the great brown nets spread out to dry. The old man had ranked as farmer, but he drew the bulk of his living from the sea. And his son, Fujiyé's father, followed in his steps; though of late he had learnt a newer, swifter, and more exciting way of building up his fortunes—or sinking them altogether—in the stock-market over the sea at the Capital.

Long before the old man passed on, his son had married; people must always marry, in Japan. He grew rich, as such things are reckoned in villages. For a score of years he lived childless, and adopted an heir to his nets and boats and orchards.

Then a great storm arose one night. In it he lost two boats. He had nearly a dozen more now, so the loss of them did not trouble him much financially; but in one of those two, gone down with all on board, was his adopted son. His wife had died the previous year.

A tear fell on the warm sand. Poor, lonely man! No wonder he was soured. Yes, life was cruel, whichever way you took it.

But indomitable still, though well over fifty, Watanabé took a second wife to console him for the loss of his first; a young woman, and very fair.

This venture was more fruitful. Within the year

a little daughter was added to his household, the pride of his old age: for fifty is old in Japan.

They called her Fujiyé—Fuji, the twining wistaria that trails its blossom-tassels in the still waters of temple pools. When the child was three years old she was left motherless—and an heiress, far the richest in the place. Her father spent little, and hoarded his gains; or so the villagers thought. Wilful, dainty, headstrong, sweet—graceful as the gulls that she chased gleefully along the ebb-tide strand, but with all her father's settled purpose, the girl brought sunshine into that gloomy house. Tall for her race and strong, she swam and dived like an otter and handled the clumsy boats with the best of the fishing crew.

But the old man never forgot his grudge, for all the brace of wives he had buried.

Another tear fell and sank in the sand, and another, till a tiny crab whose hole was about there poked his head up to see if the tide was really returning before its time. That mother whom Fujiyé could barely remember—low-voiced, half-frightened, rarely smiling except when, away from the house and her stern husband, she watched her baby splashing in the half-tide pools—why could she not have stayed a little longer till that daughter might return some of her love?

Wilful little Fujiyé, on finishing at the village school, had insisted on being sent to the big city to complete her education, and spent the next few years at a mission college. And now she was back again and wedged comfortably between two rocks, drying her eyes on a very expensive silken sleeve.

Of the other party to the quarrel gossip had told her little: her picture of them was the merest outline. The man-child, innocent cause of strife, grew as children will, and reaching man's estate took to himself a wife, another inland lass like his own mother, and she in turn gave birth first, at intervals, to a couple of girls, and then to a son whom they named Ichiro.

"And so," mused Fujiyé to herself, "that young man, who thinks himself so very important that he can't even cast a glance at one of the inferior sex, is the son of the baby who cheated *my* father out of a wife and a fine position! I wonder if he thinks I ought to take up the feud?"

She got up and shook the sand from her shoes. "I suppose I should wear wooden clogs again, now I have come back here," she reflected. "What would they say if I were to put on my pretty blouse and skirt? And this is only thirty miles from Tokyo."

(This was the year in which, in London and other foreign parts, skirts were just beginning to creep well up to the knee: so you may fix the date. A decade later, or little more, and Japan's daughters were taking to Western dress as kittens take to cream.)

Fujiyé raised her eyes to the winding road along which the people of her daydream had come in bygone times. A few country-folk now trudged its dusty sand; and on their kimonos and mushroom hats Time seemed to have stood still.

.

"So Miss Watanabé has returned from Tokyo," remarked Natsu to her brother, as she slung the

baby round to a more convenient position for supplying the milk that he was loudly demanding. "I wonder if she has finished school now—she has been away for years; her father must have felt lonely without her. I suppose now he will adopt someone as a husband for her. She must be very rich. Don't you think she's pretty, Ichiro?"

"Who's Miss Watanabé? I don't remember her," returned her brother absently.

"Why, of course, that girl we met just now on the road, that I bowed to."

"Did you? I didn't notice; I was thinking about something else. Is she a Hojima girl? If she's been away for years in Tokyo I can't think how she can stand coming back here and settling down to this dull life here. But I suppose she'll get married and then be contented to turn into a vegetable like the rest of you, and forget that there's anything outside."

"Why are you always complaining?" retorted Natsu, with a threat of tears in her voice. "You are forever grumbling and sneering as if you hated the place and all of us here. You used not to be like that—what has come over you?"

"I am sorry, Natsu, I did not mean to worry you. But you know how tired I am of this life—if it *is* life! Why can't they let me go out and see something of the world, at least, instead of staying here like a frog in a well?"

"Anyhow, don't talk like that to father: you know how it worries him, and sometimes I'm afraid he'll get terribly angry when he sees how determined you are to throw over all that he has been planning for you, and go away."

By this time the two had reached home, and Natsu went within to start on the endless round of daily tasks that her brother had been deriding.

Ichiro went in, too, but after consuming what was, after all, a healthy breakfast for a dissatisfied man, he strolled out again and rambled up into the hills that rise round the shore-ward side of the fishing village.

The lapse of years, while changes had been going on that had rent and re-made Japan, had brought little change to the Koyama family, save the inevitable change of father to son. The house to which the party had returned from the festival on that eventful night of the birth was still standing, almost unaltered, though the inside furnishings were modernised—electric light shone in every room, and there were even two chairs on the verandah, to the wonder of the village children and the scorn of a few elders.

Both his parents were still alive, and Ichiro was their pride and hope, as his father had been to the older folks. But they worried over him. The grandfather had been a man of original ideas and obstinate, and the boy showed that same streak. Just turned nineteen, he was a boy no longer, and that streak was growing more apparent.

They had talked of him the previous evening, as his father rested on the mats from his day-long toil in the fields: for in spite of added wealth the man still worked, and worked hard.

And perhaps at that same hour a girl was landing at the little pier from the Tokyo steamboat, who was destined to mingle with their plans; and another was wandering desolately over the hills at the back of

the temple, dragging her weight of sorrows, and drawn irresistibly by the promise of peace and forgetfulness in the quiet temple pool.

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In the corner the old granny whiffed intermittently at her small brass pipe.

"Our Ichiro seems unsettled. What shall we do with the lad, I wonder? Since leaving school he still sticks to his books, except when tramping lonely abroad. But he looks listless and wearied, he takes little or no interest in the farm-work, and stands for hours doing nothing, though he's not really an idle lad."

"Leave him alone. He'll soon settle down," said the farmer. "Give him a wife. Young men marry too late nowadays. All this idle talk of going to the city to seek his fortune, that his sister Natsu was listening round-eyed to the other evening when I came in to supper—it means nothing. At his age young blood ferments, but it will soon work itself out."

The old woman tapped her pipe against the china fire-box, and the others waited for her to speak.

Age has its privileges. She was eighty-four.

She looked round at her son, mumbled a few words to herself, nodding her head confidently, and then re-filled the little brass pipe-bowl with fine-shredded tobacco.

CHAPTER III

THE FAR BEACH

“WHY, Ichiro, where have you been? I’ve been looking for you for hours. Father wants you to go up to the hill-side beyond Sato San’s field and count the pine-trees on the far side that are fit for felling this year.”

“Won’t to-morrow do just as well? I feel so dull this morning, I must have a swim. Come along, Natsu, the baby’s asleep, and if it wakes mother can look after it.”

Proper little Natsu San looked regretfully at the blue sky full of warm light, but shook her head. She loved her brother and she loved swimming, but the thought of neglecting the daily round for either of them simply never entered her head. To such deplorable pass does unremitting obedience finally bring us.

“No, I can’t, and you shouldn’t either. You know father doesn’t like the way you’ve been idling lately. They were talking about it last night; the shoji were open, and I heard them.”

Ichiro stared at his sister with a sort of irritated incredulity. How could a rational human be so putty-like?

“Oh, *come* on, Natsu! You’re just like all the girls: never think for themselves, never do what they want to.”

"If we only did what we wanted to, who would cook the dinner on a hot day?"

"Or smack the baby? But that's just why you girls are so uninteresting. I don't believe there's a lass in all Boshu ever thinks of anything but rice-bowls and babies and work. And you're all so satisfied—that's the worst of it."

"When you are married, do you want your wife to be unsatisfied with babies and work? If so you'd better marry a geisha!"

"Me? No wife for me, not yet awhile! Tell father I'll count the trees this afternoon."

And the young man swung off down the village street. Can that intricate marvel of the human brain (after years of education) find no fitter work than the base, mechanical task of counting trees? Bother the trees!

Already a man in build and stature, Ichiro Koyama had an intellect a little in advance of his years—he was nineteen—and the heart of an ingenuous boy.

All who come to Japan remark with wonder those mighty wrestlers, deep of chest and mountainous of stomach, that draw vast crowds to the spring and autumn contests at their hall by Sumida River. Then politics, the stock-market and warfare are forgotten, and Tokyo talks and thinks of nothing but the gains and chances of the Eastern and the Western Camps, into which for centuries the great, fat men have been divided: or did talk and think until yesterday, when Western sports leaped suddenly over the college walls to usurp first place in popular favour.

You might imagine these giants a race apart, aboriginal survivors of some bigger tribe than the

present islanders. Not at all. They come from all parts of the Empire. In this land of astonishing contrasts a son may be born to any family who will grow up a foot or two in height beyond his parents. The wrestling patrons scour the provinces for such youths.

If Ichiro had been born of humbler stock he might well have been enticed to join the ranks of those who shave their heads, harden sinews and fatten paunches against the great contests. But though far from a dishonourable one, the profession was hardly fitted for one of the lad's parentage and up-bringing. So, as he strolled down the village street towards the beach, dreaming the dreams of life's early spring (much the same, I suppose, the world over) his thews and bulk hardly shaped in his mind as an asset in the struggle which he hoped lay before him. For what worth was life without struggle?

Of one thing he was sure. He would not be a farmer.

An honest and honoured, an easy, comfortable and secluded life was his for the mere taking. As his parents had done, so should he. Warm rice-fields offered their annual fruit, the young pines and cedars crowded the hill-side, for his cutting, arranged domesticity and the comfort of children were his, if he chose but to follow the path—even, should he wish it, scope for new methods of tilth and husbandry: but he would not.

In what undiscovered land do youth and reason go hand-in-hand?

Across the bay was Tokyo, seething with new life; and further across wider waters, lay other shores, shores of enchantment.

So the young man of Birmingham or Brixton dreams of bamboos and Eastern Isles, and labels them Romance. To Ichiro Romance beckoned West.

The call was on him, the call which some may not resist: which some resist but remember: and which some resist and forget.

He turned the corner by the little steamboat office.

"Hallo, Koyama San, have you heard the news?" shouted a young fellow in dark-blue student's uniform who had just landed from the Tokyo steamer.

"Why, Muroki San, you back from the city already? I thought you'd stay till the vacation. Well, what is the news? There's never any here."

"Oh, great fun! They've burnt three police-boxes, two near Hibiya Park and one at the top of Kudan Hill, I think, but I'm not sure. I saw the others yesterday—no, this morning—no, of course it was yesterday, because I left Reiganjima last night. They were still smoking, and I saw a corpse on a stretcher."

"Is it just the Opposition, do you think, trying to frighten the Government, or are the Tokyo people really getting excited?"

"I don't know. Some say the rickshaw-men are at the bottom of it. Anyhow, about forty tram-cars had all their windows smashed, and one car was half-burned—it looked so strange, running along the rails at full speed, all flaring up. Well, I must get in: see you later!"

And the youth (a year his junior) trotted gaily away, whistling a college song and followed by Ichiro's envious eyes.

Just as Muroki was on the point of disappearing round the street corner he stopped and turned, as though he felt the wistful appeal in that glance.

"When are you coming to Tokyo, Koyama San? You used to be so fond of talking to us about all the wonderful things that you were going to do when you left school, the countries you were going to visit and the wrongs you were going to right. We all imagined that you would be the very first to kick the mud of the Boshu rice-fields from your feet. We thought we should soon hear of you in the Diet Building, if not at Washington. Yet now six of our graduating class, including me, have left Boshu. Kato's gone down to Kyushu, and young Ohara tells me he's going with his uncle to Shanghai next month—and you are still stuck here, as if you never intended to get into a boat in your life."

Few things are more annoying for a prophet than to be called a back number by a late disciple. Too true, he *had* been rather in the habit of enlarging, when his audience was small and seemed sympathetic, on the Duties and Responsibilities which Life (this personification of abstract ideas and qualities was at that time quite new to the Japanese mind, so all the more fascinating) imposed on the young man of to-day; and how he, Ichiro, was going to meet them. And here he was, tied down. What a fraud this same Life was!

He flushed, shook his head, and walked on. The June sun shining in the blue sky (have you, I wonder, ever seen a really blue sky, not the laundered imitation that English poets glorify, but deep, flawless, radiant blue, reflecting the radiance of an indigo sea?)

flooded the road with light. The cottages on either side, small shops mostly, one-storeyed and heavily thatched, lay open to the passer's view. A few stump-tailed cats slumbered or scratched themselves at intervals along the sunny side; chickens ran up and down the road, squabbled over sudden trifles, and pecked imaginary worms in the dry dust.

Within the cottages all was quiet and dark; the shopkeepers caring little about customers, drowsed in tiny back rooms—a thief could have filled his pockets unchecked. And over the roofs on the landward side rose the living green of young bamboos, clothing the mountain slopes and bowing gently in the soft, insistent breeze. Above them were cedars, dark and sombre, though still tipped with the lighter tints of their spring foliage; and, highest of all, on the ridges that dominate the village, a triple line of pine-trees sang all day in the wind that ever blew in from the sea, the song beloved of the Japanese—Matsu-kaze, the "pine-wind," like nothing else in the world but the distant roar of sea-waves on the beach.

Further along the houses straggled, and between them one glimpsed the blue water, bluer even than the sky but sparkling with a million little points of light and dotted with occasional sails, while across in the June haze the soft outlines of the Miura coast presented but a darker blue than that of sea or sky. Fuji was there, beyond, leagues and leagues away, its fan-shaped cone invisible till lit by the light of the setting sun, when it would glow like an inverted "asagao"—the Japanese convolvulus-blossom—for a few short minutes, and then vanish again in the night.

Ichiro had dreamed the previous night of Fuji (the mountain, not the flower: the two names, though spelt alike by you, are written with different characters, and suggest no association to Japanese minds) and he took it for an omen. We have a proverb—"Ichi Fuji, ni taka, san nasu"—luckiest it is to dream of Mount Fuji, next of a hawk, and third of an egg-plant.

Past the cottages a small copse divides the roadway from the beach. Ichiro pushed his way through the hedge, the loose sleeves of his cotton kimono catching a little on the wild-rose branches that scratched his arm and strove to bar his path.

The sea sparkled, soft and warm. To undress was the work of a moment. Throwing his "geta"—clogs—and single garment beside a log, he raced over the shingle, and in another moment was in the water.

Over ankles, over knees, over hips: then he plunged headlong and struck out with slow, luxurious strokes, breasting the milk-warm wavelets, vigour flowing through every joint. It was grand, it was glorious.

For some days past he had loitered around the house, listless, dispirited, and dull in body and mind. For months he had foreseen and dreaded the struggle that must come when he should tell his people that their way, the way they had mapped out for him, could be no longer his. Now, for a few minutes, he could forget.

Koyama, the father, had been a man of liberal mind in his earlier years. Modern innovations not a few had found a welcome in the village, and he

had ever been among the foremost of his rural circle to adopt them. He had noted with warm approval the progress of his little son in such of the Western arts and learning as they taught in the Sho-gakko by the old temple near the beach, and later at the Middle School inland in the peninsula: pleased at his son's prowess at tennis, proud of the certificates gained at the end of each school-year, though sparing of praise as befitted his parental position. He loved to hear the boy read stumbly (with the weirdest accent) from the little English primer that he studied religiously for an hour before the morning and evening meals, and to watch him trace with hesitant pencil those ungraceful scrawlings by means of which Western folk express their ideas on paper.

But he regretted Ichiro's clumsy handling of the "fudé"—the Japanese brush-pen. At thirty-five his mind was crystallising. Japan had gained a position among the nations, assured, recognised. Were not her sons the bravest of the brave, her daughters the purest and most modest, without that self-assertion and masculinity that (according to report: he had met but three or four, and those only in the village street) made foreign women so odious? In what other country did loyalty and patriotism, those finest flowers of a nation's virtue, flourish as in Japan? Revolving around the Imperial idea, as the earth around the sun, in unimprovable stability, how could any change be but for the worse? Commerce was certainly important, and industry a factor in progress, yet the farmer was still the backbone of the country, whose task and privilege it was to produce rice, the sacred food, offered to Gods and Imperial Ancestors

at the spring and autumn festivals. From the farmer class the Army drew its finest men—how could life in a factory, an office or a shop, provide a soldier?

Remember that, only a few decades before, the nation had consisted, as a whole, of four classes: Samurai, farmers, artisans and (at the bottom) merchants.

Below these were beggars, actors and such, hardly distinguishable as human folk. And below them again were the Eta, uncleaner than the dogs.

And yet Ichiro must tell him that he would not, could not, be a farmer!

Further and further he swam, cautiously at first, then with bolder and faster strokes, his eyes fixed on the far horizon—of his hopes.

Perhaps he had over-rated his powers, perhaps the months of moping had weakened him, perhaps simply he had forgotten, first in the sheer enjoyment and then in the fancies that floated through his mind, the distance that he had swum; but presently he felt that his strength, ever so slightly, was ebbing.

He turned toward the shore.

But was *that* the shore, that hazy line, appearing and disappearing as the rising waves danced by his face?

And he knew, instinctively, that he could never reach it. He swam steadily, conserving his force, pressing down the little cold fears that kept creeping through him, the fears that would move him to frantic endeavour.

Distant white sails skimmed the horizon.

Ichiro did not fear death in itself. Perhaps because a justly offended God, the long, dismal terrors of Purgatory, or the endless nightmare of the Puritan hell (lingering, despite himself, in the mind of almost every Westerner) has little or no place in the Eastern outlook on extra-mortal matters, death, the Grim Spectre, possesses only slight power to awe us. When the problems of life seem too puzzling or intricate for us to unravel death offers the easy and natural answer.

Not fear of death but love of life gripped him. It seemed hard that those beckoning hopes that had been rising, gradually formulating and taking shape, those dreams that called him from afar, that future that had unrolled itself before him further and further, its end unforeseen, should vanish, be quenched,—fade as a night's dream fades, but without any morning's awakening: those pictured countries yet unvisited, those deeds all undone. And after—nothing any more!

The salt water was bitter on his lips as he gasped and strove, more and more feebly, towards those shores that never should be his.

Then, faint as the chirp of a "semi" in a distant village, as the small sound one hears at dawn from across the borderland of sleep, tickling the ear like the thin voice of a mosquito—over the water came the creaking of a "ro."

Ever so distant, half heard at first, then again, definite, coming his way: the sound of the "ro," the long stern-oar of a Japanese boat.

He gave a gasping shout that was half a sob.

"Tas'kete kudasai!"—"Help! Please help!"

The sound quickened, changed, took on new life. Presently the tiny hulk appeared, and the upright figure at the stern. The spray rippled, the boat flew; it bore down upon him, and he saw that the figure was that of a girl.

Then its shadow crossed his face. He grasped the boat's side, and the girl, leaning backward to balance, pulled him in. For a time he lay still, half-crouched in the bow, drawing his breath. The mere physical content that follows relaxation of strenuous effort filled his senses, and a feeling of drowsiness dulled all his perceptions. The boat rocked idly on a gentle swell. Gradually his faculties revived.

The rower had resumed her place at the stern, and was wringing the water from one sleeve of her kimono which, escaping the confinement of the "obi" wherein kimono sleeves are sometimes tucked when great freedom of action is required, had dragged in the sea. Demure, slightly smiling, she seemed waiting on his speech.

By some odd working of the mind, his first sensation was one of pique, that a mere girl should have been his saviour. Then, as he glanced at her half-turned face, he wondered a little; it was not a face that he knew, yet neither, he thought, was it entirely unfamiliar. Her skin was fairer, her hands more shapely, than those of the farmer girls and 'long-shore maidens of the place. Her kimono was fine and of a dainty pattern, while the "kanzashi" of forget-me-nots in her hair spoke of Tokyo; yet surely no Tokyo student-miss, across the Bay for a holiday, could handle the clumsy "ro" as she had done.

Meeting his eye, she smiled outright and murmured

"Ikaga de irrashai-mas'ka?"—"How are you feeling now?"

Ichiro, to his own annoyance, blushed: then remembered that he had not thanked his rescuer.

"Thank you so very much. I was feeling tired with my swim, and——"

"Yes, another minute, and I think you would have been finished," broke in the maiden coolly. "Perhaps you are not accustomed to the water?"

Annoyance was fast now conquering gratitude. Not so was Koyama's heir used to being treated by the lesser sex.

"Oh, I swim well usually; but I will not trouble you any longer. Again, many thanks for your help!"

And, rising to his feet, Master Ichiro plunged once more into the sea.

But, alas, the chill of his late long immersion was still upon him, and cramp gripped him as in a vice. With one convulsive movement, throwing his hands above his head, he sank like a stone.

And like a fish-hawk diving for a herring, she followed him down. The clumsy skiff yawed this way and that, empty save for a dainty gown of flowered "merinsu."

Presently they re-appeared, she swimming shoreward with long, easy side-strokes, supporting his head on her other arm.

The tide had turned, and was carrying them into land. Soon she felt the slippery, seaweed-covered rocks beneath her feet, and, supporting now his whole six-foot of sinewy body over the jagged, mussel-clad ledges of stone, she bore him up to the beach and laid him, face-downwards, on the grass.

He sat up, was very sick, looked mutely at his rescuer as she knelt by him in her close-clinging cotton shift, then lay down again, and closed his eyes.

Hot sunshine flooded sea and land. Along the beach-road from Hojima two women were coming nearer, and a farmer in a market cart. The latter at least had seen them already—he was peering at them from under levelled palm. The girl hesitated a moment or so; the young man was showing signs of returning consciousness and, if he needed further assistance, might safely be left to the care of these approaching villagers. Best slip away, she thought, and escape questions and explanations.

She rose to her feet and walked out into the water, to where her boat grated on a hummock of rock and weed.

CHAPTER IV

WHERE THE LITTLE STONE MEN SIT

FOR a week Ichiro loafed. Never yet having been called upon to take any decisive action, he needed something exterior to lift him out of the rut—and cursed himself for needing it. He snapped at those rash enough to ask him what was wrong, and made himself a nuisance generally.

Largely softness of heart: his parents took everything so much for granted—how deal a sudden blow to all their comfortable schemes of life? He wished for some unreasonable opposition, to steel him to the act of cruelty.

Work in the woods was over, work in the rice-fields not begun. The green blades were tall and rustling, but hardly an ear showed as yet. One morning he started to climb the steep slopes that bound the village plains to northward.

"Don't wait the noon meal for me," he called to his sister Natsu, who was proudly nursing her baby on the verandah.

"Another long tramp? What a funny boy you are, Ichiro! Why don't you get a job as postman, since you're so fond of walking? Where are you going to-day?"

"Oh, I don't know. Just up over Nokogiri and down into Kanaya. I think I'll call on Suzuki and see if he's finished that book that I lent him."

"And get lunch there? Well, don't break your neck—and I advise you to get over the ridge quickly; father says we shall quite likely have a storm."

A storm up on Nokogiri's craggy heights! That would just suit his mood: something to struggle through with set teeth, while one ploughed with bent head up and on, higher into the surging mists, meeting buffet with buffet.

"If you see Suzuki's O Koyo San, will you tell her that mother would like her to call next time she's over this side of the mountain? That striped cotton cloth for next winter's wadded kimonos—it isn't a bit the same as what she was showing us in the spring; it doesn't seem so thick, and the stripes are quite different. And you might tell her——"

He gave an impatient shake of his head, and walked away.

Between Hojima and the neighbouring village of Kanaya a lofty ridge of rock runs inland from the sea, visible for many miles around—a grey line when you stand by Shinagawa Bay on the Tokyo side of the gulf, a jagged edge against the sky at nearer view. Nokogiri-yama it is called—the Saw Mountain. Its sides are clothed with bamboo scrub, dwarf pines and tangled bushes among which in late summer the great fragrant lilies shine out like silver stars, perfuming the air. Gaunt lichenous boulders crown the ridge, and project here and there along the ascent.

Scalable with difficulty, a narrow path hewn in the rock leads upwards, and at intervals you may see small caverns cut in the sheer face and peopled with stone saints little and big, some standing, some

prone, and many worn and defaced by wind and frost and guttering streams.

Here and there are landings, soft and turfy, where the upward climber may rest and stretch himself at ease—smoke, or commune with the saints, as he feels inclined. If he persists to the top a glorious view will be his reward. Almost all Tokyo Bay lies rolled out like an opened picture-scroll below: busy puffing steamers crawling across it, fisher-boats skimming it with their white and bellying sails, great kites floating scornfully on motionless wings above, white gulls turning and scurrying about the rocks. Across the blue a hazy pall reveals and hides the activities of the Metropolis. Cast your eye along, past Yokohama's breakwater, and the cliffs of Miura, sombre in green of pine and cedar, shoot out a long peninsula, with a dazzling white needle gleaming in the sun—the Kannonzaki lighthouse.

Further, half lost in cloud, are the Hakoné Mountains, where foreigners go for week-end motor trips; and if the hour is right and the light kind, you see beyond them Fuji's inevitable Peak.

On the Kanaya side of the ridge the incessant tap of hammers and sometimes the dull boom of an explosion reminds that Nokogiri's quarries supply the stone foundations for innumerable wooden houses, as they did before ever Iyeyasu ascended, as his Emperor's Vicar, the throne of the Tokugawa Shoguns.

Pheasants nestle in the sunny banks, sometimes a hare creeps by, and grey pigeons wing across from crag to crag, mating with their tame relations who live in the temple courts below.

The late azaleas were fading and the wild hydrangeas starting to open as Ichiro climbed up the narrow track and rested on a little plateau whose only other occupants were a vast company of small grey men—"Go Hyaku Rakkan"—the five hundred followers whom Buddha, in reproof of the hardness of men's hearts, created out of stone. The sculptor, a whimsical fellow, has managed a really wonderful variety of expression for the members of the pious group—you cannot find two alike; some smile, some are sad; patience, hope, faith, anxiety, irony, and boredom are all to be found on the small, lichen-covered faces; and some of the followers wear little aprons on their chests, placed there by the devout.

"Chotto go men nasai!"—"Excuse me a moment!"

Someone coming down the bank had almost trodden on him, for the ledge was narrow. Ichiro looked up. A girl walked by him, stopped for a moment as though to turn, then walked on, stopped again, and finally stood and faced him with the smile that, though he hated to confess it, had troubled his thoughts for a week past. And she had the impudence to speak first!

"Excuse my rudeness, but I hope that you are quite recovered from your—from your——"

Was she laughing at him? He jumped to his feet and looked at her, confused, at a loss for a reply. Part angry, part—what? Something superior, pert, almost disdainful veiled beneath her air of meekness, as she glanced at him with half-lidded eyes, teased him. A sense of injury, too. Who was this chit that she should come, a score of times a day, between

himself and his dreams, dreams in which a woman had hitherto played no part?

Ever since that sunny morning when Ichiro had come to himself on the beach, after the swim that had so nearly proved his last, and donning his kimono (lying, as it chanced, not far off) had slowly wandered home, his world, the dream-world in which much of his waking and all his sleeping time were spent, seemed changed.

Always he had seen himself casting aside the ties of home and plunging resolutely, single-hearted, into the maelstrom of the world. The first few years to be spent in Tokyo, perfecting his English, mastering some useful trade. Then, when fully equipped and fit to take his place among the men of many nations, what oceans would he not cross, what prizes win, among the busy and varied populations of the earth!

Love, in the abstract, had not crossed his vision. For the very word there is really no equivalent in the language of Japan. Mere animal desire, the carnal passion that seeks only its own satiety and would kill where it cannot possess: the sentimental maunderings of penny novelettes: the eggs-and-bacon attachment of British domesticity: winged Eros, creature of the poets' fancy—the Japanese tongue is singularly lacking in any word to sum up and comprise all these.

Young men, former friends of Ichiro's boyhood, had crossed the Bay, perhaps with hopes and ideals as high as his: and then slipped somehow, and started to waste their means and health among geisha or in the licensed quarters, or lived in

idleness on money given them by foolish girls—their easy conquests. Only a year or so before, in a neighbouring village, the son of a wealthy farmer, despairing of his parents' consent to his union with a tea-house girl, had walked with his sweetheart hand-in-hand into the sea. What a wretched betrayal of youth's mission! And that other young fellow, a law-student two years older than Ichiro, for whom such a brilliant future was prophesied—he married, left his college, and was now struggling to support a wife, mother-in-law, and baby: probably two by this time, if not more—Ichiro was hazy as to the rate at which such troubles multiplied.

No. Women were to be avoided. A drag on strong aspiring wings, shackles to the climber's feet, sunk rocks beneath the keel of the young voyager pressing with taut sail across the wide-stretching sea of early manhood (the sun-kissed view spread out below the boy supplying in turn his similes), how could they be anything but a menace, any contact with them a disaster?

Love? He knew the word, and read it in his English textbooks, had heard it whispered among his mates as something half-shameful, half-amusing. Its import he could not grasp. Foreigners had strange ways! Perhaps among them such things could be written of, talked of, without a blush. . . .

But for him, a Japanese youth, strong in the pride of his race and of his nascent manhood, woman was merely the adjunct of hearth and home: his mother, or the mother of his future children.

Undeniable. Then why should that slender form, that hatefully interfering form, with sunshine glancing

on smooth wet tresses and glistening skin and dark eyes half-hidden by down-dropt lids, come ever and again to trouble the clearness of his vision, as the tiny trickle from a high, mossy rock falls drop by drop into the pool below, breaking the calm mirror in a thousand little, little ripples?

A chance visitor, for aught he knew, passing through in time to pull a clumsy boy from the water, and then gone for ever; yet day by day the village, *his* village, grew haunted by her presence, mocking his sufficiency. Continually he feared—or hoped?—to see that slim shape appearing, vanishing, round some street corner—in the sunshine, in the shade. Hateful intruder on his inmost citadel! Partly to escape those haunted streets he had climbed the crags. And here she stood, straight, supple, smiling, in the flesh—that soft flesh which allured and made his pulses throb. He could have cursed, or struck her.

But—she had saved his life; and he had never thanked her. And, after all, he was a lad of grace.

“Oh, please pardon me! I was sleeping, and—I didn’t see you at first. The other day—thank you so much! I don’t know what I should have done if you had not come. I had swum quite a long way, and was almost exhausted. Thank you so much for your help.”

The girl nodded solemnly.

“Yes, it was rather—not very wise to jump into the water again as you did. How you did go down! Cramp, wasn’t it? It’s rather dangerous to venture so far from land unless you are quite sure of yourself.”

Ichiro flushed. He was not used to feeling at a disadvantage before a girl; and this one, he felt sure, was laughing at him beneath that demure air.

"Yes, I think I had got a chill, and that gives one cramp, you know . . . yes, it was stupid of me. . . ."

"Perhaps you are not much accustomed to swimming?"

Confound the girl, with that superior air! Ichiro, school champion in the annual sports for the one- and three-mile races, glared down at his tormentor.

"Oh, I *can* swim: last year I swam from the steamer landing-place right round the island at Katsuyama, and at our sports——"

He checked his impulse, which he felt unworthy, to boast, and added quietly with a frank smile,

"Still, I was truly glad of your help."

He thought a change passed over her face; something of the slight mocking air seemed to fade out of it. She seated herself on the turf just below him, and looked up into his eyes.

"You are Koyama Ichiro San, aren't you?"—in Japanese the personal name comes after that which in English is called the surname, reversing Western custom in this as in so many other things.

"Yes. How did you know me? And who are you? I am sure you are not from our coast, yet how you learnt to handle a 'ro' as you did. . . ."

"Why do you think I am not a Boshu girl?" she countered, laughing.

"Oh—I don't know. You don't talk like one, and you don't look like most of the—the—your skin is so—so fair, you know, and——"

He broke off, confused, never having paid a compliment to a girl before; this one had the virtue of sounding honest.

"Well, you are wrong. I *am* a Boshu girl, you see!"

"Then—from what village?"

"My home is Hojima, as yours is."

Ichiro's eyes opened wider.

"But I am sure I have never seen you before—at least, not before you pulled me out of the water."

"Thank you. Perhaps your memory for faces is not so good as your swimming. You *have* seen me: many times."

"Where? Please tell me," cried the lad, thoroughly mystified. "I think you are laughing at me."

She did laugh now, outright, and jumped to her feet, maliciously delighted at having startled this superior youth out of his reserve.

"I am going down now and you are going up, so we shall not meet again. Good-bye! Please be careful of yourself."

"But we *shall* meet again?"

Ten short minutes before, Ichiro could hardly have imagined himself saying this to a girl—and a girl, too, whom to his knowledge he had met but once before in his life. Yet now his eager tone displayed the depth of his feeling.

"Who knows? Perhaps!" laughed the girl—and was gone.

Repressing his impulse to turn and follow, Ichiro trod doggedly up the path. The little stone disciples of Buddha smiled secretly at one another across the empty sward.

CHAPTER V

CHASE OF AN UMBRELLA

THE early summer sun was blotted out by grey clouds, the rain was pattering down, persistently, incessantly, unvaryingly, on sandy street and straw-thatched roofs and the umbrellas of oiled paper that bobbed along between the cottages. Warm mists arose from cedar groves and turfy ridges, the young bamboos bent beneath their weight of moisture, and little torrents spouted down among the craggy ribs of Nokogiri-yama. From the Bay came the hoarse scream of a steamer's whistle, as the morning packet approached the landing-place. Its draggled passengers, blear-eyed, yawning, crowded clammily to the leeward side of the deck and awkwardly scrambled into the boat which should take them ashore.

Ichiro had wandered down the road from the Matsunéya, Hojima's oldest inn, where he had been trying to sow rebellion in the landlord's grandson, aged seven. The sight of folk landing from a ship always draws us: doubly so when it is in the early morning. Waifs from the sea, drifting in out of darkness and immensity, hurrying ashore with their joys and troubles and travelling-bags, they seem in the half-light like visitors from another planet, though it may have been but a Channel crossing.

He stared absently at the small crowd jostling amongst the men who were bringing empty fish-boxes from the boat to exchange for full ones. One

of the crowd, a girl in her later teens, was carrying a wicker "kori" basket by the rope which bound it, and struggling with her umbrella, a smart affair of lilac silk. Her kimono, too, was of silk—"Chirimen," not the stouter "meisen" that village maids usually affect when they are dressed up. Her obi was tied in the "tateyanoji" style more suitable to young girls of the upper classes, spreading like a gay butterfly above her shoulders, and her hair was parted in the middle and drawn coquettishly over either ear. Altogether a young lady of considerable pretensions.

Ichiro looked at her with some faint, perhaps unconscious, disapproval, and made no move to assist her (gallantry toward the inferior sex not forming part of a young man's code according to his teaching) as, with one hand upholding her basket above the puddles, she vainly tried to persuade her umbrella to do its duty. The rain was soaking down; silk skirts were beginning to droop dismally.

Suddenly someone ran past the lad as he stood passive beneath the broad eaves of the steamboat office, and another umbrella was held over beauty in distress, while the newcomer possessed herself of the recalcitrant one.

"Ah, so you have come—so glad! What dreadful weather! I'm afraid you're quite drenched. It's too bad that no one would help you. In such rain, too! These village men have no manners, have they?"

And Ichiro met the disdainful glare of a pair of black and long-lashed eyes—eyes that he had seen twice before by day, and a hundred times in dreams.

He advanced, awkwardly enough.

"May I lend you my umbrella?"

"Thank you, now we don't want it; it is very kind of you."

For the second time this annoying young woman had made him flush.

"I'm so sorry—but my 'karakasa' is bigger than yours, much. Won't you two shelter under this and give me yours instead?"

The girl's face dimpled.

"Well, if you really don't mind: let's exchange. Ah, yes, this is much better. Now, excuse us for going first. Come along, Hana-ko, we'll get home and then you must change your clothes, or you'll catch cold."

And off went the two, chattering away like a pair of gaily-plumaged magpies, while Ichiro trailed behind with his thoughts.

They were not at all unpleasant ones. Now at least he would find out where she lived. Not, of course, that she was anything at all to him. A girl, and disrespectful, too! After their meeting, three weeks earlier, on Nokogiri's crags, he had sensed danger, and had striven, persistently but without success, to put her from his mind and regain his former calm. In no way would she fit in with his scheme of things.

Marriage in the near future, unless all his plans were renounced, was unthinkable—indeed, had barely crossed his mind. It would be starting for his plunge into the wider world beyond with a millstone round his neck. Any illicit ties were perhaps equally so, for his principles, by training and inclination, were of the strictest.

Then what remained? Nothing. Why think of her? Very logical.

So he argued, a dozen times a day: not knowing the futility of argument against the heart of spring.

And so he followed, catching at times little scraps of their girlish chat. The newcomer's voice was lower, rather affectedly modulated, and he could hear but few of her words. Her friend's lilted with the clearness of a lark's.

"You must have started very early. What sort of crossing did you have?—Oh, you poor thing, I thought you looked rather pale. And the water is really quite calm, too. Yes, it sometimes is, in the middle; perhaps there is a storm somewhere outside the bay. Do you know, I am never seasick. Once, when I went to——"

Ichiro lost the remainder of the sentence as they turned a corner into the main village street that runs, with many curves, and crossing a couple of little streams, almost parallel with the shore for some distance, and then debouches on the beach.

A sharp gust hurrying up the street met them almost full-face as they turned. The elder girl (as Ichiro judged her—she might have been nineteen, though she dressed somewhat more youthfully, and still wore the "kata-age" at her shoulders which young ladies usually abandon as they approach marriageable years) was twirling her parasol, half-shut, in her hand.

Caught by the gust, it flew open, twitched itself from her careless grasp, and sailed gaily down the street, bouncing and pirouetting as though rejoicing in its freedom.

This time Ichiro had learnt his lesson; he started in pursuit, first at a dignified pace, then, as the impish thing continued in its mad career, at a round trot.

The chase was short and sharp; the handle-crook catching in a tree-stump, the lad pounced on it viciously—and broke a rib.

He retraced his steps, grasping his injured quarry firmly by the middle, but the girls were out of sight. It was some minutes before he caught them up (they might at least have waited, he thought) and then handed it over in silence to its owner. She took it with a blush and a bow, raising her eyes in mock timidity to his and dropping them again: then glancing up once more at his flushed and handsome face.

"Oh, it's broken and all dirty: what a pity!" exclaimed her friend; and tilting her own "karakasa"—or rather Ichiro's—and gazing upwards, she continued brightly:

"Well, it has stopped raining, so we must not trouble you any more. Many thanks for your umbrella; please give me mine. Come, Hana-ko. Good-bye!"

And she coolly effected the exchange and was gone, before the discomfited youth could find a word to say.

He stood irresolute a minute or so, watching their departing forms; a trill of silvery laughter floating back which seemed to mock him. He was, of course, well rid of them both. Then, doggedly, spite of the urgent counsels of dignity and shame, he started to follow. A cracked voice smote his ear.

"Oh, Koyama San, how pleased I am to meet you!

Isn't it a wretched day? But the rain seems to have stopped, so perhaps it is going to clear."

An old woman (probably sent by his good angel), a valued friend of his mother's and famous for her long-windedness, had just emerged from the village "kambutsuya," or grocery, and almost bumped into him.

He replied briefly but suitably, checking a quite unsuitable exclamation, and tried to escape, but his companion was not to be put off so. Her husband had experienced a return of rheumatism, a cousin—quite a distant cousin—was going to be married, and a fox—or perhaps a weasel—had carried off two of her best chickens and left a third, dead, in the yard. She hung on to a corner of his long sleeve while he danced like an anchored skiff in a breeze. Out of the tail of his eye he watched the disappearance of the two gay obi down the steamy street. Out of sight! She droned on: the damned old hag!—his mother's dearest crony. Ichiro sweated; his soul died within him. Exasperated beyond control, he turned to her the face of a demon. Half-daunted, she let go his sleeve, and tried to raise a great bundle of "daikon," Satsuma potatoes and greenstuff to her shoulders; but the weight was too much, and she staggered.

In Japan sex does not command respect and help, but age does. Ichiro hoisted the bundle on his own broad back, and strode along with her dolefully to her door. Dumping it there, he dragged his sad footsteps home, lying to himself that all was for the best.

The clouds had lifted and warm sunshine sparkled from road-puddles and on the blue-black tiles of

cottages, down which ran millions of tiny rills to fill the great tubs that stand at intervals along beneath the eaves. Blue sky above was reflected from the street in a thousand patches, and paper umbrellas, two or three, were standing, handle-downwards, against the wide verandah of the Koyama home. By them were "geta"—wooden clogs, three pairs. One a man's, broad, clumsy and heavy, with leather "hana-o" or toe-thongs. The other two women's, of lighter "kiri" wood with toe-thongs of silk. Visitors, clearly.

Ichiro mounted the verandah and entered the big common-room, which was also the kitchen; at its further end was the "Kami-dana," or shrine-shelf, of the household—protecting spirits and gods.

In the semi-darkness, stepping in from the bright sun outside, he hardly recognised at first the occupants of the room.

Next moment he was bowing profoundly to an oldish man, grave and portly in "haori" and Sendai hakama, the mantle and loose trousers worn by country folk only on somewhat ceremonious occasions.

This was his uncle, a man of means, a farmer from some way inland, whom Ichiro had but rarely seen.

Then he greeted his aunt—small and shrunken, but dignified too in her shining black "haori."

"How are you, Uncle? You are very welcome. It is long since I last had the honour of seeing you. And how is my aunt? It is very good of you both to come so far. I am sorry I was absent. . . ."

"Why, Ichiro San, how you've grown!" exclaimed

his aunt. "Really, I should never have known you. Just twenty-one, so your mother tells me. You will soon be able to relieve your father of the management of the house. What a help you must be to him!"

Actually he had just turned nineteen, but Japanese counting often makes us two years older than we are. Her remark chimed ill with his thoughts; his mother, entering from the back, sent them still further awry.

"Oh, so you're back at last. Why, we were just talking about you. Perhaps you won't remember this young lady here," she smiled; "Tsuné-ko San, this is your cousin Ichiro."

And shrinking forward out of the gloom, a girl in student's "hakama" came shyly to make her bow. She had a pretty face though browned with work in the fields, and her hair, tied in "momo-ware," the style of a young unmarried woman, added some years to her appearance. She was probably about fifteen.

After murmuring a word or two inaudibly she was retiring into the shade, but her mother good-naturedly pushed her forward again.

"Come, you mustn't be so shy of your cousin. Young ladies nowadays generally find something to say for themselves—too much, sometimes, I think, especially those who have come back from the High School. Not like my maiden days. We never dreamt of talking to any young men except our own brothers."

"Yes," agreed her husband heavily, "I don't at all agree with sending daughters to these City schools. What do they want with so much learning? At the 'Sho Gakko' they learn to read and write and

cipher and make good clothes, respect their parents, and look after their husbands' households and their babies, too, when the time comes. These fine school-misses with their pianos and their English and—all those things, they get too proud to be wives to honest farmers and shopkeepers, and think themselves good enough only for diplomats or bank-managers. I've no patience with them. Isn't that right, Ichiro San?"

"Well, really," said the lad diffidently, "I have hardly thought about such things. But—perhaps a woman *is* the better for more education, just as a man is."

A month ago this speech would have astonished himself; it astonished his uncle now.

"Just as a man!" he echoed, big-eyed. "Why, you'll be saying next that a woman is the equal of a man, or perhaps his better, as I've heard that people say in America and other western countries. Such nonsense, you would hardly believe a grown man could talk it! I've heard—though of course it may be only a tale—that over there the wife struts along in front of her husband, makes him open doors for her, and even carry her parcels in the street. They must be a poor-spirited lot, if all that is true."

"I should die of shame to walk in front of *my* man like that," chimed in the aunt. "More like a mistress than a wife! Eh, Tsuné, how would you like to go on in that fashion?"

No answer came from the shadowy corner where the maiden knelt on the soft mats, but in the darkness her eyes dreamed on her cousin's face.

The talk turned to other subjects. Presently

"hirumeshi," the midday meal, was announced and brought in on little trays to another room, where they all sat or squatted on the mats to enjoy the viands; and though there was no clatter of knife or fork, for they ate with silent chopsticks, the sound of their eating was heard afar.

Resisting offers of lodging, the visitors departed at dusk. Ichiro walked with them as far as the starting-point of the little "gata-basha," or rural omnibus which, after hours of bone-jolting travel, would land them within easy distance of their upland home. Then he came indoors, and sat down to think—or dream.

CHAPTER VI

IDEAS AT ODDS

HE sat on into the twilight. Through his dreams there shone the City lights. Presently his mother came and sat down by him, troubling his dreams.

She chatted trivially for a time, the lad hardly listening. Suddenly he found that she was saying something important.

"It is some years since last your uncle called on us, though I have been twice to his house in the interval. To-day he came to talk over a certain subject—one that we have discussed several times in our letters. Can you guess what that subject was?"

Until his mother had nearly finished speaking, no suspicion as to her meaning had crossed Ichiro's mind. Of a sudden that meaning dawned on him. At first but the germ of an idea, in a moment it sprang to full size, and intuitively he knew that he was right.

"Mother, you don't mean—you don't wish——?"

"My son," she returned, looking at him with affectionate eyes to which this six-foot youth was still the baby who had come to her house to assure the continuance of the male line, as his father had gone to *his* mother before him, "you are now, as your uncle has said, a man, big and strong and clever as any mother could wish her son to be. Your

sisters are both married and happy in their new homes, your father is getting on in years, and not so strong in health as we could wish."

"He's only forty-three or four, isn't he?" put in Ichiro, moving his head restlessly.

"Yes. But he hopes soon to be putting things more and more into your hands. I'm afraid you don't take so much interest in farming as we might both desire; perhaps that is but natural. You love your books, and it pleases us that you have done so well at them. You have learnt much of many things, and surely knowledge is good. By studying the ways of Western countries we in Japan have done what would have been wonders and miracles to our forefathers, though in some ways perhaps this land of ours was a pleasanter and nobler one when I was young. But now the time has come for you to settle down, cultivate the soil, using, if you will, your added knowledge to improve, perhaps, some methods that may be old-fashioned. And as sun and moon are necessary to the earth, so man and woman to the home. It is time for you to take a wife, one well-versed in the managing of a household, to bear you stout children, and be my help as I grow old and tired."

Ichiro sprang to his feet, and stared gloomily out over the darkening land to where a faint glow rested on the sea. His mother went on placidly.

"Fortunately we have not far to look for one who is, we think, suitable in every way. Even when you were children the plan occurred to both your uncle and ourselves. We talked it over, and they strongly approved it."

"And you never thought of asking us what *we* might have to say about it," muttered her son. Without replying, perhaps without hearing, she continued.

"You have seen Tsuné-ko to-day—indeed, they called purposely that you young folks should have an opportunity of judging of each other. Shy though she is, as a girl should be, I have no doubt of *her* compliance. My son, what do you say?"

The moment, long foreseen, long dreaded, had come. Never any more after this would things be the same in that household. To neither parent had Ichiro ever hinted at his dreams, though perhaps his mother might have guessed at something fermenting in his mind. Sometimes he had talked of those dreams to his sisters in their rambles on the hillside, or in the long winter evenings sitting round the "kotatsu," toasting their legs at its warmth when their parents happened to be out.

The girls had listened, admiring but fearful. *Their* futures were mapped out: no dreams for them. But they liked to gaze at their big little brother as he boldly sketched his plans for his struggle with the world to which they would ever, save by hearsay, be strangers.

Now those sisters were both gone, and what little hope of support he might have expected from them was lost.

He drew a deep breath and nerved himself for the task. He spoke slowly in a low voice. The charcoal in the hibachi glowed more ruddily, sometimes spitting out a little shower of golden sparks.

"Mother, you know that until now I have always

obeyed my father and yourself, and I know and can never forget the love and care you have always given me. If now I could do what you ask, gladly and willingly would I do it. Please do not think me ungrateful, or imagine that I wish to set myself up against your authority; but this matter of marriage—please, I beg of you, do not force me.”

“What do you mean?” she broke in. “No need to speak of forcing yet. Have you any objection to your cousin? Good I know she is, and brought up by her parents as well as any girl could be. She’s obedient and healthy and hard-working, and though beauty is not a thing of great importance in a wife, yet I’m sure that Tsuné-ko is as well-looking as any girl in Boshu. What more could you want? Surely you haven’t been so foolish as to imagine yourself in love already with someone else?”

The thought brought a curious stab to this middle-aged woman’s heart. She had never kissed him since he was four, but he was her only son. She touched him suddenly on the shoulder—it was half a caress, but the boy did not notice it.

“Perhaps I have told you of this too abruptly; a little quiet thought will bring you round to our ideas. It is getting late and your father will be in shortly. Go and rest, my son, and think the matter over. We will talk of it again to-morrow.”

Ichiro waited patiently till she had finished, and then spoke urgently.

“No, mother, it’s no use my thinking of it; I have thought these things over long enough already, till I seem to be spending my life in dreams. You do not understand me. It is not only in this marriage

that I cannot do as you would like. Never yet have I told you of my plans, for I feared—I knew how you would both receive them. Please be patient with me for a moment.”

As the last words were spoken the “karakami” panels, which serve as doors and walls to a Japanese room, slid open, and the elder Koyama, coming in, stood for a moment behind the lad. Then he sat down on the tatami at his wife’s side, drawing his thin bamboo pipe from its embroidered case. He tapped the small metal bowl once or twice against the edge of the hibachi, opened his “tabakoire,” or pouch, gravely crammed a thimbleful into the pipe-bowl, lit it from the glowing charcoal, inhaled a whiff or two, and spoke.

He was a brown man, rather bent, shorter by nearly a head than his son. His eyes were small and stubborn and a little wearied, and his hands and clothes were clayey from the fields.

The boy had broken off short at his father’s entrance, and waited in respectful silence.

“What is this, Ichiro? What are these plans of which you speak, that would run so counter to your parents’ wishes?”

A feeling of relief, the relief of desperation, entered his son’s mind. Now at any rate the crisis was at hand; the whole matter could be thrashed out to some definite conclusion. He had dreaded another interview with his father on the morrow, when perhaps a reaction might have robbed him of his strength of purpose.

The two elders waited for him to begin. The old clock hanging on a wall-pillar ticked loudly in

the almost furnitureless room. In the gathering gloom their faces were hardly perceptible; the tiny glow from the older man's pipe-bowl shone, a pinpoint of light, and a faint radiance rose from the smouldering charcoal in the hibachi between them. From without came the shrill, piping whistle of an "amma," or blind massagist, as he tap-tapped his way painfully along the shingle road: then his long-drawn-out cry, scarcely less shrill,

"Amma-a-a—kami-shimo: go hyaku mon!"

In other lands, in distant climes, where hurrying crowds jostled in the street, or on the empty, tumbling sea, the "amma's" thin cry would sometimes recur to Ichiro's inward ear, and always it brought back to his mind with photographic clearness that tense scene in the darkening room, where the clock ticked on the wall, and the charcoal's glow scarce illumined the faces of his waiting parents.

He spoke with an earnest choice of words that impressed them in spite of themselves.

"Father, forgive me if I grieve or anger you by what I am about to say, but say it I must. My mother has told me of the plans that you, in your kindness, have made for me: that I should wed with my uncle's daughter, O Tsuné San, and afterwards take up my position as master of our house and farm. Truly I am sorry, more sorry than I can tell you, but I must beg you in this to let me follow the course which I know is the only one for me, to live the life for which alone I am fitted, without which I should be for ever miserable."

The boy paused. The man frowned, "Why, what life is this that you talk of so wildly?" he demanded.

Ichiro raised his face, and a note of stubbornness crept into his voice.

"I can't help it. I cannot stay in this village: I must go to the City—out into the world, to mix with men, and learn and struggle and conquer, and to develop whatever I have. . . ."

He broke off, unable to express the torrent of his feelings, and hopeless of making them understand. Then began more quietly:

"Many another young man would, I know, think it the best of fortune to settle down peacefully here in the comfortable home which our ancestors have passed on to us, and with so pretty and amiable a bride as you have planned for me. But I—to me it would be prison, it would be death, the death of all my hopes and wishes.

"Hatch a seagull's egg in your farm-yard, and no matter how tenderly you rear the nestling it must spread its wings, and sail out over the sea, or it will pine and die. I—I am like the gull; the open sky and the sea-waves are always calling me, and I must go."

"Ichiro, you are talking nonsense," returned his father shortly. "The seabird's egg is laid by the seabird. None such are we. Never in all our ancestry—never, that is——"

He hesitated, and Ichiro broke in,

"Ah, father, have you not told me about the wandering Samurai, the 'ronin' who was shipwrecked on our coast nearly a hundred years ago, voyaging from Ogasawarajima or some such distant part? How he waded ashore from the wreck holding his dead wife and his living child, and how the village

folk said the woman was not all of Japanese blood, for her eyes and hair were different; and how, when that child became a woman she wedded my mother's grandfather? Do you not think that perhaps some of——"

"Silence!" commanded the elder man in a stern voice, though he glanced half-curiously at his wife, and she at him: was it indeed the seabird's blood calling this young fledgling from its warm and earth-fast nest? "Silence. Do not try to blame your ancestors for your own foolish and disobedient thoughts. We have talked of this enough to-night. You know my wishes—our wishes. To a good son that should be enough."

"Go to bed, Ichiro," said his mother gently; "I will get a lamp."

She presently returned from the kitchen carrying a small brass lamp, none too well trimmed, and a paper "andon," or lantern, containing a little metal saucer of oil with two thin floating wicks.

"The electric light is still out of order," she murmured; "we must make do with these to-night."

"That is just the way with these Western novelties," commented the man, sourly, "when you get to depend on them they fail you. Fetch out the 'futon,' Natsu, I feel sleepy."

Natsu, his wife (after whom their daughter was named), opened the sliding door of a big cupboard in the wall, and drew out some half-dozen "futon"—thick, mattress-like quilts stuffed thickly with cottonwool. Half of these she piled, one above another, on the tatami mats, placing two pillows at the end, one small and bolster-like for the man,

the other of wood, six or eight inches high—this was her own.

In the next room she prepared a similar bed for her son, and handed him the lighted "andon."

"Ichiro, O yasumi nasai!"

"O yasumi nasai, Okkasan!"

Under their green mosquito-net the farmer and his wife lay rigid. He, secure from imagination and divided thoughts, slept like the cabbages in his fields, except that presently he began to snore. She, dreaming back nearly a score of years, fondled a man-child at her breast and wished that children would never grow up, to strain their mothers' hearts: yet gradually the feeling grew stronger that whatever her boy wanted must be right. Was it not through her line that this wild blood had descended to him? A faint resentment, something like enmity, began to stir in her against the secure, dull man, lying, snoring, only a few inches from her, her life's mate, yet incapable as the cabbages of comprehending more than the routine part of her soul.

The thin, chirping cry of a night-cicada trembled in the milky dark, as a half-moon lifted slowly over the sea. Ichiro, in the next room, slept and woke by turns, tossing uneasily and fighting all manner of troubles. But when his mother silently lifted a corner of his net and lay down by his side, the boy was smiling in his sleep, and she heard him whisper the name of a girl.

At dawn she rose, and went back to the other room.

CHAPTER VII

THE SHRINE FESTIVAL

FOR some days after affairs in the household went forward as usual. As though by tacit agreement all avoided mention of that subject which two, at least, carried next their hearts. Perhaps the farmer thought that the crisis was past, that his word had carried decision. Ichiro spent more than his wonted time over the work of their homestead, and wandered little afield.

His mother often looked secretly at him and sighed, for the lad's step was slow, his voice dull and listless. And then there came the day of the festival.

There is in Hojima a rather important shrine, and on its festal day (twice a year) young folk and old troop to the village from inland and along the coast; partly to worship, partly to buy at the booths in the shrine ground, lighted at night by flaring naphtha lamps, but mostly to gossip.

Natsu the younger of course was there, with her baby on her back. Many of her former schoolmates, too, with similar bundles—or soon expecting them.

An old woman came up to her.

"Well, Natsu San, how is the little one? What a fine bonnet you've made for him! And so your sister has just had another! That makes three, doesn't it?—all girls. Strange, always so many girls in your family!"

"But mine's a boy," pouted Natsu proudly.

"Yes, so it is," the old woman conceded. "And when is Ichiro going to marry? I thought I heard some talk——"

She waited, having really heard nothing, but hoping to hear.

"Well," answered Natsu slowly, "nothing has been settled about it yet. My brother doesn't quite know . . . he's very fond of reading, you know."

"And walking, too! I'm always meeting him. It must annoy your poor father. I saw him running after two girls the other day, flighty and City-like they seemed, and he could hardly stop to speak to me, he was in such a hurry."

"Oh, I don't think he cares much about girls," returned Natsu, unimpressed.

"I don't know. Old Tanaka's Kiku San saw him talking to one on Nokogiri slope not long ago. Has he any sweetheart, do you know?"

She was a good woman, but a notorious gossip, and Natsu had a streak of her father's caution. "No, I'm sure he hasn't. Come and see the acting," she replied.

They stopped at a cake stall, and Natsu bought a barley-sugar tortoise to appease the baby, who was beginning to whimper.

Opposite the shrine and at no great distance, on a wooden platform roughly put together, an ancient play was being staged by rustic amateurs. Two actors now held the boards, each wearing a paper mask. One showed a vapid, foolish face, with tiny mouth, bulged cheeks and narrow slits of eyes.

The other was undeniably a villain. His stealthy darts about the stage revealed it; probably a devil. The vapid one dangled and wrung its hands, danced tremulously, and fled off at one side, to reappear presently at the other.

Then came a fellow in a great hirsute mane, who pranced and roared. These all vanished, and were replaced by two old crones, quavering and mumbling: and so the fun went on, while the crowd craned their necks to watch. At last the actors formed up in a line and doffed their masks, to show the fresh and smiling, sweat-stained faces of young village bucks.

Naphtha lamps were lighting here and there, the glory of the western sky was dying out, and distant Fuji slowly faded from crimson through palest rose to neutral tints. The snowfield on its upper slope just below the eighth climbing-station, fast dwindling beneath hot July suns, caught a last beam of light and sparkled, a silver star, on the fan-shaped mass of warm shadow that was Fuji: sparkled, diminished, and went out. Grey mist, a shadowy nothingness, filled the empty sky, beneath which distant shore-lights, tiny pin-points of brilliance, became perceptible.

"So vanish," thought Ichiro "my hopes—if I give way now; emptiness and gloom, and the memory of mountains I shall never climb."

He turned a laggard step from the beach, and was caught up in the chattering stream of holiday-makers coming along from Katsuyama and further villages to the festival of the Saint.

Ichiro had no great fancy for these affairs, and rarely went to them; but his mood to-night asked for distraction, change, anything to rouse him from the dull conflict of his thoughts. So he walked with the stream.

An acquaintance greeted him—then another. Presently he was engaged in talk with three or four, late schoolmates of his own.

A baseball match was shortly to be played. Would Ichiro join them as pitcher? The other side were husky players, from a school near Chiba, capital of the Prefecture. Three of them had played in Tokyo. What glory if we could beat them!

For a moment the lad's immediate troubles passed a little from his mind. The joy of contest, the plaudits of his village world, the intimate work of hand and eye—thoughts of these shook him from his mood, and he joined eagerly in the talk.

By this time they had reached the broad walk leading to the shrine, with its rows of gaudy booths and the light-hearted country folk, prinked out in their best, jostling between. One of the lads touched another's arm and, pointing, said, "So Watanabé's musumé is back again from Tokyo! She looks quite the City 'ojosan' (young lady) now, doesn't she? What a change!"

Ichiro followed the pointing finger. A girl was standing near them, shadowed by a huge pine trunk that stretched dark branches overhead. She was glancing half-amused, perhaps a little scornfully, at the shifting throng, and from them to the players' antics on the stage. In one hand she held, as many of the promenaders did, a paper lantern.

He took one step towards her, then stopped. Watanabé? There were many families of that name in the village, but some instinct or some rapid mental process told him from which of these this girl was sprung. The now-aged man whose plans the lad's father once so innocently crossed had sent his daughter, the child of his old age, to be educated at a famous girls' school in Tokyo. And this must be she.

The old grudge, the old feud, still remained. To the present generation it was a tale, a legend at which folks, remembering, smiled when the two men, one well-nigh senile now, the other ageing fast, passed each other on the road with never a word spoken and averted faces. Ichiro remembered having seen the little wild-haired child playing, fearless and bare-limbed, among the boats and nets. Once he had romped with her, one warm September afternoon, on the bushy slopes beyond the far beach. Afterwards they had raced together to the waterside, and sculled a fishing-boat round and round the islet that juts out beneath the headland that separates their village from the next. Then an old, bent man, trudging beneath the weight of his nets, had stood still to watch them, and, recognising Ichiro, had spoken sharply to the other child, sternly bidding her go home at once.

Something of wrath, mumbled between those almost toothless jaws, had scared the lad. Silently the two rowed their boat to land and stepped out on the shingle. The old man grasped the child's hand and—she with mutinous backward glances and tear-brimmed eyes—they hurried off; Ichiro,

puzzled, was left staring after them on the beach.

He had questioned his mother about it when he got home, as they ate their evening meal, and she, with a smile at old things half-forgot, had told him all the tale. *They* could afford to smile, theirs had been the triumph. But what of wrath's old ashes, glowing yet in the remembering heart of a dull and disappointed man, moved the boy's fancy to sympathy?

So this was Watanabé's daughter! And she had remembered, though he had forgot—until that moment—their childish meeting. But now he knew why memory had vaguely stirred when those mirth-filled eyes had looked into his, on the turfy bank beneath Nokogiri's ridge.

That old story! It seemed more a link than a dividing line between them. Standing under the pine, she raised her eyes, and he stepped boldly up to her, glad of the darkness that concealed that hateful flush that, spite of his show of assurance, *would* warm his cheeks.

She looked up at him as he towered a foot or more above her on the sloping path; he felt certain that she had seen him, for she showed no trace of surprise as he bowed.

She stretched out her hand, and the lad took it, and held it a moment. Hand-shaking is not practised by the Japanese, though schoolboys do it sometimes in fun, and superior young men in Tokyo who feel it fine to ape Western ways. Never before had he shaken hands with a girl, certainly. The soft fingers pressed intimately his palm. It seemed a foolish action, yet delightful.

"Good evening, Miss Watanabé."

He spoke in English, with mock solemnity: and her faultless pronunciation as she returned the greeting (for V is a stumbling-block to most Japanese lips) put him to the blush once more.

"Good evening, Mr. Koyama."

Then, relapsing into their native tongue, she continued, smiling,

"So you have found out at last who I am. Aren't you astonished? Now I suppose we must not speak to each other any more. My father—how angry he was when he caught us playing together! But of course you have forgotten that time. Oh, how surprised you did look! Now I must go. Good-bye!"

"I have *not* forgotten that time," returned Ichiro in a low voice, "though you have changed so much that almost——"

"Ah, men always forget. But, how rude I am! I have not thanked you for lending us your umbrella the other day. I am sorry you had so much trouble—but really it was funny to see you chasing poor Hana-ko's sunshade along the street; and how wrathful you did look!"

Ichiro smiled at the teasing little figure. He was just beginning to hold his own in conversation with a woman.

"It was too bad of you to run off as you did. Do you know, I had determined to follow you and find out where you lived, only——"

"Only you met that dear old 'okamisan' with her vegetables, and found her so interesting that you forgot all about us."

"She was my mother's oldest friend," said Ichiro, in tones of dignified reproof.

"And I, your father's oldest enemy!"

"Please don't think that anyone in our house bothers about that foolish old story. Besides, the wrong, if any, was done by us. Yet surely your father does not carry on ill-will for such an ancient slight. It all happened before Meiji; it's like one of those stories that we sometimes see played in the theatre."

"If it had happened in Heian or Genroku it would be just the same. My father is one of those who never forget; and so am I. Remember, after this we must never meet—never."

Ichiro thought he caught a little plaintive sigh, but he bent sharply down to search her face, and found it gleaming with wicked mirth.

Some impulse that he could not understand moved him unwontedly, and as though she divined and feared it she walked a step or two away.

"Come, we have been chattering together long enough. People will begin to notice. See, two or three are looking at us now. Some kind old busybody will certainly carry it all to my father before nightfall to-morrow, and—oh, what a fuss there will be in our quiet home!"—and she lifted her hands in comical dismay.

"Tell me at least one thing before you go. I know that your name is Watanabé; but what do your father and your friends call you?"

"They call me—they call me Fujiyé," murmured the girl in a new tone of shyness that he somehow felt sure was this time not assumed.

"And how is it that you talk and act like a little lady of the cities, almost perhaps like one of those American or English girls that we read about in novels? The child that I played with once by the sea was a brown tomboy from a fisher's cottage, with bare legs and arms and shoulders."

"Hush!" she cried, putting two slender hands before her laughing eyes. "You said one question, but this is two. Still, you know, I have been for five years in Tokyo, where our mistresses, two of them at least, were Americans, and they taught us that a girl was just as good—oh, ever so much better, sometimes—as good as a young man. Now truly I must go: they will be looking for me. But"—she turned back with a swift smile—"it's my turn now to ask a question: really only one."

"What is it? I will tell you anything you may ask," said the lad eagerly.

"Then—why do you always blush so *very* red, every time we meet?"

The fiery colour dyed his whole face as if in answer to her teasing query, and without waiting for more definite enlightenment Fujiyé turned and disappeared in the throng of merrymakers, now thinning as the evening's amusement drew to a close. One by one the naphtha lamps were flickering out, the merchants packing up their unsold goods and taking their stalls to pieces.

The stage was empty and dark. Here and there parents were calling a laggard child. To the lively chatter of the crowd succeeded the gentle moaning of winds moving in the swaying pine-boughs, the

shrill and elfin cry of the mosquitoes—distinct now as the louder noises ceased.

Down the road the clatter of wooden "geta" became less and less frequent. His friends, amused and puzzled at Ichiro's reserve—they had been inclined to chaff him over his long talk with the daughter of his ancestral enemy—had bidden him good night; and still the lad stood there, or paced slowly to and fro, reviewing this new tangle in his wayward fate.

Old Watanabé had behaved, on occasions more than one or two, with open rudeness to the man who, so he held, had cheated him of his expected inheritance and bride: the more illogical our grievance, the more we hug it. Not unnaturally the other had resented this, so that, spite of what Ichiro had said, the sore was still open on both sides. Certainly, Koyama would look with no manner of favour on his enemy's child, supposing that—what? The lad was amazed at the path his own fancy was treading. Marriage? What did he really know of the girl? Besides, how could he marry and yet go through with his plans, those plans for which, even now, he was strengthening himself to brave his parents' anger?

Fujiyé! Of course he had known her name—that other girl had addressed her by it at the landing-stage—but he had wanted to hear it from her own lips. Charming name! what would his sister Natsu say could she know that he thought any mere girl's name charming!

So pondering, he went home and to bed; and forgot his woes—as youth can do.

CHAPTER VIII

GOOD COUNSEL THROWN AWAY

SLEEP sometimes has an alchemy that distils from our over-night doubts and perplexities a clear, glowing resolution. So Ichiro, now, awoke with a mind made up.

To stay in Hojima and marry his cousin seemed to-day doubly impossible. With the sweetness of an intimacy that last night's talk had revealed to him, with the tempting vision of the girl beside whom all the other maids he knew seemed dolls, mere lifeless images in clothes—with all this, forever so near him yet forever beyond his reach: that life, at any rate, was out of the question.

But to ask Fujiyé in marriage and, if she acceded to his wish (for Ichiro felt that, though she held him in some favour, hers was a mind beyond his plumbing, her real inclinations a puzzle to which he had no key), to wed her and brave his father's wrath, as she must hers—he would be stultifying those very plans about which he had but a few days before so loudly ranted; for moneyless and tradeless one cannot drag a wife over the world. Besides, his father might disinherit him—though this he doubted. At best and at any rate, it would be a soured and divided house to which he must bring his bride.

Then why not spread his wing at once and sail out into the open, soaring out of sight, away to the world that was calling, calling . . . ?

He rose and quickly dressed himself, walked to the door—and hesitated. Once more at least he must see her, if only to tell her of his plans and dreams. She, as he knew (or thought he knew) would look on them with far other eyes than those of the people of his place. Counsel, sympathy, belief, all these he might confidently expect.

He need not start on his travels to-day, but see her to-day he must. A few minutes' brisk walk took him into the village main street. He strode swiftly along, nodding absently to or passing a familiar word with those friends whom he chanced to meet.

At a corner he bumped into the same old dame who had stopped him once before, but this time he brushed past with hardly a word of greeting. She turned and stared after him, vaguely offended.

Drinking the clear morning air Ichiro strode on, heedless of village disapproval. Soon the cottage was in sight—so often passed by without a thought, now the casket that held all that made his pulses quicken; for at this moment the slender girl seemed the one thing desirable in life.

A little "chin" spaniel danced impatiently on the verandah, which ran along that side of the cottage that fronted on the sea. A cottage still, though the old man was reputed rich.

The lad stood and watched. No human form moved. The fishermen were up and off and out at sea, the old master perhaps within (his wife, as I have said, was dead), but save for the dog nothing of life appeared. Even the breezes slept that morning; the pine-trees on the slope above might have been painted with a sepia brush upon the flawless blue of

the sky. Morning-glory tendrils, the "asagao" that with broad-leaved, fragrant lotus, "hasu-no-hana," shares the floral honours of July, twined and hung motionless from the cross-bar above the well.

He stood with mind divided, disappointed, though after all his chance of seeing her had been a doubtful one. He walked on a hundred yards or so, then retraced his steps. Almost he decided to go up boldly and face whatever unfriendly reception he might meet, should others be at home. No, no good in that. He feared the angry mask of that soured and mumbling old man. And to think that she, compact of mirth and youth and spring, was his very daughter!

He turned away, the life all gone from his step, and strolled towards the sea. A tangled thicket, fragrant with honeysuckle, shut off the sand, giving passage through one narrow tunnel-like gap, beyond which, barely above high-water mark, was a big boulder of soft stone.

Creeping through the tunnel, he came upon her suddenly. She sat on another smaller rock, sketching. Glancing up ever and again at the cedar-capped headland which, with its projecting islet, bounded the bay, she plied her brush industriously, absorbed in her work, her brow wrinkled in tiny lines as though but half satisfied with the results.

His footfall silent on the sand, Ichiro approached unnoticed and bent over her.

"Fujiyé San!"

Now it was the maiden's turn to start and blush. She sprang up, her sketch-book dropping from her lap.

He stooped to pick it up. It had fallen at another page—on it, in pencilled outline, a young man's face, very haughty, drawn with no little skill. Ichiro looked at it jealously a moment—and realised that it was his own.

Smiling, he turned the sketch toward her. Swift waves of colour swept her cheeks and neck. Ichiro was indeed fully avenged of that teasing query overnight. But the crimson flush heightened her beauty, and any thought of triumph was lost in deeper feeling.

She quickly recovered herself.

"Good morning, Koyama San. Oh, how you startled me! I thought it was a thief. Please do not rob me of my pictures."

She held out a hand for the book. Ichiro coolly detached the page on which she had been working; the sketch was all-but finished.

"This I am going to keep for my 'com-mishun,'" he replied, restoring the other drawings to their owner.

"Do you like it? Is it good?" she demanded with childlike eagerness. "Stay, give it me a moment; I must do one thing more to it."

And with a few apt touches the picture was completed.

Before, it had shown but sea and sky and beach, headland and isle—a little island which rose, a blunt, steep-sided pyramid or cone covered with thick grass, small pine-trees and a few straggling bushes, separated from the craggy shore by a deep gut some thirty feet in width. But now a little boat was by the shore, one small child upright in its stern, another—

a boy—wading through the shallow water to the land. Underneath she wrote in English, "Childhood's days were happy days."

"Now you may keep it—lest you forget again," she laughed.

He looked long at it, then placed it in the bosom of his kimono.

No answering smile lit his face as he spoke.

"Fujiyé, I have come to say good-bye."

"Good-bye? What do you mean? You are not going away?"

"Yes, I am going away."

"But why? Where? I have vexed you, have I?"

Ichiro had never seen her in so grave a mood.

"No, I am not vexed, least of all by you: but—I must go. I came this way on purpose this morning to see you, and, finding the house empty, feared I had missed you. I came to tell you of my plans, to ask you what you think."

She took him by the arm and pointed to a little skiff that lay stranded, half in and half above the water.

"Help me to push her afloat."

Silently launching her, they both got in and put off from shore as, boy and girl, they had done once years ago. Fujiyé sculled the boat out to and beyond the islet, where they were screened from observation of shore travellers. Then she sat down in the stern, chin between her palms, facing him, and broke the silence.

"Now tell me all about it."

He paused a little, to disentangle and arrange his thoughts.

"Fujiyé, listen while I try to explain all that is in my heart. You know we have met already only two or three times, yet I feel that you can understand me where all the others, even my sisters, think me an idle dreamer.

"For years I have longed to break away from this dull village life and go out among men, to see the world, to take my share in the struggles, the pains and the joys that men know mixing with other men—to widen my mind, to get knowledge of good and evil. Here everything is small and fixed and bounded—yesterday like to-day, and to-morrow like yesterday. The cucumbers in my father's fields live as vividly as we do. I can't drag on this existence. The sea calls me, and the lands beyond the sea. My thoughts—no, I cannot explain them properly: but you do understand, don't you?"

The lad spoke earnestly, seeking expression, sometimes clothing his thoughts in Western phrases culled from those translations of foreign writers in which he loved to delve. Had Fujiyé expected to hear something different? She listened, nodding wisely now and then, and when he paused she broke in:

"Your parents—what do they think?"

"You may guess what they think. They think me mad, a foolish boy whose head is turned with too much reading. And besides—there is something else. I heard, only a few days ago——"

"What, then?"

"They want me to marry my cousin, O Tsuné, and settle down as master of the house, when my father retires from active work."

"So?" Fujiyé glanced quickly at him as she uttered the little exclamation, then turned her face seaward and said nothing for a while.

"Tell me now what you think I should do."

"Do you think you could love your cousin?"

"Tsuné-ko? I like her, she seems a nice, gentle little girl; but I had scarcely seen her until last week."

"You had scarcely seen *me* until last week. Is she pretty?"

"Yes, I think so; she is a well-looking girl enough."

"Very well. Your difficulties are solved; take the 'ro,' will you, and scull the boat ashore. You have my advice. Go home and marry the girl—and be happy. You will soon forget your dreams."

Ichiro felt mystified and hurt. He could not understand her tone. This was not what he had expected.

"What is the matter? You are angry. What have I said to make you so?"

"No, not angry, only—I'm a very changeable creature, Ichiro. Now I've changed my mind already. Let's land on the island. Come."

Hand in hand they stepped ashore, fastening the boat to a tree-stump, and found a soft and shaded resting-place beneath a great bush of "ajisai"—hydrangea.

The air quivered and danced in the heat, for the sun hung now right overhead, a great blinding ball in the unclouded sky. Heat-mists shrouded the opposite shores. The smooth sea surface, reflecting

both glare and blue, moved gently to some far-off swell, unbroken save where a "bora," the grey mullet, flung itself aloft into the air, perhaps in sheer joy of living, perhaps to escape hungry jaws beneath—to fall again with a silvery splash and a ring of widening ripples. White seagulls skimmed on listless wings, turning and wheeling, waiting for the retreating tide to uncover their dinner among the rocks.

Above the young couple, in the "ajisai" bush, a "semi" shrilled with loud, ear-piercing, persistent note, till another took it up from a near-by cedar, and another, and another, the further ones scarcely audible in the distance, and all the air was full of the fying of their music, the essential music of Japanese midsummer days.

"Do they have 'semi' in England, I wonder?" said Ichiro, following the line of his reverie.

"I think so. The dictionary calls it 'cicada' you know."

"Yes, I remember. Tell me, Fujiyé, how is it that you know so much? Why is it that, though you are two years at least younger than myself (I know, because I asked one of our neighbours), yet you seem grown-up, a woman, and, somehow, full of knowledge of the world, while I seem but a boy beside you?"

She plucked absently at a little patch of fragrant wild pinks, throwing the flower-heads one by one into the water. Each wavelet, retreating, drew them out, then flung them back on shore. When she spoke she still looked out over the sea.

"Years, Ichiro, do not always mean experience,

and knowledge may come without many years. Perhaps you know—I think I told you—that my father sent me, when still a child, to be educated in Tokyo. He loves me, loves me dearly, and has been the kindest of fathers, though you may think him stern and rough to others, even to his own fishermen—never to me. He wanted me to have the best of everything, to be a lady. So I went. My life at school was very happy. The teachers were, oh, so kind. I was frightened of the foreign ones at first—they were so straight and tall and had such big noses, and eyes like blue china! But no mother could have been kinder (I hardly knew my mother, you know; she died when I was ever so little) and they treated me almost as if I had been their own child."

"And did all the girls learn English as well as you have done?"

"No-o: not all of us, perhaps. But among them were a few who were 'ai-no-ko', only half Japanese—their fathers English or American—and one had a French mother. One of these was my especial 'chum,' and I spent several holidays at her house. We were like sisters. Her father was a merchant—he had some business in Yokohama. The mother was a nice quiet woman—she must have been quite pretty when young. I think, perhaps, a geisha or something like that: of course I never asked."

"Did they talk English at home?"

"Always. There were three sisters, my friend being the youngest. Her name was Mirie; often some foreign friends, girls, and sometimes young

men too, came in to see them, and they would sing or play the violin or piano. It was 'jolly.' I can play the violin, you know."

"What is 'jolly'?"

"Oh—nice, pleasant, interesting."

"I suppose you got so into the habit of talking English that now you can't help bringing English words into your conversation!"

"Don't be silly and sarcastic. Sometimes a word like that gives your meaning when you can't find a Japanese word that will just do instead. Well, do you want me to stop?"

"No, please go on. And were there only the three sisters in the family?"

"No, two brothers as well."

"Children?"

"One of them was over twenty. He was in his father's office, in the Tokyo branch of it."

"Did you see much of him? Was he 'jolly' too?"

"Very jolly, and quite handsome. He wrote poetry—in English, of course—and wore 'hanamegané'—eye-glasses."

"Did he write poetry for you?"

"No. He was engaged to another 'ai-no-ko'—such a pretty girl! But—one of his friends did."

"Oh, indeed! And who was this friend?"

"He was a student in the Tokyo University, in the Law Course. His father was a silk-merchant, very wealthy."

"And was he 'jolly' and handsome, too?"

Ichiro spoke in a tone of boyish jealousy. She looked slyly towards him for a moment; then her

mood changed, her eyes sought the distant waters, and she sighed.

"Most people said that he was. I think my friend liked him very much; but he was a wild young man."

"And did *you* like him?"

The boy's tone was now fierce and insistent, but she answered calmly,

"Oh yes, I liked him well enough. Why not? But he used to anger his parents, and sometimes there were such scenes at his home! They said—perhaps it was true—that he had sweethearts: more than one. And—something happened—I can't tell you, but—our girls, some of them, are so weak, so foolish. His father said——"

"Tell me, did he ever talk of love to you?"

"Please, Ichiro, don't look so hot, or I shall splash water all over you. Look, here is a nice big shell to throw it with. Yes, he—he asked me to marry him."

"And why didn't you, if he was so 'jolly' and handsome and wealthy and interesting—quite like a god, in fact?"

"Oh, I don't know. I didn't want to marry. Besides, his folk would not have welcomed a fisherman's girl for a daughter-in-law."

"Oh, that was the reason! Well, girls of much lower rank than yours have married counts and barons. Why don't you go back to him?"

"Look here, Ichiro, if you are foolish I shall go straight away. You asked me of my school-days, and I have told you. Now about yourself. What are your plans for beginning your 'struggle for

existence,' if you are determined not to live, as you might do, without struggling?"

Ichiro, though still unsatisfied, followed her change of topic.

"Well, I intend at first to go to some school in Tokyo to better my knowledge. My father will be angry, very angry, I'm afraid, but still I don't think he will cut me off altogether. Perhaps he will allow me some money. If not, I will work part of the day for my living—perhaps as teacher in some Common School. I will study only a few subjects—English especially. Then, after passing my examinations, I may get a place with some firm in Yokohama, or perhaps in Kobe. Then—oh, then, when I have saved a little money, I will go abroad—to America, I think. There, by hard work, I will make a place for myself, and afterwards—England, France, Germany—I will see them all."

"And marry some pretty French girl, or some tall American?"

"Marry? Oh—I don't know. Why should I think of marriage now? Many foreigners don't marry till they are thirty-five or forty, even. Marriage early hinders a man. Perhaps I might marry when I return to settle in Japan."

"To a woman of thirty-three or thirty-eight?"

"Why, no. A woman should marry before—oh, twenty, at the latest," returned the boy, with ardent gaze on the maid of seventeen summers.

"Then your future bride is still at her mother's breast—or perhaps waiting to be born," she answered laughing. "How will she like a husband twice her age?"

Fujiyé had listened with an indulgent, almost maternal smile to her companion's out-pouring. Now she sat up and spoke more seriously.

"Listen, Ichiro, in your turn. These dreams of yours are noble dreams, as a young man's should be; but if you try to realise them I fear they are only too likely to prove but ashes and dust. I *know*. I have seen much of life in Tokyo—and not only there; did I tell you that last summer I visited Hong-kong and Singapore with my friend and her family? Many thousands of young men have set out as you intend to do, strong in purpose and full of hope—and struggled, struggled fruitlessly against this hard old world, till at last, in many cases, they have gone down and down, losing their fine ideals, dragging out unworthy or dishonoured lives, sinking in the mud of that world that they had started out to conquer. Life is a strong wrestler, Ichiro, and few who throw him the challenge can stand against him. Here in this village you have your place already made for you. There, outside, you may spend a lifetime trying to cut a few foot-holds in the steep upward path that leads to fame and fortune. Without money or influence your chances of success are small indeed. Will you throw away the substance that you have for such a doubtful shadow?"

"The many fail, but not all," replied he, disheartened a little in spite of himself at these words that were so unlike what he had expected, this gloomy prophecy that seemed so incongruous from those bright young lips.

"Not all, no; but the chances against you are

too great. You have now a sure position in life. Do not be foolish enough to leap from it into the dark."

"Then, what would you advise me to do?"

"Go to your father and tell him that you are ready to take your place in the home as he has asked. Work hard and improve the land. You will still have ample time for books. Tokyo is not so far distant—a few hours away by steamer. You can go and see the city when village life wearies you. Follow your language-studies within doors, take in some English newspaper that will give you tidings of the world. It is not needful to go abroad in order to keep up with the spirit of our times."

"And marry my cousin Tsuné-ko?"

"Ah, well, for that you must do as your heart and inclinations tell you. If you give in to your parents over one wish, perhaps they will not insist on the other. But there I cannot advise you."

The last sentence was spoken in less certain tones, and the fair sage flushed a little as she uttered them. But the lad answered her resolutely.

"No, Fujiyé, you are wrong. If I fail, I fail; but at least I will enter for the race. Only the coward fears to do that. I cannot take your advice. Tell me, did you think I should, when you advised me so?"

"No," she returned composedly, "I felt sure that you would not. Now we must go back. It is late—and I have had nothing since breakfast—nor you either, I suppose."

For a few minutes they continued to sit side-by-side on the turf, each absorbed in thought. Then

Ichiro drew a deep breath, as though clinching some resolution, and rose to his feet.

The restful charm of the place held him, and as his eye met Fujiyé's she seemed to divine his thought.

"Isn't this lovely? I call it the Fairies' Isle—sometimes I come and sit here for hours, just in this spot, fishing or reading or simply dreaming to myself. Here on this side no one can see you except the fishermen in their boats. It must belong to someone, I suppose, but I always like to imagine it my own kingdom. Look at that lizard! Keep still"—and she laid slender brown fingers on his wrist. "Isn't he a beauty? Purple and blue and crimson—and how he loves the hot sunshine! I think he must be one of the fairies, just come here to listen to us. 'Fairies'—that's another English word: I don't think we have any that quite means the same as that. Ah, now he's gone into that cranny in the rock. I suppose he's gone to tell the others that two mortals are trespassing on their sacred domain. I wonder if he knows how lovely it is."

"Lovely indeed! When shall I see it again? How I wish——" He stifled another sigh, and bent down to loosen the boat's rope from the stump.

In silence they made for the beach, in silence landed, turned to each other, and clasped hands.

"Good-bye, Ichiro. When do you mean to start?"

"As soon as possible: to-morrow, perhaps."

"Then I shall not see you again before?"

"No. Oh, Fujiyé, if you could come with me!

Or if I could—but, no I must live my life. Good-bye!"

They turned and parted. He walked swiftly back towards the village; she stood still, looking after him.

CHAPTER IX

ICHIRO COMES TO TOWN

A DRIZZLING rain was falling out of a dull and misty void as Ichiro sat, half-sheltered by the canvas awning, upon the wicker "kori" that contained his clothes and books, while the little steamer put fussily away from shore on her homeward voyage. It was not much after seven in the morning.

He felt chilled and depressed. On reaching home, two days before, after his long talk on the island, he had told his parents of his firm determination.

Their reception of the news had not been so stormy as he had feared. His father had been in a good mood—some business matter had turned out better than expected. He heard the boy in silence, and though he replied sadly there was no outburst of wrath. If the boy was set on going, let him go; but he must look to himself for resources. He would find out soon enough his mistake, and return, a wiser man, to his parental home.

His mother packed his "kori," putting in some cakes, dried persimmons and other home-made dainties, some of them salted with her tears. He might have stayed at least till Bon, the Festival of Dead Ancestors, which falls, by the old-time rural calendar, in August, though city folk keep it a month earlier.

But Ichiro's mind was fixed. He feared delay, foreseeing vaguely some influence that might shake his plans.

His father gave him fifty yen, placing it in his hand at starting, and the lad's heart warmed as he felt that the gift implied more than the man's pride allowed him to express. And, shouldering his "kori," he strode out on the long trail that was to lead to the land of his dreams.

Drearly he gazed at the receding shores. Other passengers around him were settling down to the voyage—the first, perhaps, for many of them; Ichiro had made it with his father twice, and once on a school treat, but never alone.

The little island hardly showed against the coast, but he strained his eyes in that direction. Nokogiri's headland grew less and less, as they crossed the Bay to the Miura side. Here they put in at Yokosuka, and he looked with wakening interest at the fine ships-of-war that lay in harbour, some salved from Russia's Armada—ready, when the moment should come, to slip from cover and cross the dividing waters to challenge or repulse another foe.

They neared the jetty, the ship heeling dangerously as the passengers hurried to one side; there was a rushing along the gangway, dumping of boxes, shouts and fishy smells. Soon they were off again, out and past Yokohama, which to Ichiro was a piece of foreign land. Then the Bay narrowed, and they entered the mouth of the Sumida river. Picking her way, with no bad seamanship, among puffing tugs and sailing vessels little and big, the *Tokai*

Maru dropped anchor in the pool, and the passengers were ferried over to the landing-stage in flat barges. Ichiro had come to town.

He walked through the steamboat office and was in the street. Crossing one of the canal bridges, a short walk through a narrow, busy side-road brought him to the car-line close to the Shintomiza, oldest theatre in the capital.

Never had he felt so rustic. Shame and awkwardness grew on him. The self-sufficiency of the village buck, the young master of a fine homestead and cock of the shore-side walk, shrivelled and vanished. Every one whom he met fitted in so nicely with the wide thoroughfare and pretentious buildings, and he thought they looked at him with a sort of enquiring scorn—so *this* is the man who has come here to do great things in the city, is it?

The sun was shining now, the sky cloudless, roadway and sidewalk all asteam. With a rattle and clang of gongs a car swept by him—then another; he read the names over their fronts, various districts of the city. Presently he would live in one of those districts; from a mere name it would become a home. He carried a letter to the owner of a certain “geshi-kuya” in Kanda, where perhaps he would stay for awhile. Now he was in Ginza—Silver Street, the grandest street in Japan.

Bewildered by the clatter and movement, the rapid come-and-go of folks and vehicles, Ichiro stopped outside a large corner-shop, a tailor's, and looked with amusement and awe at the fine suits that clad the grave and stately dummies behind the

plate-glass. Foreign clothes, of a sort, he had seen before, but here he recognised an Art.

Then a big restaurant just opposite caught his eye. The swinging doors moved continuously. Young men in students' costume passed in and out. Some of the college badges were familiar, for most Tokyo schools were represented among the summer visitors to Hojima.

Those two youths arm-in-arm were from the Keio: one carried a notebook, half-open, in his hand: and he, as the couple stepped out on to the foot-path, suddenly turned and darted back through the yet-moving door. His friend looked round as if to follow him, then with a loud laugh jumped on a passing car. Had the other returned for one more drink, wondered Ichiro, or was it an idea which he wished to capture and write down before it should escape? Then half-a-dozen clerks, sauntering in a group, arguing noisily and laughing, passed along in; then a foreigner, a tall man, with eye-glasses and a stoop.

Crossing the road Ichiro timidly pushed against the door and entered. He sat down at a table near the window, half-hidden by a screen. Presently a waitress, soberly dressed but with face pallid with powder and heavily blacked eyebrows, came to take his orders.

He asked for draught beer. She soon brought it, iced and frothing, and set it on the little table; then, with a long appraising glance, she seated herself opposite to him. The rush of customers had slackened for a time.

"Do you want anything to eat?" she began.

No—Ichiro was not hungry, except for novelty; but he was grimly determined not to let the conversation lapse. Clenching his hands beneath the table, he remarked lightly:

"Very hot to-day, isn't it? Is it always so hot in Tokyo at this time of year?"

"Ah, I thought you were a new-comer," she laughed; "how long have you been here?"

"Well, only about half-an-hour," he returned, laughing too. "Do I look so very 'inakkappei'—so very countrified, then?"

"No—at least, not very; anyway, it won't last long. In a month's time no one will be able to tell you from 'Edokko', Tokyo-born. I come from the country, too. Do I look like it?"

Ichiro looked with his honest eyes into her face, pretty and refined beneath all its artificial adornment.

He felt that it was a mask, perhaps: what lay behind he could not guess—but countrified it certainly was not. Rather it might have been the essence of all that City life implied.

"How long have *you* been in the city?" he asked in turn.

"Six months—a year—I forget: one loses count here."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Izumo—hundreds of miles from Ginza. And you?"

"Oh, I'm only from across the Bay—Boshu, you know. I came over by steamer this morning."

"Why?"

"What do you mean? Perhaps I came just to spend a few days here and then go back."

"No, you didn't; you know that's not true. You've come to live—and learn—here, like the rest of us."

"How do you know?" asked Ichiro, amused and yet curiously stirred by something in her tone.

"I know—by your face. We all come here, the boys and girls; I sometimes think all the young people in Tokyo must have come from the country at first. And we learn—whether we want to learn or not."

"What did you learn?"

She drew a packet of "shikishima" from her sleeve pocket, and passed the cigarettes across to the boy. "I suppose you have learnt at least to smoke in Boshu?" she asked teasingly, as she held a match for him.

"Why, yes; but I've never smoked much," he returned frankly. "But you haven't answered my question yet."

Putting a cigarette between her "beni"-tinted lips, the girl bent her face up toward his.

"Give me a light from yours, please,"—for a moment her eyes, those eyes in which all City life seemed mirrored, were close to his own, and he breathed the perfume of her hair. Then she leaned back and exhaled slowly.

"What was your question?"

"What have you been learning in Tokyo?"

"Tell me your name," she asked abruptly.

"Koyama Ichiro," he answered, like a schoolboy, too surprised to hesitate or resent her question.

"And shall I teach you, Ichiro San, all that I have learnt in Tokyo? You would make, oh, such a nice

pupil—and perhaps there are worse teachers than I. But I think you will learn quickly enough without my help.”

Without explaining her words the girl rose suddenly and walked away to attend to another customer who had just entered. Ichiro finished his beer, put a twenty-sen coin on the table, and went out into the glare of the afternoon sun.

It was now a little after three o'clock. Foot traffic had slackened, but the tram-cars were as packed as ever. Whither now? The Kanda boarding-house might wait, for the boy was of a mind to see more of this strange and busy world. Meanwhile his “kori” was a weighty problem—and stamped him too, as unmistakably a new arrival.

After a little debate he took out a roll of paper from his sleeve, scribbled in pencil a hasty note to his intended landlady and, hailing a passing ricksha-man, entrusted note and basket to his care—not without inward misgivings, for were not City folk proverbially rogues?

He told the man that he would follow later on foot. The latter asked him if he knew his road to Kanda, and charged him for double the distance on learning that he did not.

Little recked Ichiro. He strode along, freed of his burden, and slightly cheered by his modest but unaccustomed drink.

Heat rose in waves from the gritty pavement and was reflected from the walls. Clerks in Western dress but carrying fans instead of canes walked by to their offices, collars wilting and neat canvas foot-gear begrimed.

A woman, richly gowned, was descending from her carriage outside the big jeweller's near Owari-cho cross-roads; she glanced at Ichiro, as he passed. Perspiration and dust made streaks of brown and white down her powdered cheeks. Catching sight of herself in the plate-glass window, she produced a book of papier-poudre from the fold of her obi and vigorously scrubbed cheeks and brow, while the grey-haired shopman stood patiently waiting.

Without intending to pry into the secrets of a lady's toilet, Ichiro, who had paused a moment to admire the glittering brilliants in the window, was half-curiously watching her. She looked up, their eyes met.

His six foot of healthy manhood held her gaze. The undoubted beauty and refinement still marking her, though part effaced by the coarsening lines and unhealthy tint that told of self-indulgence and too easy living, quickened his fancy.

A week, perhaps a day, ago, his eyes would have shrunk diffidently from the contest; now they sought to challenge hers. A sudden impulse moved him that his should not be the first to fall.

A fleeting smile—half disdain, half, perhaps, approval—curved her full lips. She turned her head and entered the shop, and Ichiro saw her no more.

The tiny incident marked another step along the road that the lad was treading: the road to knowledge of the world and of himself.

CHAPTER X

GLAMOUR OF STREETS

GRADUALLY the sun sank westward and a golden haze replaced the noontide glare. Here and there shop windows were lighting up. In the narrower streets women stood chatting in doorways, fanning themselves, their "yukata," the loose cotton kimono donned after the bath, showing a generous display of neck and bosom. Children darted to and fro across the roadway, filling the dusk with their light-hearted laughter.

Here a little knot of them were gathered round an old man whose stock-in-trade was a score or more of tiny cages made of rushes, and in each cage a solitary insect of the cicada tribe poured forth its shrill music on the evening air. "Poor prisoners," thought Ichiro, "they, too, are from the country; but they have come here into captivity and against their will. I am here in search of freedom; will the city ever seem a prison to me, I wonder!"

Further on, and for some distance, the side of the street was lined with stalls, where doubtfully genuine "curios" and more useful articles such as picture-frames and clothes-pegs, were on sale. Two ladies, one short, fat, and golden-haired, the other tall, sallow and willowy, were haggling with the stallman over a brass bowl. In all his years Ichiro had never heard English spoken by a "foreigner,"

and as he lingered and lent an attentive ear they pounced on him for help; but he could make nothing of their questions, till at last it dawned on him that they thought they were speaking Japanese; and when they turned away from him for a moment he basely hurried off.

Further on the stalls were laden with plants in pots or with roots wrapped about in straw; European flowering-plants for the garden, pansies and zinnias, among small dwarfed trees curiously gnarled and tortured—pine and pomegranate, cedar and maple, some in pots of choice and costly ware. The merchant who drowsed on the bench behind them would sometimes take a great mouthful of water from the earthen vessel at his side and spray it out fanways from between his shut lips to refresh the drooping leaves.

There was great cheapening and bargaining over the purchase of these. A passer-by would fancy, perhaps, the graceful shape of a pine-tree in an old brown crock, and ask the price. The merchant, rolling a speculative eye from merchandise to customer, would name five yen. This would be treated as a burst of humour, and the prospective buyer might make an offer, perhaps, of fifty sen—one-tenth the price demanded. After expressing and recovering from his indignation at the mention of so paltry a sum, the dealer would generously waive a half of his demand: further chaffering. Finally the thing might change hands at a yen or less—or perhaps the deal would fall through and the customer pass on. To the dealer it seemed a matter of little moment whether his wares were

sold or not. The clean breath of leaves and flowers and damp earth freshened the streets, and brought back memories of hill-sides, which stayed with Ichiro as he passed beyond the stalls.

The throng thickened as the darkness fell. Sonorous and echoing, thousands of wooden geta clanged along hard pavements or pebble-made roadways. The silken swish of gay kimonos, as young girls fresh from the bath passed him in groups of three or four, laughing and chattering and exchanging greetings with friends whom they chanced to meet; the faint perfume from their hair and skin, mixed with the stronger smell issuing from the doors of little cook-shops where "tempura," eels-and-rice and a score of other dainties tempted the appetite, and with the honey-sweet fragrance of burning cedar-wood heating a thousand baths; the alternate light and shade from illuminated shop-fronts and dark doorways, the swift patter and rush of rickshas darting past with their swinging lanterns gleaming on the bare sweating backs of the lithe pullers; shouting of newsboys and the vague, confused murmur rising from all the myriad streets of the great city and forming a background to the nearer noises; these all blended in the lad's mind to produce a sort of mild intoxication, and he sauntered on, careless of time and of his destination.

A sudden turn brought him out on the river front, where electric cars run noisily beside the dark, rushing tide of the Sumida. Beyond it, the factory chimneys of Honjo and Fukugawa belched smoke into the evening sky, and a thousand lights twinkled in the water below, shimmeringly reflected from

lights in boats and tugs and tea-house windows, behind which geisha twanged samisens. Further along a great iron structure reared itself against the sunset after-glow, and beneath it the fishermen slid downstream in the same little craft that they had used for a score of centuries—Ryogoku Bridge, famed (not, indeed, the present fabric—a thing of yesterday, but its more graceful wooden predecessors) in song and tale and picture.

“Nagai, nagai,
Ryogoku-bashi nagai—”

“Long, long is Ryogoku Bridge! How pleasant it is to go and cool one’s-self on the long bridge, watching the children go by in pleasure-boats, listening to the music.”

So sing the young folks at their play, as they have sung for centuries.

Ichiro stood for a while on the bridge and looked down into the river swirling black and silvery below: rushing away endlessly in eddying currents, away to the Bay, out to the sea. “Perhaps,” he thought, “some drops of water now flowing beneath my feet are destined, mingled with the bitter brine, to murmur by those shores on which, so many years ago” (for time is long to the young) “I played as a boy; to beat against that little island where—ah, Fujiyé, where you and I were gazing side-by-side across to the far countries of my visions, while semi shrilled in the hydrangea bushes and the gulls screamed over the falling tide.”

Ichiro was beginning already to feel home-sick. Down the river at Reiganjima the night packet

would soon be putting out to cross the Bay—so ran his thoughts: a few hours at the most, and he could——

He started and shook himself angrily, with so sudden a movement that he collided with a passing "tofu"-seller, whose wares, in small trays pendant from the bamboo pole over his shoulders, were all-but upset; and a middle-aged couple returning from a jaunt each laden with a child, dodging the swinging merchandise, dived into a fat-faced wrestler hurrying to the Amphitheatre beyond the bridge. A policeman on the other side-walk, whose roving eye had noted the youth as he leaned over the parapet, now strode across, little book in hand, scenting trouble. He decided the young man must be a socialist.

"Who are you, where are you going, and why are you loitering here?"

Ichiro, recalled so suddenly from the past and future to the present, rubbed his bewildered brow, and the "junsu" now decided that he must have been drinking.

A crowd began to gather; the wrestler, forgetting his haste, standing still to gape at this tall country youth.

"Answer me at once or come with me to the police station!"

"I'm not doing anything. I only came to Tokyo this morning. I was just looking at the river and thinking."

"Thinking!" This seemed terribly suspicious to the policeman. "You'll think yourself into trouble shortly if you're not careful. Where do you live?"

"I'm going to live somewhere in Kanda: I haven't been there yet."

"Kanda? This isn't the road for Kanda. Tell me the address—and your name."

Meekly he told him: his answers were duly jotted down, and with a parting admonition the policeman walked stiffly back to his box.

The crowd dissolved, the current flowed on, back and forth over the bridge (though underneath it flowed for ever but one way) and Ichiro turned to retrace his steps. He found the wrestler walking by his side.

"Surely so tall and brawny a lad as you must have come to join us. Isn't that so? Come, stroll up to my lodgings, they are quite close, and let me introduce you to our patron. I can assure you of a welcome, he's always on the look-out for new blood, and it isn't often we come across such a hefty young fellow as you. Come along!"

Ichiro smiled and shook his head. "Many thanks, you're very kind, but I'm going to search for fortune in another way."

"Well, if I can't persuade you," said the fat man. "But I think you're rather a fool. Still, I'll give you my card. If you fail in your way perhaps you'll be glad to remember mine."

"If? Perhaps! Thanks, all the same," and he walked on, leaving the wrestler gazing after him with disappointment on his heavy features.

In due time the young man reached the boarding-house, offered his credentials, and met with a hearty welcome, for the master and mistress had come from his own village.

His luggage had preceded him by some hours. One room was vacant, on the first floor—small, of four-and-a-half mats only (one mat measures six feet by three), but ample for himself and his possessions.

After chatting for awhile—his hostess and host were eager for the latest Hojima news—he was led upstairs by a small maid, daughter of the house, who showed him to his room. He flung himself full-length on the soft mats, tired out with the day's adventure.

Presently the girl re-appeared, carrying his supper—soup, pickles, some roast salt fish, and the inevitable rice. He roused himself to eat, and found his appetite in no need of sharpening, while the girl nodded over the rice-tub, and the mosquitoes droned in the air. From without, the noises of the city came faintly through the half-closed shutters.

Then she spread his futons on the floor, fixed the "kaya," the green mosquito-net, above them, collected the used supper-bowls, fastened the "amado" shutters, and softly wished him good night. And within a very few minutes Ichiro was rocking gently in a little boat beside the Fairies' Isle.

CHAPTER XI

INTRODUCTION TO A MISTRESS

BRIGHT sunshine and the unaccustomed noises of a city already in the full tide of its morning activities aroused the sleeper.

For a little, still poised on the threshold of dreams, he lay luxuriously thrilled with a vague, pleasant sensation of novelty, of untasted life immediately ahead of him, a new world of which he had become already an inmate. The village across the Bay seemed remote: it was some other lad who had grown up and rebelled there. The future was still nebulous—it was his to shape.

Then, waking a little more, he noted the various sounds that stood out from the welter of noise. That grinding roar, irregularly growing and decreasing, must be the cars, carrying their millions to work or pleasure, to pore over books in packed schoolrooms, to sweat in close and clamorous factories, to sit in dusty offices amid the clatter of typewriters, to tramp the streets in search of occupation, to visit friends and spend the day in idle chat, to entrain from some suburban station and whirl away between quiet rice-fields and sleepy villages, between rows of patient pine-trees grey with age-long dust, between terraced hills rising on either hand, away to the blue, far-stretching sea, perhaps to such a village as he himself had left behind.

The hoarse hooting of factory sirens broke through his reverie, and the scream of a train leaving O Cha No Mizu station. Then the "fusuma" slid open, and the little maid appeared with his breakfast.

"Dear me, I'm a sleepy-head this morning! What time is it? I forgot to wind my watch last night, and it's stopped."

"Just nine o'clock. You must be tired after your journey yesterday. I came in once or twice to see if you were up, but you were sleeping so soundly, I didn't like to wake you."

"Why, yes, I suppose I *was* tired: though it wasn't much of a journey, after all. Have you ever been in Boshu, Toshi-ko San? Your name is Toshi-ko, isn't it? I think I heard your mother call you so last night, though really I was so sleepy, I didn't notice things much."

"My name? Yes, I am Toshi," answered the little maid composedly. "Mother took me to Boshu two—no, three years back. I was born there, you know, but they came across to Tokyo thirteen years ago, when I was only two, so I'm almost an 'Edokko.' Which do you like better, there or here?"

Ichiro was rather amused at the matter-of-fact equanimity with which the damsel carried on their chat. Beyond the Bay, girls of fifteen would hardly open their mouths in the presence of strange young men; but, as he reflected, in a boarding-house where young men come and go shyness was not likely to be a lasting attribute.

"Well, I can scarcely say as yet. Perhaps I'll tell you after a week—or a month. Now I think I'll have a wash."

Ten minutes later he returned to find Toshi-ko still squatting patiently beside the rice-tub.

"You're not very busy this morning, it seems," he said, smiling; "how many boarders have you here?"

"So—ten or eleven just now; all our rooms are full. But they're mostly gone out by seven, except Mori San, and he usually doesn't rise till nearly noon."

"Lazy fellow!—worse than myself. Whatever does he do to make him sleep like that?"

"Oh, he's a newspaper reporter, and often he doesn't get in till two or three in the morning—sometimes later, when we're beginning to get breakfast ready."

"That must disturb the others rather, doesn't it?"

"No; he generally comes in quite quietly, except when he's been drinking too much saké and sings some funny songs, or if he's been to a political meeting, when he talks and argues to himself while he's undressing."

"He must be rather interesting. What are your other boarders?"

"Mostly students, High School or University. What are you going to do in Tokyo?"

"Oh, I don't quite know yet," answered the young man, a little taken aback at the directness of her question. "I'm a student too, you know, at least I was until quite recently, and I think I'm going to try to enter some college."

"But the entrance exams are not held till next spring, mostly. I suppose you'll be studying for them. Please have some more rice."

"Thanks: one bowl more. I'm quite ashamed of my appetite. Hallo, somebody's calling you."

Somebody was. Loud shouts and hand-clapping arose from an adjoining room. "That's Mori San; he's up early this morning," the maid remarked, as she rose to obey the summons.

Ichiro, finishing his meal, unpacked his students' uniform (terribly short in arms and legs) from the wicker basket, and changed his clothes. Through the closed fusuma came the sound of badinage and laughter—Toshi-ko was engaged in a duel of spirited repartee, none too refined on the opposite side, with the latest riser. Presently their voices sank; Ichiro thought he heard his own name mentioned; and just as he had completed his change of attire the girl returned, still laughing, and said (with due obeisance), "Mori San, of whom I spoke to you, would like very much, if you will excuse his rudeness, to make your acquaintance. May I bring him in presently?"

"Certainly, I shall be delighted. Please ask him to come at his convenience."

A little later his visitor was ushered in, and Ichiro looked at him critically: here was another City type.

Rather tall, rather pale, with refined features almost too narrow, and pince-nez poised dandiacally on a nose capable (as Japanese noses very rarely are) of sustaining them, contrasting somewhat with a decidedly dirty kimono, he advanced into the room, peering forward with contracted eyes as he met the burst of brilliant sunshine with which it was flooded.

Simultaneous bows—Ichiro's consciously rustic, the visitor's slightly negligent.

"Excuse me—I am Mori Noboru. I heard just now that a new guest had come, and I could not resist the desire to make your acquaintance. I hope we shall be good friends."

This—the usual Japanese formula for such occasions—having been suitably replied to, the two young men, as though moved by a common impulse, walked out through the open shoji on to the little verandah and stood side-by-side for a while in silence, looking forth over the busy city.

To the left, in Hongo and Asakusa, and away across the Sumida in grimy Fukugawa, a thousand chimneys sent up their columns of smoke into the still morning air, spreading a bluish haze over the toiling streets. The sunlight glinted on a network of wires. Below, the people swarmed like ants. Workmen in their blue blouses, each with his employer's name, a huge ideograph in white, on breast or back, carrying tools or sweating at their benches; errand-boys idling along, chatting with other errand-boys as idle, stopping as they passed over the bridge to gaze down at the sluggish waters far below, dawdling as only errand-boys of every clime can dawdle; rickshas rattling noisily or gliding on rubber tyres behind the rhythmic patter of dusty flying feet; women marketing, many with babies perched on their backs; hawkers chanting in high-pitched sing-song; grave men of substance issuing weightily from swinging office doors and disappearing through others a few yards down the street; students in uniforms of pale-blue "kokura"; each one intent

solely on his own immediate pleasures or affairs, yet all forming co-ordinate parts in the great intricate, inter-related game of life. And the throb of pistons, the clatter of wheels, the dull resonance of multitudinous noises, formed the music to which that game was being played. This was the song of the city, as it sings in the ears of the young.

To Ichiro the sight, the sound, the thought, was fascination. Yes, this was life; and into this life he had taken the plunge, in this complex drama he was now an actor. A spectator for the moment, he was but waiting his cue. From whom would it come? He turned, to find his companion looking humorously at his eager, expectant face.

"You find it interesting, this little bird's-eye view of life? Well, it interests *me*, still, though I've seen it often enough. But then it's my business to be a student of life—Life, the Goddess! She is my mistress, too, and I love her and despise her, pay tribute of my health—and make my living out of her, as many a good fellow does with his mistress. Shall I introduce you to her, Koyama San? I'm not jealous of her favours, not a little bit, and she is gracious to the young and inexperienced. Come, are you busy this morning?"

The invitation chimed in harmoniously with the young man's mood. The other's speech, full of Western idioms novel to rustic ears, seemed an answer to his unspoken thoughts. He had, perhaps without knowing it, been feeling lonely, a stranger, out of touch with this new environment. Here was an interpreter of this world, one, too, who could divine and interpret to him his own mind,

With a sudden impulse of eagerness he touched Mori's arm.

"How could you guess what was in my heart? To study life! Yes, that is what I am here for indeed."

"Then will you come with me to-day?"

"Thank you, you are very kind—if I shall not really be in your way."

"Not a bit. Get your hat and come along. I suppose I must spruce myself up a little, or you'll be ashamed to be seen with me. Wait just two minutes, please—and continue to gaze at the mistress that you are to share with me."

The two minutes had extended to twenty before Mori reappeared, shaved and slightly powdered, with a shade of darkening to his thick, finely-arched eye-brows, dressed in a well-cut suit of grey flannel with silk socks and soft grey hat to match, and a large opal flaming in a tie of darker grey. The Boshu boy had rarely seen so fine a sight.

"Well, will I do? Will she smile at me this morning? When we go to meet our mistress we must dress the part, you know."

"Dear me, you look so splendid, I feel quite ashamed of myself," returned Ichiro, not without sincerity, as he gazed at the transformed apparition.

"Now I suppose I shall make *you* feel ashamed."

"Come along, no nonsense. If I had your height and figure I'd walk naked through the streets, and the girls wouldn't mind. I have to make up with Art where Nature fails."

And together they descended the narrow stairs, put on their shoes, and went out arm-in-arm into the street.

"So this is your first visit to the Capital, or almost—and you're going to begin as a student and end as a celebrity! Yes, that little minx of a Toshi-ko has been chattering about you to me, just as she has about me to you, I'll warrant. I'm a young man connected with the Press, very irregular in my habits and somewhat so in my payments, with a penchant for coming home at odd hours of the morning, and a taste (did she tell you that, I wonder?) for saké and young ladies. There isn't much more to tell about myself, except that I graduated at Waseda—or rather, didn't graduate, but was requested to leave, rather before the customary period, for reasons which I may recount to you some time; also that both my parents are dead, and both my brothers, and I have only a sister left to me, and she is far away in Echigo, which is almost as countrified a spot as the one that you hail from, if not more so. Do you want my age? Well, guess!"

Amused and interested by his companion's chatter, Ichiro glanced round at the smooth, narrow face, with its bunch of little crow's-feet about the eyes and sarcastic twist of the lips.

"Twenty—six?"

"Good: I must be wearing well—or are you being complimentary? I am twenty-nine. On the right side of thirty still, you see, but only just. And you, I suppose, are twenty-two or thereabouts?"

"No, only twenty—nineteen in 'maru-toshi' counting."

"And never yet kissed—or been kissed! Well, we'll soon remedy that in *this* village. When the girls see you blushing like that they'll soon want

to be your teachers: or did we leave a fair one behind us across the water? Now then, confidence for confidence, open confession between friends—no concealments!”

It seemed curious to Ichiro, the intimacy of speech and feeling that had sprung up, as it were spontaneously, between himself and this debonair free-lance of whose very existence he had been ignorant but an hour or so before. To no other man—and to no woman—had he ever yet spoken of Fujiyé. He hardly knew what moved him now to speak of her; perhaps it was only a boyish wish to prove that he, too, could boast of some experience. With eyes fixed straight ahead to avoid his companion's half-quizzical glance, he answered haltingly,

“There was a girl—but only a friend. She saved my life once, when I was nearly drowning—and after that we met a few times.”

“It sounds promising! Did you kiss her?”

“No—oh, no: no, she was not that kind. I'm sure she has never kissed anybody. . . .” The idea of such a possibility seemed strangely unpleasing.

“Good heavens, man, fancy having the confidence to say that about any girl! Well, what *did* she do?”

“Nothing. . . . I mean, she helped me—understood and advised me. . . .”

“And she advised you to go away to Tokyo and leave her, did she?”

“Yes—no; no, she advised me to stop.”

“Then it seems you didn't profit much by her advice! I must hear more of this young lady another time. Well, let's get on a car, it's too hot to walk

—though riding in these crowded cars is not much better.”

The cars *were* crowded. Seats were for the lucky few. Burly navvies, malodorous fish-porters, staid school-girls in hakama of navy blue or “ebi-cha,” clerks in sober black, and holiday folk with shoals of children, jostling and squeezing and swaying, clung for dear life to the straps that ran along both sides of the car, and manœuvred slyly or struggled openly for a seat almost before the departing sitter had risen to his feet. Through, under, and between them, threading a passage where passage there seemed none, dodged the conductors, persuasive, gay, polite or truculent according to their various natures, continuously yelling in cracked voices the name of the next stopping-place, punching tickets and doling out small change, forcing parcels and umbrellas on to forgetful owners, advising country-folk as to localities and routes, and forever unceasingly urging their congested human freight to move up and pack themselves yet tighter.

Sometimes a dispute occurred over a ticket or a question of change, and wordy warfare ensued. For five minutes, perhaps, the car would stand still while all that sweating load of busy humanity awaited in patience the outcome of the duel. In such case police aid is rarely invoked. If the conductor is small, timid and polite, the defaulting fare (not infrequently a bully, gambler, or dissolute student) may strike him in the face and depart, muttering fury, his ride unpaid-for; but with a large and fierce conductor the recalcitrant will end by paying, even though he has already paid. Then

at last the car moves on, and no one reckons up the aggregate of wasted hours; Tokyo, Westernised, is still in and of the East.

Ichiro enjoyed his morning, for the young journalist was an excellent guide. Far and wide they roamed—to Kudan Hill, where amid cherry groves the souls of all dead soldiers and sailors are enshrined perpetually; to Hibiya Park, pride of the modern metropolis, where a base-ball match was attracting a crowd; and so finally to the Ginza. It was in the Park that Mori suddenly declared himself hungry.

"Two o'clock! Why, you must be starving. Forgive me, Koyama San, you know I'm a most irregular chap, and generally run breakfast and lunch into one—about half-an-hour after I arise. Now, where shall we go? You can get a very decent meal at the Matsumoto over there, close by the pond, and the girls are mostly rather pretty; they change them frequently, too, so that one isn't perpetually bored by looking at the same faces while eating one's steak. Or shall we try the Café Tigre in Ginza—not a bad shop, either, where the waitresses are rather 'chic'."

"Yes, I think I've been there," admitted Ichiro.

"Oho, you have, have you? So we are not quite so innocent as we would seem! And which of the young ladies made most impression on you?"

"Oh, nonsense, I just went in for a glass of beer—I was so thirsty after crossing on the steamer, yesterday afternoon."

"All right—no need to get hot about it. 'Qui s'excuse s'accuse', you know."

"What's that? Latin?"

"No, French. It means that when a man seems too supernaturally good, people think there must be something fishy about it."

"Did you learn to speak French at Waseda?"

"No—just picked up a few useful phrases—comes in handy in journalism, you know. The great art of writing is to make folks think you know more than you do."

In another minute they had reached the busy crossing and had passed the swinging doors. Sitting down at one of the smaller tables, they commenced to study the menu. A waitress approached, and glanced at each in turn.

"Ah, Mori San, good morning. Good morning, Ichiro San."

The young journalist wheeled round in his chair, and gazed fixedly at his friend.

"You young villain! So this is the meaning of yesterday's innocent glass of beer! And I was going to introduce you to Mademoiselle Life! Well, it seems, no introductions are necessary. And I'm still only Mori San, after all our long acquaintance, Kaoru?"

The girl laughed, showing an even row of pearly teeth.

"You see," observed Mentor, "Miss Kaoru has been watching the foreign actresses at the Imperial Theatre, and learnt the Western way of smiling. How long have you two known each other?"

"Oh, Koyama San and I are old friends, aren't we? I offered to teach him something, but it seems he's in cleverer hands."

"Not cleverer than yours, Kaoru, unless you're out of practice."

"What are you gentlemen going to eat?" responded the waitress, suddenly demure. "I know what you're going to drink, at least if Mori San orders it."

"Well, what, then?"

"Berumotto first, French and Italian, equal parts."

"Right, Kaoru, you're a jewel. When I grow rich and set up a big house, I'm going to have you to take charge of my dinners."

"Thanks—very much! And perhaps I shall be a Prime Minister's wife by then—or old and wrinkled, like Ono-no-Komachi."

"Ah, well—I like you best as you are. Now, what's it going to be, ham salad or fried oysters?"

"No oysters to-day, 'o ainiku sama'; but we have some very nice fried crayfish."

Ichiro sat back in his chair and said nothing, while his friend turned his attention to the congenial task of drawing up an appetising list of dishes, and the girl departed with his order.

"How did she come to know your name?" asked Mori, curiously.

"Oh, I don't know. She talked to me while I drank my beer, and asked me questions."

"She seems to have taken quite a fancy to you—I watched her looking at you just now; and she's not a common girl, at all. Most of these young females have sweethearts, you know, but I don't know any of my friends who can boast of having made a conquest of Miss Kaoru. Congratulations!"

"Don't be silly, I've hardly spoken to her. Besides, I—I don't want to waste my time on girls."

"No? Quite right, stern young man. But you don't mind a little harmless chatter with them, now do you? And you can't help feeling pleased to think that they think of you—do you? Confess!"

"Please don't think I'm trying to be a prig; only——"

"I understand. Well, here comes the 'ebi' (crayfish). Let's begin."

Full justice was done to the fare by young and healthy appetites, beer followed the vermouth, and liqueur brandy (of doubtful vintage) accompanied the coffee. Mori footed the bill, refusing his friend's offer to pay his share ("I've had a stroke of luck lately," he explained) and it was a singing head that Ichiro took out into the evening dusk and coolness.

Mori resisted (by an unwonted scruple) a strong temptation to conduct his friend to less reputable haunts, and together they wended their way back to the Park.

For hours they sat on a bench in the deepening gloaming, watching the crowds of men and girls threading the narrow paths around them, while ricksha lamps darting about the high-road flickered through the trees like fireflies, and street-cars droned along with serried rows of lights.

At last Mori sprang to his feet.

"Well, Koyama San, you're an entertaining comrade! You've hardly spoken a word for the last hour. I believe you're half asleep. I must get to work—but first I'll see you safely to your bed, or you might get into mischief. Come along."

With difficulty the other roused himself.

"Work! Why, it must be ever so late. Surely you're not going to begin any work to-night?"

"Certainly. You don't think I'm such a rich young man that I can afford to live on my means. I told you that I was a night-bird, you know. I must find out what the Empire is going to do to-morrow—and give it some good advice, too. Now for a Kanda car."

As in a dream—so it seemed to Ichiro—they boarded a street-car at the corner, packed with tired students and scented pleasure-seekers, and still dreamily he found himself removing his shoes at the boarding-house porch. The maid Toshi-ko helped his sleepy footsteps up the narrow stair. Mori must have left him at the entrance—he never noticed his departure.

"I hope you have enjoyed yourself to-day. Were you with Mori San all the time? He is really amusing, isn't he? Shall I bring your supper or have you had some already?"

Ichiro was too sleepy to answer her chatter—almost too sleepy to understand it. Mechanically he took off his coat, collar and tie, and then turned towards her.

"No, I don't want anything to eat, thanks. Please put out my futon; I think I'll go to bed now."

"So you aren't going to tell me what you think about Tokyo?"

"No, not to-night: to-morrow. Be quick with that futon, or I shall go to sleep on the tatami."

CHAPTER XII

FITTING IN

THE thunder of heavy wooden shutters sliding, one after another, along their warped grooves as Toshi San let in the daylight brought Ichiro back to consciousness of the world and an aching head. His tongue felt thick and he missed the healthy appetite with which he was accustomed to awaken. For a moment he was at a loss: then he recalled his unwonted libations to the Goddess Life.

Well, that was part of what he had come here to learn about; but without regretting his excursion into frivolity he decided that the one experience should suffice, at least for many a long day. Sitting in cafés and discussing drinks and girls was a side of life, no doubt, but only a very small side. Now for others more important, and first, and principally, work.

He went down into the bathroom, where another maid, older than Toshi-ko, was scrubbing clean the wooden tubs and bowls, and emptied a bucket of ice-cold water over himself. That was better.

Now, to-day, he must really settle on a plan of campaign. He thought of consulting the maid—she seemed to know a lot about needy students and their ways; but she was attending other boarders, and he ate his meal alone.

Then, dressed and ready for the fray, he set out, determined to catch Fortune as she passed him in

whatever guise. On the stair he almost blundered into another young man—short, stout and freckled, with a shock of stiff, unruly hair and a broad nose. Mutual apologies, a trifle surly on the part of the freckled one.

On reaching the hall door Ichiro found the other still fumbling with his shoe-laces; beside him on the step lay a bundle of text-books. Their hostess was standing by to speed them on their way.

Tucking his bundle under his arm, the shorter youth stumped out. Ichiro followed, filled with desire to speak and perhaps gain counsel, but too shy to begin. A few paces down the street the former suddenly turned to him.

"We live in the same house, so we ought to know each other. My name is Saigo—Saigo Tetsuno-suké."

His voice and manner were gruff, and his accent not of the city, yet Ichiro felt instinctively that he might be likeable enough, and promptly completed the introduction.

"My name is Koyama Ichiro. I came to Tokyo only the day before yesterday, so everything is still quite strange: please excuse me if I have been rude."

"Ah, you're from the country, too, are you? Well, you don't look it."

Ichiro felt distinctly pleased; he was certain that he would like the other man.

"Is your home far from here?"

"Yes, right across the Bay, in Boshu."

"Why, that's practically Tokyo! It takes *me* a two-days' journey—more—to get here. My home is in Kagoshima."

The information was growled out almost defiantly. Ichiro understood now the unfamiliar accent. Kago-shima, away down at the end of Kyushu, the furthest point of the main islands, where live the Satsuma men, who pride themselves on their ruggedness, their simplicity of living, and their unflinching faith and valour; the fighting breed whence sprang the mighty Saigo Takamori, loyalist and rebel, and—in somewhat later days—the hero Togo, conqueror of the Russians.

“Over here for work or for amusement?”

“For work,” answered Ichiro firmly—and meant it.

“I saw you yesterday in the Ginza,” went on the other. “You were just coming out of the Café Tigre with Mori San.”

The student of Life flushed a little at something half sarcastic in his companion’s tone.

“Oh yes, we had been in there for lunch. I had met him in our lodgings for the first time.”

“H’m! He’s not a bad fellow, Mori—he’s a friend of mine, too, in a way. But if you are really going to work, as you say, it would be better not to go too much with him.”

“But he works pretty hard too, doesn’t he? He said he had a lot to do, after I left him last night.”

“Yes, he works, but not in the way you or I could; and it’s no use mixing things. You can’t do it.”

Ichiro hardly knew whether to feel flattered or vexed at the implied distinction—at this plain young man’s coupling of themselves together.

“Oh, I don’t mean to go in much for that sort of thing,”—*what* sort he would have been hard put to

to explain, but he knew that Saigo would divine his meaning—"Still, one must see a little of all sides of life."

"H'm. Better not see too much of that one. Now, what do you intend to do?"

Yesterday Ichiro had felt surprised at his own readiness to discuss with a three-hours' friend those feelings that he had concealed from almost all at home; but now a stronger bond of sympathy was drawing him to this second and so different counsellor—more like the home folks, somehow, yet filled like himself with a purpose other than that of those around him.

"Could you—I wish you could advise me. I have no definite plans, only—I must work to live."

"Not live to work?"

"Yes, that too: but first I must find some means of livelihood in order to do the work that I wish."

"And that work is——?"

A second time, in halting words and phrases half-expressed, Ichiro unburdened his soul, and Saigo listened, as Fujiyé had done in the boat, but with blank face and in silence. The flow of eager talk died down.

"Well?"—the lad looked at his companion, doubtful of his comment. After pacing for some moments in thought, the latter replied,

"Well, if you are really determined to succeed, I don't see why you should not. But, remember, it means years of hard work, self-denial, application—intense, pleasure-hating application. Dreams are all very well—indeed, I think dreams are necessary unless to gain your end you lose your soul. But

they must be the background of your life, not life itself. Now, to be practical, what can you do?"

Without waiting for an answer, he went on in a musing tone,

"You know farm-work, of course—not much good, that, in the city. You might work part-time in a shop, or enter some gentleman's house as a student-servant, but you would have little or no time for studies, so that wouldn't be much use, and the pay for that sort of thing is wretched. By the way, don't you get any money from your parents—none at all?"

"As I told you, my father disapproves very much of my coming here, and says that if I go my own path I must pay my own way. He gave me some money to start with, but I don't want to break into that."

"Quite right. Meanwhile, what do you think you can do for a living?"

"Well, I'm a Middle School graduate; I thought that perhaps——"

"That perhaps you could get a job as teacher in a school! Yes, that's what most of the young men of your age think, when they come to Tokyo. But the teaching trade is over-crowded, at least in the lower ranks. Still, you might be lucky."

"What do you do? Have you enough to live on?" asked Ichiro.

"I? I make shoes."

"You make shoes! But do you mean to say you can live by that?"

"Well, not entirely. It's only the finer sort of hand-sewn shoes that I go in for. I do a little carving in wood and ivory, too, and odd jobs of that kind.

My grandfather was an artist in sword-hilts: but that class of work is out of fashion now. Honest work, with the soul of the worker enshrined in every stroke of his work, is not wanted—not understood. Things are factory-made—made to pattern, made by the gross, turned out to please the Western taste, or the worse taste of those Japanese who think that all good comes from the West. Koyama San——”

He turned suddenly and grasped his comrade by the arm.

“Do not bow down before the false gods of ‘progress!’ Learn the language, study the science, master the ideas that reach us from abroad; but do not lose your soul. Much as we owe to the West, to ourselves we owe immeasurably more. They say we are good imitators—and surely to imitate the good is good. But once let Japan become a nation of *mere* imitators, servilely copying the ways, the thoughts, the art of foreign nations—and good-bye to her future, to her position in the world!”

Saigo broke off abruptly, and for a little while neither spoke, Ichiro revising his ideas of his new friend by the light of this sudden outburst. Then the former halted, and laughed in genuine amusement.

“Forgive my earnestness, Koyama San, I’m afraid I’m rather carried away sometimes when I start to air one of my theories—or grievances. To return to our subject—which was, ways and means of earning one’s daily rice. An idea has just occurred to me. Not far from where I lived last year there is an old man who keeps a book-shop. He comes from my prefecture. He had an only son, who used to help him in the business. Not long ago this

youth became infatuated with a geisha of the Kanda Myojin quarter, and—well, the upshot was, the two young fools committed 'shinju,' double suicide, in the sea at Kamakura about a fortnight ago. Of course the father must have been terribly upset—it was his only son: but he is, in part, a follower of the 'Zen' philosophy, and refuses to allow the ephemeral happenings of this Karma-ridden world to shake the stability of his soul. I called on him a day or two after the thing occurred—his only reference to it was: 'Twenty years ago our ways met—now they have parted. Who knows the path of a ripple in the sea?' Still, the day's work must be done, he can't manage the shop alone, and would be glad of a helper, one whom he could trust and who has some education. If I recommended you, how do you think the job would suit?"

"For how many hours a day do you suppose he would require me?"

"Oh, six or seven, perhaps—I don't know. Let us call there this afternoon and see about it, after school."

"Where are you studying?"

"At a medical school in Shiba—we are quite near now. I'm in the Third Year Class."

"Do most of the students in your school support themselves, as you do?"

"No, very few indeed. They're mostly the sons of well-to-do people—City doctors in good practices; work hard? H'm, a few do, but most seem out simply to have a good time: idle through their earlier terms, settle down to grind for the last two or three, and succeed, sometimes, in scraping through their finals.

Heaven knows what sort of doctors they make! Most of them enter College with fine ideals and a determination to win laurels, but in the lower classes there are always idle and more-or-less vicious young men who have failed again and again in their exams, and although not lights of learning prove lamps to many new-winged moths. I sometimes wonder if these great gatherings of the young in the midst of our cities that we call schools do more harm or good to the generation which will soon have the destinies of Dai Nihon in their hands."

"Yet you yourself are not afraid to be a member of one of these dangerous institutions?" laughed Ichiro.

"Ah, because I'm sure of myself; at least, as sure as a man may be. And that, too," answered Saigo, half to himself, "is perhaps a foolhardy boast. But don't take me too seriously. I'm inclined to be a pessimist. Ours is a very fine college, and we certainly produce some of the best doctors in Japan: the workers outnumber the drones, but they make less noise. Well, I must leave you here. I expect my lectures will be over by three—you'll find plenty to occupy your time till then. Where shall we meet?"

"Shall we say Hibiya Park? I think I'll lunch at the 'ryoriya' there, which I passed yesterday. Not far from here, is it?"

"Ten minutes' walk. Straight down the road, cross the car-line, and you'll see the Park on your left. Meet you by the pond. Till then!" And with an abrupt wave of the hand, off he strode to join a group of students wearing his College cap-badge.

Ichiro pondered how to spend the next few hours.

A flight of grey stone steps caught his eye, leading sky-wards, and up he went.

Up and up, pausing half-way for breath; these pious builders perch their temples high. At the top he leaned on the rail to contemplate the view. After him toiled a family of five, the mother with a baby in her arms dressed like a rainbow, evidently come for the formal shrine-visit in honour of the latest addition. He caught a glimpse of the tiny face as the party came up just under him. That little girl (he knew it was a girl, from its unshaven head) resting so passively in her mother's aching arms—what would be her part in the pageant of life? She looked frail, not brown and hardy as the babies of his village women. Was she destined before many months or years were out to pass away into that empty infinity of time and space that must sooner or later engulf us all, to leave, perhaps, for a little while a diminishing sense of loss in that happy group of which she was now the pride? Would she grow up to maidenhood and feel the grip of passion, the pangs of jealousy and disappointment? Would she mate with some youth—now perhaps a helpless baby like herself—at her parents' behest? Or would she, too, rebel and walk a self-determined path, as he, the watcher, was doing?

Touched perhaps by some connecting current of thought, the mother paused as she passed him, to afford a better sight of her treasure. Ichiro smilingly put out his hand, and the baby twined a tiny bloodless finger round one of his. So they stood motionless, the father, too, smiling in fatherly pride: then the group passed on out of sight.

How flat the city looked from up there! Millions of grey-tiled roofs in lines irregularly running this way and that, narrow streets crossing and interlacing without symmetry or design, with here and there a block of buildings six storeys high rising like an up-flung billow above the sea of grey—dark grey, verging into tones of blue and sometimes almost black; here and there, too, a noble temple all but hidden among its encompassing greenery; lines of thin chimneys afar off, trailing feathers of lighter-grey smoke—and away beyond Shinagawa the pearly sparkle of the Bay.

Looking over Kanda, Ichiro noted the fine dome of the Russian Church, a noticeable landmark, near which stood, too small to descry, the house that was, for a time, his home—his own foot-hold in this ocean of city life.

A few sparrows hopped about him, picking up crumbs which pious visitors to the shrine had dropped, perking at him sideways with twisted, inquisitive little faces; and in the trees, a choir invisible, the semi shrilled their noon-tide chant, burdening the ear and tiring the very soul with their incessant, reiterated, changeless note. A clock struck somewhere, and through the air came the call of bugles, blown in the Palace grounds within the inner moat. No dreaming! He descended the steps.

Along the street he met students in groups or couples all carrying books and in square caps with their College monogram; but Saigo was not among them. Soon he reached the wistaria arbour by the little pond in Hibiya Park, and while the fountain cast rainbow spray into the sunshine and children

fed the ducks and great red carp with bits of buns, he took out an English textbook and was soon deep in study.

Time passed, a gun boomed not far away. "Twelve o'clock!" said Ichiro to himself. Two students sitting near opened their lunch-tins. He began to feel decidedly hungry. Just behind him was the "foreign restaurant" that his friend of yesterday had praised for the attractions and variety of its waitresses. Well, he didn't want any more nonsense with girls; besides, the dishes were probably expensive.

Harkening the voice of prudence, he made his way to the Japanese-style "ryoriya" a little further off, and ordered a cheap but filling meal of "sushi," "dango" and hot tea.

Then, comfortably replete, he strolled along the paths that meander among the azalea bushes, and reopened his book on a bench. Soon he nodded over it.

Footsteps on the gravel aroused him, and with a start of surprise he saw the short, sturdy form of his friend Saigo bearing down upon him. Three o'clock already!

Saigo greeted him with a nod of approval.

"Studying? Good! Glad that City life hasn't spoilt your taste for books. What's that one?" Ichiro held it up.

"Ah, you're making a speciality of English! Are you going in for literature? Well, come along if you're ready; we'll visit the bookseller."

"Is it far?"

"A pretty good step. May as well take the car at the corner of the Park, and change at Suidobashi."

After a half-hour's tram-ride they alighted and traversed mean streets ever growing more suburban in aspect, till Saigo halted at a little shop wedged in between a bath-house and a rice-dealer's.

Behind the counter, strewn with crude and gaudy magazines for children, was an old man, looking out vacantly into the street with a half-closed book in his hand. On the counter-flap sat a small cat, once white, industriously washing itself with poor result and stopping occasionally to dab at a chance fly that came within range. The friends entered, greetings were exchanged, a colloquy ensued.

In the end, the old proprietor (whose name was Suzuki, and who seemed favourably impressed with Ichiro's quiet and modest demeanour) agreed to take the young man on trial. The details were soon arranged.

Ichiro was to spend the morning and afternoon of each day in the shop, serving customers and looking after stock. The evenings from four would be his own. His meals might be taken on the premises, and a small sum paid him weekly as pocket-money.

The arrangement suited him very fairly. No need now (if he denied himself all but the necessities of life) for him to trench further on the sum that represented his sole capital. Books he would need, of course, and accidental expenses would no doubt arise.

The next point to settle was which school he should enter. Acting on his friend's advice, he selected one of the large private colleges in Kanda which, while devoted in the higher sections to some

special branch of learning, afford facilities for other courses of study, more particularly in English, both practical and literary.

Before nightfall Ichiro was enrolled a member of one of these, his entrance fees paid down, and course of study indicated.

CHAPTER XIII

TRANSITION

THE school was but a short distance from their boarding-house, and thither the two friends returned on foot. At the top of the stairs they parted, Saigo to immerse himself in bones, drugs and symptoms, Ichiro to review the day's events, make firm and noble resolutions for the immediate future and then wander off into vague dreams of after days. "From to-night," he told his soul, "no more dreams until you have something solid to show for them."

Toshi-ko brought in his evening meal, and he suddenly remembered that the new plans involved leaving this cosy, cheerful little house, which he had already begun to think of as his home.

"Well, Koyama San, how have you been spending the day? Have you decided yet what you are going to do? I saw that you came back with Saigo San. Have you been with him all day? You went out this morning together, didn't you? I should think he's not so interesting as Mori San, is he? I don't believe he ever looks at a girl! When I bring his meals in he takes no more notice of me than if I were a white cat, and sometimes if I speak to him he nearly bites my head off. Do you think he's been crossed in love?"

"I suppose you girls don't like that kind of man?" queried Ichiro, amused as usual by her inconsequential chatter.

"Oh, well, who can say? Some girls might like that sort, I suppose, and some not. We're not all alike in our tastes, you know. It's just the same with the men, isn't it? One man would give his head for a girl that another wouldn't look at twice."

The little table was set out with its array of tiny bowls, and Miss Toshi plumped herself down beside the rice-tub, favouring her guest with a glance that Ichiro felt was more than half a challenge. From the tray arose an appetising smell: the guest was hungry: the challenge was allowed to drop.

After the fourth bowl of rice, there recurred to him the thought of his impending departure.

"Is your mother busy just now, Toshi San? If not, I should like to speak to her."

"I'll go and see. But what's the matter? Isn't your supper pleasing?"

"Delicious: everything is as nice as nice could be. Yet, in spite of that, I must go away and leave you."

"What do you mean? Have you found another boarding-house? I thought you were going to study in one of the Kanda colleges, and I'm sure you can reach any of them from here quickly enough."

"I must explain all about it to your mother. It isn't because I want to go, really."

The message was delivered, and after an interval the mistress of the house appeared.

Ichiro explained the doings of the past day and

plans for the immediate future which necessitated his departure from her hospitable roof.

The old lady looked disappointed. It was not the loss of a boarder, for fresh applicants would certainly beset her door within an hour of the placard's announcing "Rooms to Let"—and, as a matter of fact, a change would mean more profit, since Ichiro was paying at reduced rates. But the motherly O Sen San liked the youth, as did most women, for his quiet and unassuming bearing, his air of honesty and truth, and his handsome face. He was a fellow-villager, too, doubly welcome on that account in this world of cold-hearted and self-engrossed City folk.

She, and her husband, too, had looked forward to many a quiet evening chat on old times, old places and old neighbours. It was almost like losing a son who had but just returned to the parental nest; indeed, perhaps the mother's planning eye (for mothers, too, are alike the world over) had half foreseen a future son in this child of their childhood's home.

Ichiro, for his part, was genuinely sorry; but all agreed that his arrangements with the old bookseller were well suited to his present circumstances and intentions.

Then old Yamada, the husband, came upstairs and was apprised of the doleful news. Saké (which the old man had long regarded as the remedy for most earthly ills—the burden of the boarding-house now rested on his wife)—saké was brought in and stood to warm in little bottles. Pipes were produced, and the worthy couple settled down to a

quiet evening of rambling reminiscences. In detail, and no doubt embroidered, Ichiro heard over again old stories of the doings and misdoings of his former village neighbours.

Stories of marriages, of births and deaths, storms and fires and droughts, of festivals, scandals, ancient feuds and ancient jokes, things with which he had been bored from his cradle. It seemed as if he had dropped back into his former life, he could almost fancy the sound of the sea in his ears: that former life which had ended—could it be only three days before?

He was questioned as to the changes that recent times had made, and his kind hosts listened eagerly, with appropriate comments. The evening dragged out drearily, bed seemed an unattainable haven, the aged bookseller a saviour from a vista of such evenings. Ichiro yawned, blinked, and by surreptitious self-pinchings in divers tender spots managed to keep himself awake. Suddenly, nodding, he heard a name that jerked him into life. The old man was speaking.

“Watanabé San’s girl was over here recently—may still be here. Fujiyé, I think they call her. They say she’s quite the lady in education, speaks French and English and plays the piano. She never called here, though, all the time she was in town. No doubt her father hopes to get a good match for her—they say she’s very pretty—but I’m not so sure he’ll succeed. He used to make money, quite a lot, what with his fishing boats and other things, but lately I’ve heard that he’s taken to speculating, and that his speculations mostly haven’t

succeeded. It takes a City brain to make money at that kind of thing. That reminds me——”

And the speaker branched off into some tedious story of another villager's unlucky dabbling in stocks and shares, nor might the younger man coax back the conversation to the topic which alone of village topics could possess the slightest interest for him.

At last the hour of deliverance drew near. Old Yamada was lachrymose, the bottles were empty; Toshi-ko, flagrantly asleep and punctuating the lengthening pauses with her snores, suddenly sprawled across the mats as if some one had stabbed her in the back. Ichiro blessed her as she kicked out her legs, O Sen San jumped up, and the clock struck midnight. Five minutes later the lad was alone, free to crawl into bed.

Awhile he lay sleepless, planning and dreaming of the future; then suddenly fell asleep and dreamed of Hojima and a girl.

Day broke, his fourth in Tokyo, with grey drizzle and a lowering sky.

Breakfast over, the sound of ricksha wheels hurried his packing. Old Yamada and his wife stood bowing good-bye in the hall, while Toshi-ko hoisted his wicker basket into the little vehicle.

“Good-bye—Sayonara—call on us whenever you have time!”—then the click of the “genkwa” doors as they slid together. This was the last memory that Ichiro carried with him from his first City home. Three days ago he had never set eyes on the house: yet those three days had carried so much of new experience, they might have been years.

On just such a morning as this the traveller had watched his village roofs receding in the mists. Only three days ago? Was life then nothing but a series of good-byes heard through the patter of small rain-drops falling, through the sighing of chill morning breezes?

The rain pattered on the ricksha hood. The straw sandals of his human steed splashed steadily in the slush. Little could be seen of the streets, for the hood shut out all his view. He could see only the feet of the passers-by, feet clad in black or white "tabi," stained and flecked with mud.

He clutched his basket tightly with his knees. The ride seemed to take hours. Occasionally the puller stopped to ask directions. At last they reached the house.

The old bookseller received him with a grave yet kindly welcome, showed him the stock-in-trade, and explained little details of daily procedure. Apologising for the meagreness of accommodation which was all that he could offer, he asked a few questions relative to his new assistant's literary tastes, and then left him alone.

Now for Ichiro began a period of quiet, steady, laborious application, of single-hearted pursuit of knowledge that made the days and weeks flow by, without incident to mark one day from the next, as deep water flows swiftly without a ripple: that widened his mind and quickened his brain, adding rich stores to the modest stock of learning with which he had left the village. In English especially he soon showed vast improvement. The works that he read brought new ideas, corrected earlier

crudities of thought, helped to mature this young man's soul, to fit him for a citizen of the world.

His friend Saigo looked in on him occasionally. Not much talk passed between the two within-doors, but each approved the other. Their mutual friendship became more firmly knit.

On Sunday afternoon, since there were no classes that day, Ichiro would, if the day were fine, tramp into the adjacent suburbs, and sometimes go far beyond the City limits, out where on either side the road lay fields of ripening rice, and brown thatched roofs (forbidden in Tokyo, on account of the ease with which they burn) brought back memories of home.

Sometimes the medical student would accompany him, and then, striding along some dusty road or seated beneath the eaves of some tiny wayside "chaya," for whose modest pot of tea the sum of two sen—a halfpenny—was sufficient, the friends would engage in argument, as young men will: morals, politics, the nature of the Deity, the oddities of examiners, the engrossing subject of sex, were food for weighty discourse. The last of these they thought rather beneath their notice, yet strayed into it frequently.

On most subjects they differed, not so much in fundamentals as in details and treatment. Saigo was, except in rare moments of excitement, a slow thinker, careful in inference, heavy in argument. His friend met him with lighter rapier-work. Great were the contests that ensued.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TYPHOON

ONE such walk lingered long in Ichiro's memory. The year had drawn on to mid-September. The ardent heat of the sun had lessened, cooler nights and fresh, sparkling mornings relieved the lassitude of noon; the thick, clammy dampness, that in summer seems to clog the mind and spirits as it coats clothes and shoes with mildew, had gone. Summer still ruled the daylight hours yet her power was undermined, and autumn colouring was beginning to show in the wooded heights out-lying the city. The year was on the wane.

They started early one Sunday morning, each with a little knapsack containing food—rice rolled in seaweed, salted plums, a few hard biscuits: also, for mental sustenance in case of need, a book. Saigo's was a medical work—Ichiro's, a novel by Gissing.

Morning had broken doubtfully. For some days it had been showery, with increasing wind. Now the wind had dropped, but clouds still scurried through the upper air; the sun shone out at times, but was soon obscured.

Shinagawa station, at which they met by appointment, was crowded even at that early hour with working-men and students eager not to waste a single moment of the precious weekly rest. Then by train to Meguro, nestling amid the bamboo groves whose shoots are a table delicacy, and noted

for its Fudo Shrine no less than for those lowlier and gayer temples that cluster round Fudo's gates, where smiling little priestesses pour endless libations for the devotees, and festal days keep on in never-ending circle from Bon to New Year's Day, and on again to Bon.

Tea-shop business at that time of day was dull. Tired workers do not rise early from bed to loll on "chaya" mats and sip saké, but to taste fresh air and country scenery; so the girls who have spent most of the night amid the fumes of food, drink and tobacco can stroll out, blanched and jaded, to snatch an hour or two of morning sweetness. Ichiro and his friend, as they footed the dew-laden road that leads down-hill and across the valley from the station, met several promenading in groups of three or four, faces smearily powdered, yawning wearily or chattering about their last-night's guests, gathering fresh strength after long hours passed in the exacting ritual of the Goddess Mirth.

More than once, when they were going by, the travellers caught sly comments on the younger man's appearance couched in such complimentary terms that Saigo, in mock alarm, gripped his companion's arm and hurried him at breakneck speed along the road in spite of his laughing protests.

"Take example from Ulysses, my young friend, and let an aged mariner whose ears are plugged with the triple wool of experience, firm purpose and homely features drag you post-haste from the allurements of these enticing sirens. I'm not going to sit out in the dust all day while you are lounging on

soft cushions and murmuring endearments to soft-eyed girls as they refill your cup: and I'm only too sure that they'll never ask me to come in for the sake of my beautiful face."

"Rubbish! I've never spoken to a geisha in my life, as far as I remember. In fact, I shouldn't know what to say to them; I don't suppose they'd be much interested in English irregular verbs or historical research or social problems."

"Well, irregularities wouldn't frighten them, and some people say they are *the* social problem, in this country; and anyway, I bet you'd find some common topics. Now, which road are we going to take?"

They usually sketched out roughly, from a local road-map, the direction of their tramp, but by no means felt bound to follow the route laid down; half the pleasure of a ramble lies in obeying the impulse of the moment. Noon found them on a hill-side, miles from the station.

But noon found no midday sun to cheer them on their way. Dark clouds of coppery hue and with jagged edges hurried ever more swiftly through the leaden sky. The wind was rising, bending the pines and cedars, booming hollowly in the darkened distances.

Suddenly came a fierce slashing fall of rain, driving across the rice-fields and blotting out the view. Large hailstones, too, stinging the face and ears and hopping up everywhere as they struck the hard soil like myriads of tiny white frogs.

The wind increased to a full-throated roar. It bellowed, shrieked and howled, rising and falling

half a tone, but ever growing in volume of sound till it seemed that the measure that the ear could hold was reached.

Trooping down the valleys of the shrouded hills and striding out over the great empty cultivated spaces came the battalions of the rain, treading out the harvest with the cruel unconsciousness of an invading host.

They were walking a narrow raised track between rice-fields, sloping up gently towards a little copse which crowned the ridge, when the first onslaught of the typhoon caught them. Shelter there was none at hand, nor could they run to gain it, for the little earth causeway, barely a foot wide, churned into mud by the insistent pestle of the rain, grew slippery as an eel's back. A false step would have plunged them into the soft slime of the field, hip-deep or more.

Soaked, deafened, gasping and choking for breath, pressed almost to earth by the heavy hand of the wind and preserving painfully their balance on the crumbling pathway that unfolded itself section by section ahead, crossed here and there by other ridges as narrow, they crept onward through a labouring world of tortured water.

The vast booming of the wind overbore and drowned all other noises, but when, for a moment or two, it lessened its intensity, one could hear the strident hiss of the rain as it threshed a million million ears of rice from the golden stalks now spread, flat as a pavement, across the empty areas of the fields. Now and again a flash lit the yellowish blackness of the heavens, and they guessed that it

thundered: or would have guessed, had not the faculty of speculation been quenched by elemental violence.

At last they reached firmer ground, where coarse weeds and bamboo grass straggled up to the edges of the copse.

Suddenly a huge bough, torn from a gnarled old elm that had withstood the stress of perhaps a thousand years, whirled by them out of the obscurity. The hard wood missed them by a yard, but they were caught, scratched and overturned by the mass of sodden foliage. For a time they lay and struggled for breath, then stumbled on into the semi-cover of the woods.

Crackings and snappings around them showed it to be but perilous shelter, but at least the direct driving of the rain on their sore bodies was lessened.

The direction of the wind was changing; in the morning it had blown from the east, and was now almost full south.

After an hour, perhaps—though the mind lost sense of time with the furious assault that stunned and numbed it—they roused their cramped limbs and started to crawl onwards through the wood; and presently, topping the rise and descending slightly to a wide plateau that stretched beyond, they saw a farm-house standing in a small open area surrounded by a hedge or fence now beaten flat.

The hardened ground on which the farmer threshed, with his simple flail of jointed bamboo, the ears of rice, was inches deep in water. They splashed across and reached the farm-house. It

was little more than a cottage, one-storeyed, with thick thatched roof all overgrown with green things, and from the edge of the wide eaves poured an unbroken sheet of water.

They beat on the closed "amado" of the house, and presently the farmer's wife opened the shutters—a bare ten inches—and let them in.

In the living-room the family were gathered together, rather subdued and frightened, though this was no new experience. A great iron kettle—fashioned perhaps when the Tokugawa dynasty was young—swung from a beam over the "irori," or open hearth lined with bricks, in which home-made charcoal burned smokily.

Round the hearth sat the children, half a dozen boys and girls, cuddling, squabbling, chattering, fresh from the bath and the younger ones mother-naked. The eldest sat apart at a little eight-inch-high table, studying a book.

The new-comers were made welcome, tea and cakes put before them as a matter of course, and the good-wife brought kimonos for them to put on while their soaked clothes were hung up to dry.

It was, perhaps, but five miles from the railway, yet only the two elders and the student son had ever been in Tokyo, and they spoke of the city almost as of a foreign land.

The younger members of the family attended open-mouthed when the visitors were speaking. At first, indeed, they seemed almost too shy to come within range. Gradually clustering round, they listened eagerly as the two students talked in casual tones—not unaware of the impression they created

—of life in the great city. To Ichiro it was a new sensation, to be received as the know-all man-about-town, while country people hung on his words.

It seemed that this place was more rural than his native village across the Bay. Yet that, too, was natural, for here no link connected the inhabitants with the movement of life beyond the rice-fields.

Outside, the storm raged and devastated the world, but this lowly dwelling, part and parcel of Mother Earth and more firmly rooted than most things that sprang from her bosom, feared not its violence.

Ichiro's talk turned to the sea; he spoke of fishing-fleets, and how *they* fared in storms. His home, he told them, was beneath the shadow of Nokogiriyama. The name brought a flash of recognition into eyes that sought and evaded his across the smoke-wreaths of the smouldering fire, for the jagged contours of the ridge that overhangs Hojima are noted in a song that every school-child knows. The eldest daughter of the house, busied until then by household duties, now kneeling on the worn tatami and fanning the dying embers into new life, had joined the circle.

A few short months ago her presence would have passed quite unnoticed by this young student of life: but Ichiro's mind was no longer sealed to the pervading influence of sex. She listening, he discoursed in finer terms and stressed his new City accent.

Presently, though with some reluctance (for he was shy in company), his friend took up the tale, and told

of happenings and scenes in that far corner of Japan from which he came. Here was a traveller indeed! The farmer and his wife plied him with questions. How did rice grow in those warm lands which must be reached by days and days of train-ride from the Capital? Was it true that bananas ripened there? And snow and ice, were they really so rare?

Yet while Saigo spoke one listener at least seemed to lose interest in the story; for sometimes, and given certain audiences, the tale itself is of less moment than the teller of the tale.

Gradually, while they talked, the fury of the storm assuaged, the clamour lessened. The wind—veering round from hour to hour and blowing now from the nor'-nor'-west—decreased in violence. Rifts appeared in the lowering sky, and suddenly, athwart one of these, a golden ray of late sunshine lit up the room.

With reluctant steps the tempest strode off into the distance, so that the ear could almost mark the stages of its departure. And when peace had fallen again over the sodden land under a cold blue sky, far out in the remoter places of the world the trumpets of the storm-god blew hollowly.

The whole air rested, the buffeted earth lay still, recovering energy. The silence was wonderful.

Only the silver voices of a thousand streamlets, born of the storm and coursing down every little slope, singing till they died and running to their death within the hour, intensified rather than broke the far-spreading quiet. Then a few insects, drying their gauzy coverings in the sun, crept out and raised a tiny sibilance.

Presently from the east came a fresh wind, cool, clean and sweet, rustling the branches of the trees to ease them of the moisture weighting their battered foliage.

It was six o'clock.

Ichiro and his friend changed back into their own clothes, now almost dry, and said good-bye to their kind hosts. They were pressed to stay and share the evening meal, but refused with most grateful thanks. The children followed them out into the open—the parents, too, to take stock of damage done.

This, except for the crushed crops (which, even these, might with care and good weather be saved, since the grains were, in this sun-kissed valley, already almost ripe) was not so much as might have been feared. Thousands of City roofs may be stripped of half their tiles: cheap, showy houses run up to pattern by the hundred, such as Tokyo carpenters love to build nowadays, may collapse like packs of cards, filling the streets with wreckage: telegraph poles may lie in dozens measuring their length along the railway line, while ravaged parks and ruined gardens deplore the destroyer's rage. But these country homesteads with their low and wide-spreading roofs of heavy thatch, clinging like limpets to the hill-sides or nestling snugly in the valleys, have withstood, perhaps for a century, the might of the typhoon.

Ichiro glanced behind him as he left the cottage to see if the eldest girl, who had gone out of the room a little while before, was coming with the children to speed them on their way; but she did not re-appear.

At the station, when they reached it, they found the platform packed with damp and steaming crowds, and it was no easy matter to squeeze into the train that at last wheezed up. From Shinagawa their progress was slower yet, for the street-cars had stopped running, and coils of snapped wires still littered the roads. And when at last they reached their homes (Saigo had left the boarding-house some weeks before, and was now living not far from the bookshop), it was with tired and aching limbs. Ichiro was soon between the quilts.

Perhaps he was over-tired: sound sleep simply would not come. He dreamed confusedly, never once losing sight of his room furniture outlined by the moon shining in through shutter cracks. Three girls mixed in his dreams, and the most persistent was the one of that afternoon's cottage, whose name, even, he did not know. Fujiyé came, a dim figure—her face eluded his dream-memory. And after cock-crow he suddenly fell dreamlessly asleep.

CHAPTER XV

A SUNDAY'S PLEASURING

ROUTINE does not make time pass slowly: it lends wings to the days and months. Ichiro had settled in, and one day was precisely like another, so time slipped away. September's varying greens were giving place to deeper tints. Maples were meditating the assumption of their crimson robes, in which, some people think, they look far lovelier than the blossom-covered April cherries. Rich glossy browns and richer gold shone out in park and garden and along the terraced ridges of the hills.

Autumn had come. Autumn rain sometimes fell heavily, but without the fogs and vapours that English autumns bring. Fine days were frequent—clear, strong, vigorous days, when old men walk briskly and firmly, and the young overflow with life. The golden moon of summer would soon change to winter's silvery planet, but in the day-time it was still very hot.

One Saturday a business errand took Ichiro to Shitaya, a poor-class district in north Tokyo, and about noon he entered a little restaurant to get lunch. A waitress came and took his order.

Surely he knew her face. Where had he seen her? He puzzled a little: a customer? No. . . . Then memory supplied the missing link. The Café Tigre! Of course—it was Kaoru.

She had changed. Her face was paler, the tired, inscrutable eyes more weary still beneath their heavy lids, and she moved slowly, dragging her feet; her hair, too, had lost a little of its lustre.

She looked at the young man vacantly a moment: then started with surprise, and seemed to come suddenly to life.

"Why, Ichiro San, it's you! How you have changed! Do you remember me? Perhaps I have changed too much, too. Have I?"

"No, I knew your face at once. How long ago did you leave the Café Tigre, and why?"

"A month ago or more; I don't know why—I was tired of the place. Why didn't you come back there any more? I thought you must have left the city."

"Did you?"

"No, I didn't really think so. Your sort can't leave, once you have come here, until——"

"Until what?"

"Until you have got what you came to seek—or tried through years and failed."

"And I'm not going to fail, you know. So you think I have changed?"

"Yes, far more than even I expected in so short a time—and I said you would be a quick learner. Do you go much to cafés and—those places?"

"No, hardly at all. No money and no time, even if I wished."

"Do you see your friend Mori often?"

"Very rarely. Do you? He came once or twice to see me at the bookshop where I work; I'm working in a shop, now, you know."

"In the city? Do you like it?"

"No, right out in the Koishikawa, in a little narrow street. I like it well enough. I'm studying, too, of course, in a night school in Kanda."

"So you have little time for restaurants. Don't you ever take a day off for pleasure? It must be dull."

"Oh, Sundays I go out walks in the afternoons, sometimes."

"Not all day?"

"Not usually. I could, I suppose, if I wanted to. Why?"

"Don't you get tired of working every day? I do—and Sundays are worst of all. Most of our girls amuse themselves pretty well, one way or another; but lately—I don't know—nothing seems much fun. I think I'm getting old and dull. Are you still as eager to learn about it as you were?"

"You're looking tired. Have you been ill?"

"And old? Well, never mind. Some day soon they'll fish my body, perhaps, out of the shallows of Shinagawa Bay. That reminds me, Ichiro San. To-morrow I'm going right away, for a whole day, to Kamakura. Come with me, won't you?"

"Were you going alone?"

"I was. Will you come?"

Ichiro hesitated. No doubt the bookseller would not object to taking charge for the day, as he had done once or twice before. The small expenses need not trouble him. It was nothing: a day's outing with a friend, even though that friend a girl. Yet he feared something, he knew not what, something which might disturb the even course of that

life that he had marked out for himself through the months ahead.

Kaoru watched his face as he balanced the point, eating slowly; she was sitting opposite, resting her arms on the flimsy table. She stood up.

"I think after all I'll go alone."

"No, you will not, Kaoru; please let me come. What time do you start? I don't know why I was so long in answering."

"I do: because you are one who never does anything without consideration."

"Then you must think me a very dull and uninteresting person."

"Do I? Well, shall we start at eight? There's a train from Shimbashi at about that time. Yes? And shall I bring you anything more? Those three clerks over there are getting impatient; they think I'm staying much too long at your table."

"No more, thanks. Let's see, how much is that?"

"So—beef-steak, bread, beer one cup, coffee, and two cakes: forty-eight sen, please."

After some fumbling he fished out a one-yen note.

"Haven't you got a fifty-sen piece instead? I'm going to keep the two sen for a tip."

He laughed; further search produced the silver coin, and he replaced the yen "satsu" in his pocket.

But it was a paper note that she handed over to the till-man, and Ichiro's coin rested until night within a fold of her silken obi, just against her heart.

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The down-line platform of old Shimbashi station was peopled with its usual Sunday morning crowd.

Red-capped porters fussily trundled trucks, small boys shouted the morning editions—*Mancho*, *Jiji*, *Asahi*—agonised families swarmed on to the wrong sections, and other small boys hawked eatables packed in shallow wooden boxes, rice concoctions for the general populace, ham-sandwiches for those of sophisticated palate, or the foreigner. It was Waterloo Station in the Far East.

Small parties of friends in rich and tasteful or cheap and gorgeous kimonos—destined alike to burial in the smuts and grime of Japanese railway coal—promenaded up and down. Single friends met and bowed like jack-knives shutting up, strangers borrowed matches and fraternised, children played hide-and-seek around piles of luggage, or came to stare fearfully at a row of cage-like boxes full of barks and yelps and whines, for the shooting season was on that day, and important little men with sporting gear and dressed for the part were journeying to moor and marsh.

Over and through all the bustle blew the strong, sweet wind from the sea.

Kaoru, sitting on a bench, stared dreamily at the animated scene. She was dressed quietly but daintily in a grey silk kimono of small pattern with an apple-green "haneri," or collarette, and a fine lace veil over her shoulders. Her obi, green also with a design of grey and silver butterflies, tied in the upright "tateyanoji" style, made her look younger (thought Ichiro, when his eye picked her out as he neared the ticket-gate) than she had seemed even at their first rencontre in the Café Tigre. She looked, so quiet and modest, more like the daughter

of some wealthy merchant than a beer-hall waitress.

Kaoru rose as he approached, and bowed. He raised his hat, and they walked on side-by-side, neither speaking.

"Give me your ticket," she said suddenly.

Obediently he produced it. She had told him the previous day that he must let her buy her own: probably he would have done so in any case, for in Japan the man does not always pay, as is the custom with the effete foreigner.

"Wait here a moment!"

Swiftly she crossed over the platform to where a porter stood.

"Please change this ticket for a second-class one."

The train just shunting in, the man promised to bring the ticket to her carriage.

"Are you too proud to travel third?" laughed her escort as they seated themselves in the long car.

"To-day I am. And, Ichiro, promise me one thing: to-day you are my visitor, so you must let me pay for everything. Do you agree?"

"No, that's absurd. I'm sure you don't get such a splendid salary. Have you had a windfall from a rich uncle?"

Kaoru's smile, half cynical, half wistful, and a faint blush that came like a doubtful stranger to her smooth, powdered cheek, stirred a distasteful thought in the boy's mind, and an answering flush to his cheek.

"You know," he hurried on, "in foreign countries a man would be quite ashamed to let a young lady pay for anything for him. I've seen lots of jokes

in American papers about them ruining themselves buying ice-creams for their——”

“Sweethearts? Yes, but we are in Japan, where most young men think it quite right and proper to let the girls who—who go about with them pay for everything—and to take all their money and make them sell their clothes to get more, too, sometimes, poor little fools! And then leave them for some other little fools, perhaps. What pigs men are, Ichiro!”

“Why, Kaoru, you talk as if you had been—had been treated——”

“—Like that? No, Ichiro, I have never cared enough for any man to sell *my* kimonos for him.”

They were silent for a little while. Ichiro leaned back in his cushioned seat and stretched himself luxuriously.

“It’s pleasant, travelling like this. And it’s so much quieter than third class; the people seem half afraid to chatter here.”

“Too lazy! Look at that fat woman in the black summer ‘haori.’ She fell asleep two minutes after entering the carriage, and hasn’t opened her eyes since, while the two babies are climbing all over her poor husband and worrying him to death. The man sitting next to them is pretending to be reading a paper: he must be very pleased with the editorial—he’s been nodding at it ever since he sat down. And that long-haired fellow further on—he thinks himself very beautiful: he’s tried about ten times to see his face in the mirror at our end of the carriage.”

“H’m! I think it’s your face that he’s trying to catch sight of, more than his own.”

"Why not? What are girls for, but to be looked at? If ever you marry, Ichiro, I think you'll be a terror to your wife; and if she had been educated in foreign style—like the girls at Miss Maeda's school, for instance—she would certainly want to go to dances sometimes. How would you like to see other men clasping your wife tightly round the waist, and twirling about till they both got giddy? Have you ever seen people 'waltz'?"

"No, but I've seen pictures of it. I think for girls I prefer Japanese ways."

"And foreign for men? Then you'd make her walk behind you in the streets and carry your parcels and be quite good and gentle if you should happen to bring a mistress home with you one evening?"

"Oh no; some Japanese husbands are beasts, I know. But from what I've seen in books, some foreigners are just as bad, in other ways."

He stared out of the window for a few minutes, looking rather puzzled.

"Do you know, Kaoru," he said at length, "you remind me very much, in some ways, of somebody I used to know in my village."

"Man or woman?"

"Woman."

"Young or old?"

"Young—much younger than you."

"Well, I'm glad I don't look like some one much older, anyhow. Was she a sweetheart of yours?"

"No," answered Ichiro, smiling, "I've never had a sweetheart."

"Tell me," she said suddenly, leaning over towards him and resting one hand lightly on his

knee, while she looked up into his face, "Have you never cared for any girl at all? What an unusual sort of boy you are!"

Ichiro laughed as he settled himself back in the cushions, while the train drew out of the station at which it had been resting a moment.

"I've always been too busy over my studies to care for anything else—until this morning," he returned.

The girl looked keenly at him as though to divine any significance attached to the last few words, but her companion's attention was engrossed by the view of the Yokohama streets, into whose outskirts they were at that moment running.

"What a crowd of foreigners on the platform! I always think that Western clothes suit our people all right except for the trousers, and somehow our legs don't look long enough for them."

Kaoru's interest was absorbed in the size and variety of the hats which adorned those travellers of her own sex whose dress and appearance proclaimed them recent visitors from abroad.

"Do look at that woman! She must be fifty, and she dresses just like a girl of sixteen. Foreign ladies always seem to pretend to be young, even when they're grandmothers."

"Well, they do seem to keep young much longer than our women do, don't they?" remarked Ichiro simply.

The girl's mouth twisted a moment as if with pain, and she leaned back listlessly, opening and shutting her fan without replying.

Presently she murmured absently, "Yes, I suppose we get old-looking very quickly—and then if we're not married, we're finished."

But the boy was not listening. He was trying undisguisedly to catch fragments of the rapid conversation which was passing between a group—three young women and two men—who had just invaded their carriage, already somewhat crowded with the influx of passengers. The former squeezed themselves into the small sitting-space available, but even then one was left standing. Their cavaliers, gripping the bar that ran along the carriage overhead, glanced once or twice at Ichiro (or so he thought) as though to suggest that he might afford the fair travellers a little more room by resigning his own seat. Indeed, he made a motion to do so, but Kaoru's hand restrained him.

"Don't be silly, you'll be tired of standing before we reach Kamakura, they haven't paid any more for tickets than we have."

There flashed across his mind the memory of a provocative parasol chased by a young man down a village street; but he kept his seat.

"How fast these foreigners talk! I wonder if they're American or English," he remarked—quite audibly—to his companion.

The young man standing nearest glanced down at him with a rather humorous smile, and it suddenly dawned on him that all foreigners are not quite so ignorant of the language of the land in which they sojourn as most Japanese imagine them to be.

A few intervening stations, and Ofuna was reached. Here they changed, as did most of their fellow-passengers, while the train continued its way to far-off Kobe.

Ten minutes' wait, another few miles in a smaller

and dirtier carriage, a tunnel or two, and behold!—they were at Kamakura.

Both were glad to get out and stretch their legs. They crossed a tram-line, and strolled along a shaded road growing ever sandier underfoot until the view widened on to the open sea. Right and left the sun-kissed sands rolled out golden and smooth, lapped along their edges by tiny ripples, and dotted with pleasure-seekers.

Here and at this hour it seemed still full summer to-day. Children screamed with delight as they dashed in and out of the water, or dug small ramparts against the rising tide; older boys and girls splashed about and pelted one another with seaweeds within safe reach of land, while further out the heads of hardier swimmers bobbed up and down above the wavelets.

Fishing boats crawled with idle sail across the blue rim, and a trailing feather of smoke betrayed a distant steamer.

They wandered lazily along the marge, then sat down on the sand. Kaoru had brought a basket. Ichiro, silencing her protests, had carried it from the station. On opening it, it revealed a dainty lunch, various small odds-and-ends, and—two bathing-costumes.

Ichiro took without question the one that she handed to him: it was coming to seem natural that she should provide for both.

“Do you swim?” he asked.

No, Kaoru could not swim, but she was anxious to learn; hence the preparation for the lesson. They debated a knotty point: bathe first, or lunch?

But it was too early for lunch, the air was hot, the blue water looked inviting; later the weather might change; they decided on the bathe.

The spot where they sat was comparatively isolated. Ichiro changed into his costume. Kaoru, beneath the scanty shelter of her open sunshade, did the same. Kimonos admit of this change of attire under the public eye far more readily than do foreign clothes, and the student had, for the day, discarded his school uniform for native dress.

Two minutes more, and the boy was in, every nerve braced with the cool, salt contact, swimming steadily away from shore. The action brought a sudden memory—the very last time he had been in the sea was the evening of the day on which he had said good-bye to Fujiyé. Then he forgot this in the sheer joy of rapid motion through the waves.

Presently he returned to the beach, where his companion awaited him, and hand-in-hand the two went down into the water.

To teach others to swim was no new thing for Ichiro. He had helped dozens of village youngsters, school-mates mostly, to master the rudiments of the art. This was quite another experience. As he coaxed Kaoru out into the deeper water, more free from drifting weeds, he felt the difference between his former angular little pupils and this warm, lithe, palpitating creature that clung to him for support. When a wave more boisterous than its fellows threatened to break over them, she flung her arms round his neck in half-assumed alarm; and as the soft palms pressed his shoulders her eyes met his with an expression he had not seen in them before.

But she was in earnest in her desire to learn, and after half an hour or so the new pupil was making unmistakable progress. To some people the knack of swimming seems to come naturally, while others may spend many seasons in the water without getting beyond the ability to flounder for a score or so of strokes. Kaoru was in the former class. Before she experienced the little admonitory chill that warns us that we have had enough of the sea for the time, she was able to support herself with ease, unaided, a dozen yards or more.

Coming out, they dried themselves on small towels—also produced from the basket—and found that the sea had sharpened their appetites. After “sushi” and cakes, very thirst-provoking, came Japanese pears, hard but full of refreshing juice, and a modest flask of saké; they drank, turn about, from its lip. The mild alcohol made the boy feel languorous. Then they strolled inland to the town, visited the famous shrine of Hachiman, God of War, and the still more famous Buddha, the Dai Butsu, giant mountain of bronze, cast in the days when men’s piety still moved them to great works, to build cathedrals and wage exterminating wars of creed.

Ichiro, standing in its shadow, looked up curiously at the huge, smooth features—thoughtful, composed, with perhaps a little of contempt, serenely superior to the tiny folk who craned at it like sparrows from below—and wondered what message, if any, they conveyed. Was it the embodiment of man, or of God? Had that great Face been wracked by the struggles and emotions that are part, the essential part, of life? Or had it always been content to

remain aloof, apart from and above the turmoil? Was that strange calm attained after æons of strife, or was it the peace that knows not and has never known aught else? Was it an ideal thing, a thing to be desired, or was it the formulation of an outworn creed, a creed from which his country must turn away if it were to survive?

Kaoru, looking rather bored, was nibbling chocolate and throwing silver-paper pellets at the gold-fish in the pool. "What do you suppose he is thinking about?" asked Ichiro, curious to know her reaction to the image.

"He? I think it's a woman, it looks so lazy. But I've seen it so often on picture-postcards, it doesn't interest me. Let's go back, shall we?"

And slowly they retraced their steps to the car-station near the beach.

It was now some hours after noon. Ichiro had thought of proposing to return, but the girl declared that having come so far they must not miss Enoshima, the little sacred island of a few miles along the shore, to which it is joined by a frail swinging bridge destroyed almost annually by the typhoon, and annually repaired.

The car soon brought them opposite the island. They alighted, paid toll, and crossed the bridge.

Enoshima is the isle of Benten, Goddess of Love. Lovers go there singly to pray for love returned; but you must not go there with your beloved, for the Goddess is jealous, and will cast an evil spell to separate you.

They sell quaint shells and ornaments of shell on Enoshima. There are craggy rocks and caves,

reached by perilous bridges and ladders, going darkling down into the bowels of the cliff. The Sage, Kobo Daishi, who, says legend, first brought to Yamato from China the art of writing, once dwelt in these caves. Up on the cliffs above the caves there are comfortable tea-houses where dainty meals (dainty if you can appreciate shellfish and seaweed soup) may be enjoyed: and where rooms may be had for the day—or night.

Many are found who brave the Goddess' wrath.

As the sun sank in golden brocade beneath the sea, and the moon flooded wave and strand with her clear, pure light, Kaoru and Ichiro were finishing their meal in a little six-mat room overlooking the long stretch of shore. The boy was tired and sleepy after the unwonted exercise and fresh air.

Side by side they looked out across the silvery water, brightening here and there with a phosphorescent streak.

Suddenly he gave a start and looked at his companion.

"Kaoru, what time does the last train leave for Tokyo?"

She turned to face him, putting a hand on either shoulder.

"Ichiro, the last train has gone, or will have gone before we can possibly reach Kamakura. But does it matter?"

And then, bending passionately forward, she put her lips to his.

CHAPTER XVI

BENTEN'S PILGRIMS

SILVER waves were gilding now with the early morning sun, and sea-birds swooped and screamed as they flew over the rocks. Waking with the sound—unfamiliar for so long—of lapping water in his ears, Ichiro puzzled a moment over his whereabouts. Was he indeed in Hojima, the months of City life only a dream of the night that had passed? But the room, too, was unfamiliar, too fine and fanciful for his village home. The sliding shutters had carven tracery running over their woodwork, bright lacquer ornaments crowded the tiny alcove.

He turned on one elbow, and saw the girl on the silk futon beside him. His elbow crushed her outstretched arm, and she winced a little without waking. He remembered everything, and reviewed, with a curious detachment of mind, the events of the day and night.

She looked older now, in the unkindly morning light; little lines showed in places on her smooth skin, the powder on her neck left it mottled, and her hair strayed untidily across her forehead.

Presently, as he looked intently at her, she awoke, and without opening her eyes put up a rounded arm and drew him down to her. Discreet noises moved about the house, and a clock somewhere struck seven. Jingling bells sounded faintly outside, where

a party of white-clad pilgrims climbed the rocks to a small shrine high up—old bent men and women, come from far off to pay devotions.

He rose brusquely to his knees.

"Kaoru, come, we must get up. We should be back in Tokyo. People will be wondering what has become of us."

"I know," she murmured dreamily; then, opening her eyes and looking at the boy, "What people, Ichiro? Who knows or cares in Tokyo what happens to you or me? Ichiro, it was my doing entirely that we are here this morning, but—bend down again and tell me that you love me!"

Did he? He knelt there frowning at her in perplexity, trying to disentangle and define to himself the interwoven yet incongruous threads of feelings and emotions that obscured his vision. He liked her, pitied her, admired her, and last night he had felt the hot flame of passion. The touch of her smooth flesh made his pulses throb. With Fujiyé he had never felt this. Did all these, together, make up that "love" of which he had read in Western books?

The while she lay and watched him, her great black unfathomable eyes fixed on his face, trying to read his soul. Deep, velvety, heavy-lidded—an impulse wrenched him to kiss them savagely, to throw himself into their depths: deep, shadowed pools, far remote from the cleansing tides, did they go down into ancient craters, with living fire below, or was their bottom mud? His brain was still turbid with sleep and the wine they had drunk; images, ideas, mixed and danced in it confusedly. What worth in

resisting? He stooped lower over her, and she crouched towards him, head thrown back, lips parted thirstily.

A gull cried, a long fluting note, as it sailed past their window hunting breakfast on the rocks below. Some other train of thought started in the boy's mind. Turning his head, he looked steadily out through the open casement, out over the sea, where millions of wave-points dazzled the eye and fishing boats chased each other away to the horizon. Over there, across the sparkling sea, beyond Miura's intervening promontory, lay his home, where earlier problems, in which this had played no part, had taxed his solving.

But he had solved them, and cut himself clear. To what end, if now meshed in other tangles? But he was thinking only of himself: what did Kaoru feel? He must get an answer from her. He looked round to speak.

The bed was empty. Pulling her "yukata" over her shoulders, the girl had slipped quietly from the room.

He sat and waited. A little later she returned and knelt down with her back to him at a small oval swing mirror, to complete her toilet. Ichiro meanwhile went down to the bathroom for the cold splash that, unlike most of his countrymen, he never missed.

The October morning air was fresh and bracing. The past week had been unusually hot for the season—hence the number of bathers the previous day, for in most years the sea is too cold in this month for the average watering-place frequenters. To-day

a distinct change could be felt, and the beach was deserted except for a few strollers.

On returning to their room he found breakfast already waiting. They chatted cheerfully as they ate, meeting each other almost on their yesterday's footing. After finishing Kaoru left him alone again, but soon rejoined him.

"Don't you think we had better ask for the bill and make a start?" he suggested.

"The bill? Oh, I've paid it," she returned negligently.

"How much was it?" demanded the boy.

"Don't ask so many questions," was the laughing response. "Now, Ichiro, come along. Don't bother about the basket; they will bring it downstairs. Look, here's the mistress coming in with presents for us—two nice fans and two little baskets of 'awabi' in their shells. No, you shan't see it!"—as Ichiro put out his hand for the receipted bill—"Remember, that's mine."

The tea-house mistress bowed her forehead to the mats, thanked them for the "cha-dai," and trusted they had enjoyed a comfortable night. She addressed Kaoru as "Okusan"—(wife or madam), repeating the word two or three times. The girl responded pleasantly, but shot a covert glance at Ichiro a few moments later to see if he had noticed—and found him gazing absently at her as though lost in thought.

Once outside the door the sun and breeze reacted on their spirits, and they peered with interest into the shell-curio shops that lined the street—Kaoru buying a trifle or two for remembrance—and raced

like children across the swaying wooden bridge, clattering over the planks in their "geta" with a noise like a galloping horse.

At the further end Kaoru's "geta" caught in a loose plank. The silken "hana-o" snapped; she stumbled and all-but fell. Ichiro put out an arm to steady her, and she leaned against it heavily; the life seemed to ebb from her body, and she pressed one hand across her eyes. He bent down to pick up her "geta," and himself almost over-balanced with her weight.

"Help me on to that rock; I want to sit down a minute," she whispered.

Her eyes were shut, and every vestige of colour had fled her face. The boy felt her trembling violently as she pressed her cheek to his, while he more than half carried her to a convenient rock a little way away and then gently detached her arms from his neck. She drew a deep shuddering breath, opened her eyes, and smiled at his face of sympathetic concern.

"Well, did you think I was going to die? My foot pained me for a minute—I twisted it. All right now. Give me my 'geta' to mend."

He fetched the little wooden shoe from where it lay forgotten and neglected on the sand, and the repair was quickly made.

"Please help me to put it on; the 'hana-o' is so tight I can't slip my toe under it."

Meekly he stooped and obeyed her behest, the girl trembling again slightly as he touched her foot; perhaps her toes were cramped—he could hardly get them under the silken thong. Suddenly she

gripped his fingers as though they pinched, and bent her face over them.

"Oh, did I hurt you?" he cried, looking up at her remorsefully.

A smile shadowed her features. "Just a little," she murmured; "but I shall get over it."

Then she stood up, took one last long look under curved palm at the little island with its Benten shrine that they had left, and walked quietly with him to the car station.

On their return journey they chatted and joked and pointed out to each other the little things that caught their eyes along the route, much as they had done when coming, as though nothing of import had happened to separate yesterday from to-day; but sometimes Ichiro fell into long silent reveries, which the girl refrained from interrupting.

During one of these pauses an old country fellow, after peering at Kaoru through huge horn-rimmed goggles, asked,

"How many stations do we pass before reaching Yokohama, Okusan?"

She looked down at her finger-tips and calculated.

"Two—no, three more, I think."

Then again she looked at Ichiro. He was smiling, but frowning a little, too, and this time Kaoru flushed and dropped her eyes.

"People seem very quick to settle our relationship, don't they?" he remarked.

"People are fools, mostly, aren't they, Anisan (brother)?" she returned.

And his answering laugh chased the frown from his forehead and the blush from her cheek.

Bells clanged and porters shouted; the train steamed into Shimbashi station. Ichiro was conscious, perhaps, of a tiny sentiment of relief at the termination of their trip. In the open space outside the station she stood still and laid a hand on his arm; he looked down enquiringly at her.

"We must part now, in a few minutes. Ichiro San—don't bother about last night; it meant nothing to you. Let's forget it. I don't want to think that anything I've done could have interfered with your work; that is what you are living for just now. Only—come to see me sometimes, won't you? Not often, only—no, don't quite forget."

The traffic buzzed around them. Her eyes spoke a question as she raised them for a moment to his face, waiting his reply. What verdict did she hope, perhaps, to hear? Ichiro opened his lips, but hesitated for speech. She must think him cold and hard, yet what could he say?—for her words chimed so exactly with his own judgment of the affair. Kaoru had been endowed with the attraction of mystery, and now the mystery was gone. The connection, if allowed to persist and become still more intimate, might indeed prove a distracting one—to the extent of ruining all his plans, perhaps. To her the thing was probably merely an episode—he would be foolish if he let it become anything more to him. He seemed to himself a brute, yet again, what could he say? He was silent, looking down at her.

A ricksha came swerving break-neck round the corner behind them. Ichiro jumped aside, barely avoiding a collision. The fare, a fat and perspiring

stockbroker hurrying to catch his train, leaned back and shouted a word of apology. The sunshine glinted on his bald, round skull. The pair looked at it, their eyes met, and both burst out laughing; so, undramatically, their little scene ended.

They managed to find standing room in a Ginza car, but parted at Owari Cho, the young man having to change there for Koishikawa.

The old bookseller, absorbed in a roll of Chinese script, asked no questions as to his assistant's absence, and the latter volunteered no explanation.

Ichiro took up his daily life where he had dropped it, and the interlude soon grew into a vague memory, leaving no permanent impress on his mind. Once, weeks after, in a very vivid dream, the whole thing came back, and he wandered round the crags of Enoshima in a shifting mist, seeking and calling for Kaoru, while a waveless, stagnant sea stretched at his feet. When he woke he felt a strong impulse to call at the little restaurant where last he had met the waitress; but he resisted, and soon forgot it.

CHAPTER XVII

VISITORS

OCTOBER passed, November came, work went on. November that year was, contrary to its usual habit, a dull and cheerless month for the most part, with frequent chilly rains. But at its worst Tokyo is spared those smoke-laden fogs that make London's November a month of wretchedness.

Not much pleasure walking in mud and drizzle: Ichiro stuck the closer to his work. Sometimes the drizzle let up, a watery sun crept through, the sky remembered to be blue, streets steamed and dried; but of course those days were never Sundays. So when Sunday came he communed at home with his books, eating biscuits to save cooking-time, and progressed fast. The old man, grateful for his intelligent help, now gave him all of that day to himself.

Sometimes at dusk he would stroll round to visit his Kagoshima friend at his workshop—which was also bedroom, study-room and occasional kitchen. There amid the sweetish smell of old leather they would sit, warming hands at the charcoal hibachi, and continue those discussions which had served as meeting-ground for their minds when Nature in her kinder moods had called them abroad. Sometimes they irritated each other, but only on the surface. Saigo had a plodding, oat-bread outlook;

he did not ban dreams, but they had to be closely scrutinised before passing. His feet never left earth, and he would sometimes look up in amused, rather sarcastic puzzlement at his friend gyrating in mazes of fantastic speculation above him. Ichiro was earnest enough too, at times and in his way, but the deadly, single-eyed directness that so often makes young persons in their late teens a trial to themselves and those around them was being modified by a sense of humour. Still under twenty, he had come of age.

One such afternoon, when their talk had grown more confidential than was its wont, Ichiro asked his friend,

"Saigo San, have you ever had a sweetheart?"

They hardly ever discussed personal affairs, such being beneath the notice of philosophers. The abrupt question followed a period of silence, while each had mused along his own line of thought. Saigo smiled a little at its directness.

"As I think I've remarked before, and in fact you may have noticed it, I'm not the kind of man that the girls chase after very much, and I've never had time or inclination to run after them. But before I left my province I knew one who seemed as if she rather fancied me. She was quite pretty, but not very clever, in fact, I sometimes felt that she was rather stupid. Yet she attracted me curiously, almost irritatingly—by her outside only, I suppose, though I don't think I'm sensuous by nature. We often had a chance to meet, as her parents—shopkeepers in our village, not very rich but not very poor either—lived quite near our house and were

intimate with mine. We used to walk together and talk a good deal, though I don't think she understood most of what I said, while her chatter failed to interest me much. Yet, as I say, I often found that thoughts of her kept getting between me and my work, which was not at all what I desired. I know she thought a good deal of me, too: admired—don't laugh!—my majestic intellect. I suppose if I had wished I could have married her, and our families would have been delighted. Probably if I had done so I should soon have ceased to think about her at all, which would have been one solution of the problem. She was heiress to a soy and pickles business, with the post-office as a side-line, it would have kept me in food and leisure for life. But it would not have been fair to the girl—you see, I was a scrupulous young man, if not very loving—and when I finally left my province I did not answer her letters, though she wrote me two or three. Now," he concluded with a laugh, "don't you think me a very cold-blooded creature, Koyama San?"

"I don't know," replied Ichiro thoughtfully. "Perhaps I should have done the same, had it been I."

"Would you? I wonder!" laughed his friend. "I don't think, even after all these months, I've quite got to the bottom of your character, young man. When first I met you I must confess that I had very serious doubts as to your holding to the austere life you had laid down for yourself: you seemed a bit too callow and enthusiastic; and now I'm not sure that you're not a cynic. Question for

question—have *you* ever had a sweetheart, Koyama San?"

But the younger man returned no answer to the query, and in the gathering twilight Saigo smiled quietly to himself.

The next Sunday was fine. November's glooms were finished, and the last month of the year opened, as it often does, with a cloudless sky. Ichiro awoke one morning to find the world sparkling in silver sheen. The first frost was on the ground.

Crimson maple leaves were rustling to the earth or already lying in heaps about the parks, trodden underfoot of men, soon to mingle with the soil. In the remoter vault of winter the stars shone as brilliant points, and the soft pink glow edging the rich indigo of night's sky, that all around the pale horizon heralded the approach of dawn, was a sight to draw the sluggard from his warm quilts.

Ichiro awoke and looked out at the frosty world. Good—it was Sunday! To-day he would certainly go out for a long, invigorating tramp. He washed, dressed, fed, and rubbed his shoes. Then came a cheerful voice from without, demanding admittance. He opened the door.

There stood his journalistic friend, Mori Noboru, spruce and neat as usual when in the public eye; and with him, in dark grey student's hakama, a young lady. For a moment, with a shock, he thought it might be Kaoru. But it was not.

He shook his friend warmly by the hand—for in many little points he loved to affect the Westerner. The young lady bowed.

"Why, Koyama San, you really are a stranger, a complete stranger! I haven't seen you for centuries. How are you getting on? Oh, let me introduce you—this is my sister; Aiko, my very intimate friend, Koyama San, whom I have often talked to you about, although he has kept very much out of my way lately. Koyama, you remember, don't you, my telling you that I had a sister, the only one left to me of all my family?"

Ichiro, at first glimpse had thought the relationship invented for the occasion; but now he *did* remember it. He pressed his visitors to enter, apologised for the shabbiness of the room, brought small cushions (made in Hojima of strong, country-woven silk; he was rather proud of them), and they all squatted down. Aiko San spied a canister on the "cha-dansu" shelf, cups and a tiny teapot; water was boiling in an iron kettle over the hibachi. While her brother talked she took upon herself to play hostess, and in a few minutes tea was served. Then she sat sedately down.

Mori's tongue rattled on at its usual pace, mixing news and nonsense. In a short time they were all three chattering like magpies and laughing heartily. Ichiro found himself able now to contribute his full share to the flow of gossip, raillery and jokes in which his friend delighted, and the latter was secretly more than a little surprised at the change, though he forbore to comment on it.

"Our young philosopher," thought he, "has come out of his shell: what, I wonder, was the educative agent?"

Aiko, for her part, talked as much as did the

others. To Ichiro she was something of a new type. Pert tea-house girls he knew, and shy, demure daughters-of-the-house (Fujiy  was in a class apart). This girl belonged to neither category.

Without a trace of embarrassment, while her brother went into the shop to seek a certain volume of old stories that he fancied he had seen on the shelves some time before, leaving the two together, she chatted away to her young host of Tokyo life as she found it. Her first visit, a very short one, had been when she was quite a child, both parents being then alive. This autumn she had come up again to study painting at the Academy in Hongo.

She talked, Ichiro watched. Her clear skin, free from all trace of powder, shone milky white in the winter sunlight that fell on her face from the one window of the dingy little room—Ichigo girls are noted for their fair complexion—and the student style of hair-dressing suited her to perfection. Her eyes were large and dark, like Kaoru's, but lacked something of their mysterious depth, and met his own frankly without coquetry. Every now and then her silvery tinkle of a laugh rang out clearly like the note of the suzu-mushi, so that he found himself searching for some remark that might excite a repetition of the charming little sound.

She liked her school, liked the city, and almost everything in it. She confided to Ichiro that lately life in the country had been extremely dull. The long winters, when snow lay on the ground for months and sometimes heaped up high as the house-roofs, seemed unending: the dowdy style of the girls, her class-mates in the country Middle School,

the rustic youths and tedious elders who made up society in that remote place among the mountains, and the mountains themselves—"I'm sick of mountains," she declared. "Some people say they're beautiful and poetical, but for my part I should not mind if I never see another. I love the sea; I'd never seen it until last summer, and now I'm longing for summer to come again so that we can holiday beside the sea. I sometimes go to Shinagawa just to look at it. Noboru says he's going to take me to Kamakura some day soon—I'm dying to go there, though of course it's too cold to swim. You must come with us, won't you? I do so want to see Enoshima and paint a picture of it. I always think of it, from what I've heard, as a fairy island. You've been there, of course?"

The memories evoked by her innocent question flooded his consciousness. For some minutes he was deaf to her chatter. The remembrance of that warm day and night in the sacred Isle of Benten had grown so faint, for weeks he had never thought of it at all. The girl with whom they had been spent he had not seen since. Business not having taken him near the café where she worked, he had never made occasion to go. He had thought to, once or twice, and put it off. He reproached himself for ingratitude—all else apart, she had certainly spent far more than she could afford over their trip—but the memory of her elusive and pathetic charm had faded from his mind. Sometimes, when he did recall the incident, he could hardly help wondering if he were not but one of many with whom she had made similar excursions: such is

the justice that man has always accorded woman. Then he forgot altogether—or the thing slipped into that remote and unvisited place in the memory that is equivalent to forgetfulness.

Aiko San's chance words brought it all back, in every detail; and with it the memory of another Fairies' Isle. He sat in a trance, reviewing the past.

A hand on his shoulder and a hearty laugh in his ear brought him back to the present. Mori had returned to the room.

"Why, what's this? I left you chattering and come back to find you sitting like a bronze Buddha while my little sister is demanding to know why you don't answer her, and wondering if you are ill. Have you been saying anything to make him angry, Aichan?"

"No, I don't think so," answered the girl laughing, but with a little tremor in her voice which hinted that her companion's strange demeanour had brought tears near. "I really forget what I *was* talking about, but it was nothing very serious."

Ichiro had roused himself, and was blushing as he had not blushed for months. He knew not how to excuse his gaucherie.

"Forgive me—I really have been very rude. I think my solitary life, as your brother says, must be beginning to affect my brain. I have so few visitors, you know, I'm afraid that I've forgotten all my manners. You were saying something about the sea, weren't you?"

"Oh yes, that was it," replied the girl cheerfully. "I was just saying how I loved the sea, and I suppose

that reminded Koyama San of his home, and he forgot all about poor little me!"

"Yes, to tell the truth, I think that *was* it," lied Ichiro, much relieved. "You know, until I first came to Tokyo I had scarcely ever been out of ear-shot of the waves."

"Oh, Anisan, he says he will come with us when we go to Kamakura. You know you promised to take me soon, didn't you? When shall we go? Next Sunday, if it's fine?" cried Aiko, delighted at the prospect.

"Perhaps I said I should *like* to go," smiled Ichiro in reply; "But I'm afraid I shall be too busy to get off for many, many weeks, or even months."

"Better not overdo things," counselled his friend. "Too much study has a bad effect on the brain, as you're beginning to show already. If you keep it up we shall find you wandering away one of these days to the Kegon Falls at Nikko, and measuring how far it is from top to bottom by jumping down."

"I wonder why so many of our students commit suicide every year," said Ichiro, glad of an excuse to change the subject. "I believe you hardly hear of such a thing abroad. Is it that we study harder, or are our brains not strong enough to stand the strain?"

"I have a special theory about that," returned the journalist. "I believe it all comes from hard-boiled rice. It's indigestible and when it is a constant diet the brain finally rebels."

"The new doctor of medicine has a thesis," laughed Ichiro.

"Well, ask your young medical friend if there's not a lot in it," retorted Mori.

"Saigo San? Yes. He's a bread-eater when possible, you know. Rice he puts in the same class as late hours, saké, and—and so on, as the enemies of the aspiring young man."

"Very sound, sensible fellow that," agreed Mori, nodding vigorously.

"Very: though I shouldn't have taken you to be one of his disciples," smiled Ichiro.

"Well, as I think I've explained to you before, there's a vast difference between theory and practice, especially among journalists," rejoined his friend.

Aiko San, sitting silent while the other two talked, looked across at her brother; he glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Why, it is getting late and we have promised to call on some other friends this morning, at Aoyama. No, really, we must not stay another minute. Jump up, Aichan, and make your bows."

Ichiro was disappointed. He had thought of proposing a walk, but could hardly do so now.

"If you must—but don't forget to visit me. Come another Sunday, won't you?"

Mori readily promised. Aiko murmured a word or two of assent. They were gone.

Re-seated by the hibachi, the student pictured the little oval, delicate face so lately opposite him, bathed in sunlight and shining up against the drab background of his colourless wall. Shaking himself from his reverie he jumped up and went out. Mori had mentioned that they were going to Aoyama. Unconsciously his steps turned, too, in that direction.

At the Moat he gave himself the small luxury of a tram, and got out by the Parade Ground.

The morning frost had vanished, leaving behind a thin coat of mud on the road, fast drying under the hot sun. He walked across the open space, filling his lungs with the clear, fresh air, to dispel those vaporous memories that his visitor's words had evoked.

A group of officers from the Military College hard by came clattering up, their horses' hoofs scattering small clods and kicking up the dust.

He watched them idly. How would a soldier's life have suited him? A small defect in his hearing had exempted him from conscription—though in any case, as a student above Middle School grade, he would have been allowed to defer his term of service until after his twenty-seventh year. A few of his older class-mates had returned to the village vastly improved, in some ways, by their two years of training; but the dull routine of farming soon effaced the marks of discipline; their carriage lost its erectness as their minds sank back into rural sloth.

He fell to wondering in what part of Aoyama his friends were visiting. Sitting down on a log, he tried to recall the echo of Aiko San's silvery laughter.

But this mood was not for long. Of late months he had drilled his mind to concentration, as he knew by experience that habits of aimless thought were easy to form and hard to break. Feeling in his pocket for a book, he found that for once he had forgotten to bring one with him.

"This will never do," he exclaimed aloud. "If you are not careful, the fruits of four months' hard study are in danger of being lost!"

Nevertheless, on his homeward way he scanned each couple that he met. And a fortnight later, being in Shitaya, he called at the little restaurant where he had met Kaoru, but she had gone.

CHAPTER XVIII

SHIPWRECK

LIFE in Hojima flowed on without much change for most of its inhabitants, save for the unvarying changes that the seasons bring. The rice grew full in ear, ripened, and was cut down. Fishing smacks put out for their daily harvest, and returned full or empty according to the decrees of fate. The typhoon in September that caught Ichiro on inland fields wrought its accustomed havoc; some of those fishing-boats that put out to sea at morn failed to return at all, and a few old cottages crashed in ruins on the hill-side; but such is the daily life and death of man.

For one house, deep-thatched and wide-eaved, that summer had brought change and left a vacancy. The farmer, a little more bowed as he plodded to his work, spoke hardly ever of the boy, but probably thought of him none the less. He grunted when his wife read to him the little filial messages with which every letter from the city began or ended; but whether the grunt was the outward expression of annoyance or pleasure, or of grudging admiration at the writer's proved ability to work for himself, no one knew. No doubt it appealed to the thrifty side of this hard-working, well-to-do peasant, but one does not care to see one's most dismal prophecies of failure themselves fail. He had given the lad

six weeks to find out the market value of dreams—the fifty yen should last about that long. Being stubborn (the father recognised that quality, and complacently saw a little image of himself in it), he might starve for a month longer; perhaps run into debt; but before autumn was over he would return subdued. Now autumn was gone and the New Year near.

To mother and sisters Ichiro formed a topic of unceasing interest when the farmer was out of earshot, and the neighbours often asked for news. His letters came frequently at first, moderately full of home-sickness; then at longer intervals, more off-hand and mannish. His mother wrote once a week and told him of the village happenings: those small events which seemed so engrossing at first, each detail calling up a memory, and then gradually dwindling, somehow, though he tried loyally not to think so, into most tiresome gossip. But his family affection never waned, and he awaited the letters eagerly. His mother, too, had hoped that her son would tire of his whim and return to quiet prosperity at home; but as the months slipped by this hope weakened.

One village happening, by some chance, Mother Koyama forgot to tell; had she mentioned it, the news might have brought her son home hot-foot; but it concerned a girl with whom their family had less than no concern, so she never dreamt that it could possibly interest her son.

It concerned, in fact, a cottage right at the further end of the village, away by the sea, where the passing

year had brought sharp changes, misfortune, grief, ruin.

Fujiyé's father had taken to speculation in his later years; first to increase the store that was to be his child's dowry, then as a hobby—much more interesting than fishing, and more comfortable for old bones—and then, gradually, with a gambler's mania. His early operations—beginner's luck—had been amazingly successful: he thought himself a financial wizard. Had he been content to stop he might have retired a really wealthy man. Then Chance ceased smiling, and struck him.

The markets went against him. He lost: lost again: put more and more on the board. A big company failed half the world away, and smashed the old fisherman. Then the typhoon met his best boats out at sea and foundered them with all their crews, and among those he lost the two old net-captains who had been with him since boyhood—first equals and then servants but always friends, the only two men with whom, in his old age, he cared to talk.

The typhoon came, we have seen, on a Sunday. For the next two days and nights he shut himself up in his house, seeing no one, not even his daughter. Wednesday morning's mail brought a letter; at noon he went out; and Thursday's retreating tide left his dead body, tangled in seaweeds, in the shallow water a mile along the coast.

On Saturday two black-coated men came from the city and by night-fall everyone knew that Watanabé had died hopelessly ruined and deep in debt.

From the first he had borne all his troubles secretly; never a word of them passed to his beloved child. To the last he never stinted her for money, but as the clouds thickened Fujiyé sensed their shadows, spent little, and tried to make up at home by extra lovingness for the blows of fate which, instinct told her, were battering the grim old man from without. But she had never realised that things were so desperate.

A crowd came to the funeral, for the old man had been a figure in his part of the village respected, though few had liked him much, and they pitied the girl so suddenly bereft of all she had. She, too, had no real intimates there—people said she carried her nose too high—that delicate, rather scornful little nose which flat-faced Hojima belles secretly envied her; but envy's voice was stilled, and villagers proffered blunt sympathy as Fujiyé passed them along the street.

But the girl, though she thanked them gratefully and sincerely, bore herself with the proud and graceful carriage that had earned her so many covert sneers alike from matrons and maids. They naturally felt that she should have been subdued by her misfortunes to the proper attitude of the penniless, and might have forgiven her beauty if she had given them a chance. When she had gone, little whispers of detraction again made themselves heard.

"She doesn't seem to worry much over her troubles," said the wrinkled wives as they went about their work. "No doubt the old man was not too pleasant to live with, but still he was her father,

and it would have been decent to show more filial sorrow. As for the money, she probably knew that their rich days were over and she thinks with her good looks to manage in other ways. I'm glad *my* girls are honest and hard-working, even if they don't look so much like long-beaked foreign women. I wonder what she will do now! Go back to Tokyo, I suppose, and that will be the last that we shall see of her."

"I wonder what I shall do now?" That was precisely the thought that Fujiyé carried with her as she walked on steadily along the sandy road, still strewn with *débris* from the recent storm; shrivelled seaweed, broken branches, old straw sandals, and fragments of cloth and paper and straw matting washed out of the inundated cottages nearest the sea. In one place lay a little dead puppy—drowned, as her father had been drowned, by the unthinking waves. Over its sleek, glistening body a scarlet crab crawled, revelling in the feast; and as the girl stopped a moment to gaze at it mechanically, her thoughts on other matters, the creature waved its jagged claws at her as though in triumph or derision.

What should she do now? As far as she knew, none of her near relations were left alive. For years the old man had written no letters except on business matters, and received none.

Should she go to Tokyo? There were her school friends, and the ladies of the school. They might help her—at any rate the latter.

But Fujiyé's pride rebelled against the thought of going to them for charity—once so secure in wealth and ease, now totally a beggar; before one has learnt

what terribly sharp discomforts life may have in store, pride is the thorniest thing to put in one's pocket. Her school-fellows had envied her then: she could not face their pity. Rather go among strangers, and begin her new, hard life free from all connection with her old.

For one more night she would sleep in the old house by the beach; then leave it for ever.

On and on she walked. Strange, this world! The same bright sun, blue, dancing waves, white-sailed boats—the same old fisherman sitting mending a net on the very same stone where she had seen him doing it a fortnight ago; nothing to show that everything had changed. She watched a sea-bird prying under stones for worms or half-tide creatures; he wrenched at a heavy one, twisting his neck so comically—surely he could never lift it! He did, and it fell back on his foot. He pulled his long toes out and danced about, shaking them. Had he pinched his favourite corn? Fujiyé smiled—and that moment of forgetfulness passed, and reality struck her, so that she swayed with the pain of it.

She walked on through the dark tunnel that in those days pierced the hilly spur dividing the Hojima district from neighbouring Katsuyama, where the road went darkly under mossy rock, dank moisture dripped on the wayfarer from above, close, sulphury smells oozed out from between crevices, and the footfall sounded hollowly with uncanny noises.

Then, suddenly, clear autumn sunshine and the fresh breeze; the road winds down the slope, past school and little cemetery, to the village and the sea.

She rested to refresh herself in a little tea-house

by the beach, busy enough in summer, now empty of customers. The old woman looked at her curiously—misfortune travels apace; her story had already reached this hamlet.

Near by, five or six girls were busily engaged in packing small fish—herrings or such-like—into barrels, pressing the coarse salt around them, working hard but chatting and joking the while in their country dialect. Their hands were chapped and roughened, their skins dark as the brown rocks that dotted the beach, but they looked happy, and the girl watched them with strange envy. How if she had been born to such a life? Then the crushing thought—before long she might be glad to get just such a job. Presently they finished and went away.

Fujiyé looked out drearily at the sparkling water and the blue coast opposite. She thought of the boy who had gone to try conclusions with life across there. Would he succeed? Would he forget? Would he come back? Should she ever see him again? She did not know where he was in Tokyo—perhaps he had already left. "You may write to me after six months, if you still remember and care to do so," she had said at parting, "but not before." And he, vexatious boy, had taken her at her word. When his letter came, if it came, where would she be? Now she was going. If he came back he would not find her. Well, best so. Beggar, child of a suicide, what a welcome bride for the son of—and suddenly her cheeks flamed. Foolish! Why, he had never spoken, perhaps never even thought, of marriage between them. But her heart ached, and her dry eyes ached, oh, so bitterly.

The blue water sparkled; forgetfulness, under there. She thought of her father. But life, though it seemed to hold so little, was strong within her. That refuge, were she driven to it, was always hers to take: she would not take it yet.

Slowly, with weary steps, she returned. The house was empty, the amado all shut; that old nurse had died a month before, and since then she had done all the daily work herself. The bathroom door was ajar; she entered that way. Inside, all darkness. She opened a few shutters, made a fire, lighted a lamp (the company had cut off the electricity), and prepared to pack for the morrow.

She filled a large basket with her best and costliest clothes. No more dainty dresses for the work-girl but these things represented money, and some money she must have. Were they indeed hers still, or did they by rights belong to her father's creditors? To the feminine soul mere abstract law means little, when it opposes necessity or desire. As for those things that she could not take, the creditors were welcome to them. Then, tired to exhaustion, she lay down to sleep, and slept dreamlessly. This little favour did Fate give her.

By eight next morning she was gone. What happened to the house she never knew or cared.

Only, as she walked to the beach, the sight of that little island where, centuries before it seemed she had listened to the out-pourings of a boy who had held her hand and looked into her eyes—the long-familiar outline of shore and wave and headland—brought a sudden sharp pain into her heart, so sharp that she dropped her basket and gasped, pressing her palms

across her forehead. Then she threw herself down prone, and burst into passionate, shuddering sobs, so that her toes scratched the sand.

It was very early, and no others were about.

Numbed by her bruising emotion, she grew calmer. She dried her eyes, picked up her basket, and walked on. She reached the village. Beyond that was the stopping-place of the little omnibus that carries passengers along the coast road. There she waited.

Several neighbours came up to speak to her and wish her god-speed. She felt that they meant kindly, and was grateful.

Far in the distance sounded the driver's tuneless horn. Soon the clumsy, jolting car, springless and cushionless, hove into sight. It rattled and creaked, and might have carried, except for these drawbacks, six passengers in some comfort. It actually carried eight, without any.

Room was made somehow for the girl and her luggage. Horses were changed—the new animal looking as weary as the old one. They drove on. The horn blew dismally.

Bumping, lurching and groaning the 'bus rolled onwards, now and then stopping to drop a traveller or take up a fresh one. To Fujiyé the journey seemed to lengthen out into eternity. Sometimes she slept in spite of the hideous motion, sometimes she sat for hours awake but drugged by grief and discomfort into a sort of trance. Never, in after life, did she forget the complete wretchedness of that ride.

CHAPTER XIX

TRIALS OF A MAID-SERVANT

KISARADZU is a small town standing on sandy mud-flats by Tokyo Bay; fairly important, not unpicturesque, smells of fish: no points of interest to recommend it to the tourist. Steamers ply across the Bay to Yokohama, with whom it trades. Treaty Ports sully themselves and their neighbours.

At Kisaradzu Fujiyé's nightmare ride ended, and there she stayed some days in a very small, quiet, cheap hotel a few hundred yards back from the shore. The bath-tub, patronised one after another—same water—by all the guests and each of the staff, was in an uncurtained alcove of the kitchen.

Her first business was to turn her pretty clothes, or most of them, into cash. In this she was moderately successful. The dealer, with thick lips and long bulbous nose (why does such traffic induce that type of face?) did not know quite what to make of her. He took her first for a geisha, but her modest manner of speech denied it. Then he thought she must be the young mistress of some rich man who had tired of her, or whom perhaps she had robbed and left. That seemed hardly to fit her case, either. Finally (these speculations relieved the monotony of business), he decided that she was the daughter of wealthy people, who, after some love episode, had run away from home; when Fujiyé thought he was

figuring up the value of an obi, he was really picturing to himself her hypothetical lover; so do we misjudge one another. Anyway, the stuff was first-rate material; good, heavy silk. He proceeded to try to make as much out of her as possible.

At the first deal, however, he found he had not met a fool. This pretty puzzle knew the value of silk, and meant to have it. Give a fair price or let it go elsewhere. He did the former. Both parties were satisfied, and a slender purse swelled.

Fujiyé stayed a week at Kisaradzu. Chatting one day with an old lady whom she met at an ice-water shop on the beach, she heard that a certain visitor from near-by Chiba City, was looking round for a servant. She wanted, it seemed, a girl of refined manner but not too modish in style. Fujiyé wondered if she would suit. Her chance friend (sharing the clothes dealer's speculations) thought she might, and promised to arrange an interview.

Fujiyé—she who loved pretty clothes and pretty things so much!—had dressed herself in a plain cotton kimono of dullest pattern; her hair she deftly coiled in most ungraceful country style, and she tried to carry herself humbly as befitted her changed state, for she knew the world, and how best some of its dangers may be met.

The Chiba lady saw her, and approved. This Chiba lady was of a florid and common type—large features, fair complexion assisted liberally by art: stumpy person adorned with gold and silver ornaments, clothed splendidly in bright silks that did not suit her: wide waist and wider hips, and a commanding voice.

Fujiyé's face was brown and unpowdered. The close-folded cotton kimono hid the whiteness of her body. Her future employer thought her devoid of beauty, and was satisfied—that was an important condition. Yet she also saw that the girl was neat, ladylike and graceful, not likely to jar on the fine house to which she purposed to take her.

The wages offered were fair, conditions reasonable. With very little talk they came to terms. Fujiyé thought herself much luckier than she might have been. Next day they left Kisaradzu together for the city of Chiba, capital of Chiba Prefecture.

Then began for the young girl some months of quiet, tedious, restful life. She found her duties light and not unpleasant. There were three other servants in the house, two over thirty and the third about Fujiyé's own age: all plain, homely, countrified. They were jealous of her, no doubt, in a dull, unmalignant fashion, but she did not have much of their company.

Her mistress made almost a friend of her, took her out for drives and ricksha rides, and once or twice by train to Tokyo. She thought this quiet, colourless creature a useful foil to her own flamboyant style. Like most women she disliked ugliness even in a possible rival, so long as her own looks were not eclipsed. Once or twice she offered to buy some gay trinkets for the girl. The latter thanked her but gently refused them; the mistress was surprised, but applauded her good sense.

From time to time the master of the house came down to Chiba from Tokyo, where his business was. Fujiyé disliked him, by instinct, from the first.

He was probably about the same age as his wife—forty, or a little more. His complexion was red with orange shades, his skin spotted and shiny, as though slightly greasy. He was short, rather fat, and had a continuous smile, most benevolent. His business in the City brought him much in contact with foreigners; he had a good name among them, both with the strict, who went to church or chapel, and with the lax, who went only where their carnal appetites called them: which was curious. To one or two charitable institutions he subscribed liberally. He was also prominent on the board of a large, semi-religious school for boys. As speech-maker at graduation ceremonies or committees for uplift he was invariably a success, humorous but serious when befitting.

At first he took very little notice of Fujiyé, but on his second visit she thought that he would sometimes sit and stare at her rather longer than occasion called for, and at such times his smile grew wider and even more benevolent. Pottering round the house one day, he came into her little room, and espied a couple of English novels on the shelf where she kept her few belongings.

That evening as she served the couple at dinner the good man—whose name was Shimizu—suddenly addressed the maid in English, which he spoke fluently though incorrectly. Without thinking she answered in the same language. Her mistress was not a little surprised, and plainly displeased, since she herself couldn't understand a word they said; she certainly had not reckoned on engaging a servant with such accomplishments. After that

night Shimizu frequently used English when speaking to the girl, but she would never again reply except in Japanese, and often pretended not to understand his meaning; it seemed as though he were trying to create a bond between them from which the lady of the house was left out.

Life in Chiba was not exciting. The place boasts of more than one large college; plenty of students of both sexes walked the streets. When Fujiyé went out alone—which she did as rarely as possible—young men sometimes spoke to her, even followed her, but she was quite capable of showing them that she didn't feel flattered by their attentions. Often her mistress would take her to a picture-palace or to the theatre. These times she enjoyed herself, forgetting her own dull days in the romantic doings on the stage.

Then came the year's end. In the household those ceremonies proper to the season were duly performed. On either side the gateway they erected standards of pine-branches and bamboo, such as Fujiyé had often used in decorating her own cottage home. But these were put up by the gardener, very fine, formal and expensive. Over the doors hung big crawfish, bitter-oranges, seaweed and plaited straw, potent to ensure good luck and long life. Great flat slabs of "mochi," rice pounded into hard and sticky masses, adorned the "toko-no-ma" of the guest-room; Japanese, young and old, gorge themselves on this for the first week of the year; cut up into bits and boiled in sweet or savoury soup, it appears, morning, noon and night, as the staple dish.

How Fujiyé had enjoyed New Year in bygone days! The noisy parties where everyone squatted on the floor playing "poetry-cards" for ten hours on end, till the mites fell asleep: the New Year calls, when every friend's house must be visited, and sweet spiced wine drunk at each! Good luck, long life, happiness, prosperity: what a jolly business life was then! Well, some good years she had known. And the future?

Such were the maid's waking thoughts on the first day of January. Then visitors came, and she had little time for moping. Next day her mistress took her out for the visiting, and at more than one house the good folks rallied her on her pensiveness, too sober for the season, when most, good and bad, get a little drunk. Spiced wine, in quantity, has that effect.

Hard frosts set in, and then came snow. Shimizu came frequently to his Chiba villa, and managed to force his intimacy more and more on the unwilling girl. Her mistress must have noticed something, though the man was circumspect. Fujiyé felt that her manner towards her was changing; she was less friendly than before, and sometimes glanced covertly at her with hard, suspicious looks.

Then came March and warmer days; the master stayed more in Tokyo. A little spring came back to Fujiyé's heart and manner: difficult to be always gloomy when the trees are budding. April passed, and May.

One evening she was sitting in her room, reading, straining her eyes in the twilight. Her mistress had gone to the theatre with a friend, leaving the girl,

as now she often did, alone to her thoughts. The other maids were in the kitchen. A ricksha drew up outside, feet moved in the hall: someone had come.

Presently the shoji of her room opened noiselessly and a shadow fell across her page. She looked up.

The merchant had returned and was standing by her in the dusk, his benevolent smile widening to a grin. He bent over to see what she was reading, and she resigned the book to his hand.

"Why, you must be dull, all alone here. So my wife has gone to the theatre and left you to amuse yourself! I thought she usually took you with her."

He knew that of late she didn't: Fujiyé knew that he knew. "So she does, sometimes, but to-night she has gone with Mrs. Okamoto," she answered, drawing away from him.

"And suppose for a change *we* go out together, eh? Come, I have brought such a pretty 'chirimen' kimono and haori with me from Tokyo—I know young girls like dainty clothes. Please put them on, I want to see how you would look dressed up as you should be to suit your face."

"No, thank you very much, but I have quite enough clothes; please give them to someone else."

"Don't be foolish. I know you like such things—I can see it in your face: isn't this lovely?"—and as he spoke he opened a parcel which he carried, and showed a beautiful garment of dark-blue crêpe-de-chine which certainly did great credit to his taste in selecting feminine apparel.

"There are two rickshas waiting at the gate.

Put on that dress and come out, just for an hour or two."

While speaking he knelt down by her side and slid one plump hand under her arm, while with the other he loosened the fastening of her obi.

With a sudden movement the girl slipped from his grasp and, without answering, turned to leave the room.

She heard voices in the hall. Someone entered the next apartment. Fujiyé crossed the verandah with rapid, uneven steps, one end of her long obi trailing behind her on the floor; and as she did so she met her mistress. The woman passed her without a word, and went on into the little bedroom beyond.

There she found Shimizu standing gaping like a fish at the sudden dénouement. The chirimen dress lay glistening in its beauty on the floor.

She opened her mouth and glared at him, too infuriated for words. The man cowered before her, a crouching dog detected in a felony. Not for years had he experienced so uncomfortable a moment.

Then, whipping round, she went out dumbly, as Fujiyé had done before her, and found the girl standing, head bent over the verandah railing, looking out as in a trance into the empty night across the garden.

At sight of her the jealous woman's pent fury broke bounds. With strident voice and every indecent epithet she stormed and raved at the silent figure. Then, maddened by that silence, she snatched up the gaudy parasol which she had dropped and struck Fujiyé again and again across

the back and shoulders, her rage increasing with her violence, till the handle snapped and she leant back against a post, gasping to get her breath. Virtue had done its best.

Ricksha wheels grated on the gravel without. The noise rapidly dwindled into silence. The merchant had wisely departed until the weather should improve.

His wife went to the kitchen to find out from the servants what they might know of this affair.

While she was gone Fujiyé stole painfully to her room, gathered her few small possessions into a bundle by the moon-rays which were now shining in, and went out through the garden to the gate.

Another ricksha still stood there empty—doubtless the one procured by the master to take her for the intended evening's jaunt.

She got in, and was carried swiftly to the railway station.

CHAPTER XX

THE SEASIDE "YADOYA"

OUT of the scented darkness through which her little rubber-tyred car glided almost noiselessly now that the gravel was passed, while shadows cast by the pale moon from roadside trees flitted across her face, Fujiyé drew up suddenly in the patch of brilliance from the open door of Chiba station.

She got down ("Paid for already," said the man with a friendly grin as she proffered her fare), entered, and sank on to a bench in the busy, stuffy waiting-room. Little groups moved noisily to and fro, boys shouted, engines shrieked and whistled, bells rang. Friends greeted or bade each other farewell, wooden geta clattered over the floor. All the mingled uproar of a busy railway station smote upon and confused her ear. The bright light pained her. She tried to think, and could not, except for a sort of impersonal wonder as to what chance had brought Shimizu's wife back so early.

She had fled here with no definite plan—simply to escape, as a beaten animal escapes: to get far away from the place where this hateful thing had happened. The railway would take her quickest and farthest.

Something must be done, some line of action settled. She sat up, covered ears and eyes with her

hands to shut out the scurry and glare, pressed her temples with her finger-tips. No use—her brain refused. Presently, faint with misery and oppressed by the noise and lights, she fell asleep with head pillowed on arm, like a child. She was not much more.

After some time—hours perhaps—she woke. A man was shaking her by the elbow.

"Where are you going, please? Are you waiting for a train?"

She forced her lids to rise. A young man, uniformed, with pinkish smudgy cheeks and a broom. A porter, of course, and this was the station waiting-room, and not her bedroom. Marvellously quiet it had got, though—where was all the bustle and crowd that had bothered her? Wiped out, as they wipe out a picture from the screen. The lights were all turned down, too: yes, she must have slept hours. But the young man, twiddling his broom, was gazing at her for an answer. "Are you waiting for a train?" One does go to a railway station for a train, usually; but she could not think why she was sitting here, in this one. She frowned at the smudgy young man, trying to concentrate her thoughts; then she feared he might think she was very angry, and she tried to smile instead. A flicker of apprehension seemed to light the young man's vacuous face: was he beginning to take her for a lunatic?

Fujiyé sat up straight, pulled her faculties together, and suddenly remembered what had brought her there. Still she could not formulate a plan of action. The porter, leaning on his broom-handle, mooned

at her patiently but curiously; he couldn't have much work that evening, yet the floor was fearfully dirty and littered. With an effort she spoke.

"At what time does the next train go?"

Rather a silly question, without mentioning where to; but porters are used to silly questions.

"Up or down?"

She tried to command her thoughts, to decide where she should go. One way lay Tokyo, the other the quiet shores of the Pacific. Streets and City people seemed hideous to her now. To bathe herself in the sea, to wash off the stain of that fat man's groping arm! With an enormous effort she concentrated her mind for a decision.

"I mean the down train."

"Last down train left here nearly two hours ago," riposted the broom-holder, but with a decent air of controlling that note of triumph in which porters usually dispense such information. "The next is at six-thirty to-morrow morning."

"What time is it now?"

"Half past eleven, nearly."

"Thank you. How far does the first down-train go?"

"Right to the end of the line, to Suginoura; is that where you want to go?"

The girl considered. Probably it was a town of some size, being the terminus, and perhaps a popular resort for summer visitors. Well, she didn't want that. She glanced up guardedly to see if there was a time-table on the wall. None.

"What is the name of that little station, four—no, five stations this side of Suginoura?" she asked at random.

He took out a dirty little book. "Let me see—do you mean Miyamachi?"

"Yes, that is it," she answered: she had never heard even the name before: as good as any other, probably. "There's a small hotel there, isn't there?"

"Yes, I think there is one"—she was quite sure he knew no more about it than she did—"is that where you are going?"

"Yes," returned the girl, suddenly accepting the decision thrust upon her. Then she recollected that the night must pass before her journey could begin.

"Could I stay here in this room till morning? It's too late to go to an hotel now."

He pondered the point, his chin resting on the end of his broom-handle. Yes, there seemed no objection. Thereupon he left her.

Fujiyé settled herself on the bench and tried to sleep again, but now sleep would not come. Hour after hour thoughts raced through her head as rats race across the wooden ceilings of old cottages, pattering unevenly just inside her skull. What was it that they reminded her of? Ah yes—that irregular throbbing of a drum that she listened to by the temple on the hill, just before she found the drowned girl's body. Then memories of the further past mixing confusedly with the more recent, at times she seemed to be moving again through former scenes till she knew not whether indeed she was awake or sleeping. Only she could always feel the bulge of a broken cushion-spring digging the small of her back.

The station clock tolled out the hours. Each hour seemed a month. Then at last, looking at the darkness where the window was, she saw a dim square of grey and knew that the dawn had come. Soon after that she slept in earnest.

The same young porter woke her up again. He had washed his face, in parts. He still carried the same broom, but in his other hand he held a cup of tea, which he awkwardly and shyly proffered. She felt intuitively that he would be hurt at a tip in return, and took it with a sudden gush of gratitude for the little kindness that almost brought tears to her eyes. He, a man, was doing something for her without expecting anything from her. Not since her father died——

"Nearly six o'clock! Train goes at six-thirty. Have you got your ticket yet?"

She had not.

"I'll go and get it for you if you like. Yes? Is it second or third?"

"Thank you so much. Third class, please," and she handed him a five yen note. Presently he returned with her ticket and the change. Several other folk had come into the room meanwhile, chattering together in drawling country accents.

A rumble and hiss outside. The train puffed up. The little porter scurried away to his wicket. Fujiyé wondered how many more jobs he combined.

The train was fairly crowded, but she found a corner, wedged between babies and blue-smocked navvies. A minute, and they jolted out, and were crawling through fields, the track slowly but continuously ascending. Flat rice-fields dropped behind.

Around were hills, bamboo-covered, pine-covered, with flat terraces, bursting with young rice-plants, among the copses. Cutting after cutting was roared through, where pines above seemed toppling over the rails, and one long, smoke-and-sulphur-smelling tunnel—a sleeping passenger had left his window open, and the babies nearly choked.

Cross country ran the line, with snake-like loops and curves. At two different stations the engine was detached from one end of the train and coupled on at the other, so that their direction was reversed and they travelled back over the same rails till the ways forked asunder. By and by they reached the pass of the mountain ridge which forms the backbone of this peninsula. Down they raced, steam shut off, and the air grew sweet and fresh, with a zest that Fujiyé had not known even in Hojima, for here the strong Pacific breezes sweep the land.

Most of the time she had dozed, but pleasantly, not as in the night. The last scene blurred in her memory: she succeeded in not dwelling on it. For the rest, she felt curiously light-hearted. That house—she knew now that she had never liked it, and was glad to be moving on. Glad—slightly, perhaps, reckless: but she knew that she must control that. What would she find at Miyamachi? Then the sea showed faintly from her window, first a blue line, soon wide sweeps of it. There had been a sea near Chiba, but muddy stuff. This was the real thing. Hardly any of the passengers from Chiba still remained; old fish-wives bent under baskets, planters and delvers from the paddy-fields in tight blue drawers spattered with wet earth, a

young village masher, resplendent but bashful, whose brown bowler sank nearly over his eyes, a group of country tea-house girls ogling him to his mingled pride and embarrassment—the marionettes jiggled in and out at each small wayside station. She looked at them with sleepy half-interest. Presently her cue would come to leave the stage. Ah, here it was—big letters on a board—Miyamachi. So soon!

Quickly she gathered up her bundles and got out. She looked about: a little prim, bare station, brother to the last half-dozen they had passed, and with the same cluster of buildings behind it—cake-shop, grocery, restaurant, and a shack for rickshas and their pullers. A long, sandy road led away to the village, distant, as in most rural districts here, the best part of a mile from the station. Before starting for her walk Fujiyé washed face and hands at a tap on the platform and re-arranged her hair and dress, but the long, weary night had left its mark on the girl. Then she set out.

The brisk motion freshened her. The air (except for passing whiffs of fertiliser) was glorious. In fifteen minutes she had discovered an appetite. Sitting down to tea and cakes at a tiny "chaya," she questioned the old man who kept it concerning Miyamachi and its inhabitants.

He told her it was a fishing village—no importance until the rail-road had come there a few years before (she thought it did not look *very* important even then) but of late the trains had brought visitors from inland to enjoy the bathing and sea-breezes in the summer months. Any hotel? Yes, one small one, but recent prosperity had added to its rooms

and built on a new wing. "Why, look, there's Tanaka O Kimi San, who keeps the very 'yadoya' that I am telling you about!"

Fujiyé twisted round to follow his pointing finger. A stout, shrewd, kindly-looking woman was trudging up from the station. Behind her walked a man with a basket and a leather bag. She answered the old fellow's greeting and plumped her portly person on the bench beside Fujiyé, perspiring and mopping her face with a small towel.

She looked rather curiously at the girl, and the latter remembered to have seen her on Chiba platform that morning. They must have come by the same train.

They exchanged a few words anent the weather. Then the stout lady asked her point-blank what had brought her to the village.

Moved by a sudden impulse, Fujiyé confided to her the sad little story of her past year—not all of it, and not its latest chapter—and asked her if she needed help at the hotel.

The woman considered a moment. She pitied the girl, and was half inclined to believe her tale. Moreover, the summer was coming, and with it brisker business; more help needed. Good looks and a refined appearance have money value even at a seaside village inn. On the whole, she was rather pleased.

Finally she told Fujiyé to come with her and she would try; so the two continued on their road together.

The "yadoya," the country inn, when they reached it, proved a cheerful place. No roses or honeysuckle,

of course, clustered round its porch, no benches for rustic ale-lovers stood in front; it smelt of fish and stale saké and defective drainage (of none at all, in fact), but it was bright, homely and snug, with a wealth of coarse flowers at the side, and a garden behind that ran down to the beach.

Four maids, all of the type that one usually finds at country inns, an old man and a boy—the last of about fourteen years—came round to greet the new arrival and satisfy their curiosity. The new arrival confessed herself unbreakfasted save for the wayside cakes, and a meal was soon provided: sound, filling country fare, recalling Hojima days—not like the stinted gentility of the Chiba kitchen. They seemed kindly folk, and she was glad.

It was a slack hour at the hotel, and two of the maids were going bathing. Would Fujiyé go with them?

A costume was found for her, and soon with a thrill of joy she found herself again in the cool embraces of the sea. Her companions, like most fishing-village girls, could swim; but the newcomer outdid them so much that they were surprised into admiration.

Buoyant as a cork in the rippling waves, she swam far out until the others shouted a warning, but only her silvery laugh came back over the waters. She fancied her troubles dissolving in the cold, clear brine. The dull feeling of oppression left her. When at last she returned to the beach the two maids greeted her with exclamations of relief.

"We really thought you would drown. How splendidly you swim!" they cried.

Soon the ancient man appeared, to tell them that new visitors were come and their presences required.

Fujiyé's duties in her new home were far more arduous than at the Chiba merchant's. Guests came in increasing numbers, meals must be served in several rooms at once, and it was rarely that she got to bed before eleven. Then she shared a large mosquito-net with the other maids, and their snores often kept her awake. These guests were mostly travellers along the road, stopping but for one night, or families come from small inland towns to spend a week or two by the sea. Sometimes, however, folk arrived from Chiba, and she lived in daily dread that one of these might recognise her and spread the version of her story that no doubt was current among the circle of her late mistress's friends.

Not that her present employer or her fellows in the hotel would see anything disgraceful even in that version. They would only be inclined to sympathise with her bad luck over the angry wife's inopportune return; but the girl sickened to think that anyone should believe such hateful things of her.

Uncompromising virtue, prudish morality, are hardly expected of the waiting-maids in the average Japanese "yadoya"; sometimes, perhaps, hardly regarded as an asset. Guests are an hotel's life-blood: encourage the stream. So long as nothing really scandalous, no open breach of decorum so pronounced as to bring discredit on the house,

occurs within its walls, the girls are allowed to use pretty much their own discretion in their entertainment of the guest—of the wealthy guest especially.

The travelling male on business or pleasure bent, when he arrives weary or worried to take his ease at his inn, expects comforts and relaxation.

Escorted respectfully to his room, he throws off with a sigh of content the formal kimono and hakama, or the still more restricting foreign clothes, puts on a short-sleeved "yukata," a single cotton robe, and is escorted to the bath.

There he is scrubbed from head to foot by the girl who will presently serve his meal: nothing unconventional about that. Emerging red as a boiled lobster and much refreshed, he sprawls luxuriously on the tatami and smokes a cigarette or fills and refills his tiny metal pipe.

Presently the maid enters with his supper—a bowl of "miso" soup, a little plate of raw fish cut into slices daintily with sauce and condiments in which to dip them, another bowl of soup containing fish and mushrooms, perhaps a plate of beans boiled soft with sugar—or lotus root, or lily bulbs or balls of pounded fish. Last the pungent pickles that wind up every Japanese meal. One bowl, refilled three or four times, is for rice, the staple of the meal. The other things are just flavourings to help it down.

While he eats the maid squats by him, ministering and chattering. Perhaps he calls for beer. His colour heightens, his tongue loosens. Soon after this, if he is a decent citizen and alone, he will probably order his bed. The maid brings in and spreads his "futon,"

fixes the "kaya," if it is summer, to keep out mosquitoes, puts a small lamp and ash-tray by his pillow, and wishes him good night. But sometimes even the decent citizen is affected by travel abroad from his city.

When two or three young fellows are travelling in company, however, or staying at the inn for an evening's jollity, the maid's duties are liable to be far more comprehensive. Hour after hour the men sit and sing and drink and chatter—while soberer guests curse them behind paper panels. Hebe sits beside them to refill their cups and keep the ball of mirth a-rolling. Talk grows loose, broad jokes go round, restraint vanishes. Caresses are enjoyed, endured, resisted, the samisen's twanging note fills in the pauses, perhaps a geisha or two is sent for to increase the gaiety. As the fun dies down some of the guests grow amorous: promises are whispered—to be kept or broken as inclination or opportunity may dictate.

To many of the girls such scenes are really enjoyable—pleasant breaks in the dull monotony of hard daily toil. But, whether or no, they must keep even temper and a smiling face. An offended guest (except for those undesirables with more wit than money) means loss to the house and the displeasure of the mistress on the culprit's head.

An exceptionally pretty face attracts patrons to the house, of course. So does skill on the samisen, or ready wit in conversation. The girl who has any of these is in luck: of her much is forgiven. She may have a lover—or two; but if they visit often and spend liberally it does her no discredit. She is the envy of

the less fortunate. The "boys" of the inn, too, expect complaisance from their colleagues of the lower sex. A waitress of too unbending propriety may earn dislike and ridicule from the rest. . . .

Through this small world of lax manners and easy judgments Fujiyé carried her pale face and quiet, cool tranquillity untouched by and despising its temptations and its risks, and gained the grudging admiration of its other inmates. The young men of the village and the habitual visitors gave her, after a rebuff or two, their enforced respect. Her mistress conceived a real affection for her, and this helped to make her position the easier.

Yet she felt, somehow, that this life was not to last very long. A foreboding told her that she should not see the year out by the sea.

CHAPTER XXI

CUPID INSISTENT

NEWS reached the servants' room one Monday that the two coolest guest-chambers were to be reserved for some wealthy Tokyo gentleman who had wired that morning for accommodation. They supposed him a bachelor, as he was travelling alone: not, of course, that that followed.

Sun-down brought the visitor. He came with a lordly air and large suit-cases. Fujiyé went with the others to the "genkan" to receive him, but before reaching it she recognised with a sick feeling the voice raised loudly in answer to their chorused greeting.

She turned and hurried back along the passage to escape all sight and sound of him. What unkind fate brought this man, cause of her humiliation in her last home, to the remote spot where she had fled for refuge?

Her mistress, puzzled at her absence, found the new maid out-of-doors, by the beach. Why had she left her work? It happened that one of the maids had gone away a day or two before, and another was unwell. Her help could really not be spared.

"Please do not ask me to wait on that man," murmured poor Fujiyé.

"Why?" asked the elder woman, amazed. "I hear that he is a very good man, and very rich. The

station-master says that he is well known in Tokyo and everyone speaks well of him. Come, don't be a foolish girl. I really can't spare you just now—Maki gone away and Tsuné down with fever. Go in quickly—he won't eat you."

Fujiyé never lacked courage. She didn't fear Shimizu, but he sickened her, physically: his voice, his greasy face, his very tread. One of her friends, she remembered, used to feel that way about snakes. No good fleeing trouble when it meant shirking duty. This was duty. She went upstairs to her former master's room.

She entered noiselessly, and it was not till she arose from the lowly obeisance with which a new guest is always welcomed that Shimizu saw and recognised her. His momentary stare of surprise was really well acted. No suspicion woke in the girl's mind that anything but chance had brought him there. She could not know that her smudgy little friend at Chiba station had, quite innocently, betrayed her hiding-place in answer to what had seemed the kindest of enquiries. Then the merchant greeted her quietly and good-naturedly, without reference to their parting scene.

The other girl attended him to his bath: *that* Fujiyé would have refused: but she had to bring his evening meal. To her relief, however, he talked little: indifferent topics—the weather, rice-prospects, sea-bathing, and such-like. Soon after finishing his food he went to bed.

For the next few days their intercourse remained on the same footing. Fujiyé grew gradually more at ease. Once he rallied her on her sudden flight, good-

humouredly, as though she had been a child. He asked how life in this quiet village suited her after Chiba. She replied simply, and spoke as little as she might. She began to wonder if indeed he had not repented of his folly and the injury he had done her.

But when she bathed she felt his eyes fixed greedily on her from the hotel verandah; thereafter she indulged her passion for the sea only when she knew him to be absent inland.

Fine weather continued for a week, hot, close and cloudless. Sunday it was hotter still, a scorcher. Thunder was about. People felt limp as rags. As evening came on Fujiyé looked forward to her hours of rest. Shimizu had gone somewhere by rail before lunch-time, and did not return till after dark. He had dined, he told them, already.

The rest of the household, all wearied with the oppressive heat, had retired early. The rich guest sat alone and read papers till nearly midnight. Then he clapped his hands, and Fujiyé came, heavy-eyed, to answer his summons. At his request she spread his quilts and deftly hooked up by scarlet cords the green mosquito-net which filled nearly a quarter of the room-space.

Shimizu prepared for slumber, taking a book with him, as he said he wished to read a little longer. He asked the girl to bring the lamp inside the net and set it by his pillow, and she obeyed.

"Please turn it up a little, the wick seems burning badly."

She knelt down to do so, her back toward him.

Then suddenly she felt herself clasped firmly round the waist, and forced down on to the soft silk cushions.

Silently, without a word or exclamation, she writhed to free herself from his loathed embrace, but the man was strong and his grip was firm. In the wind created by their movements the lamp flickered and went out.

It was just against her hand—a heavy, squat affair of carved bronze—and her only weapon.

Slipping a finger through the handle-ring in the darkness, she half turned her body in desperation, and dealt her opponent a swinging blow.

The sharp edge of the base caught the merchant on his smooth head. The strangling grasp loosened, and she heard his body subside with a soft thud. Then, raising the bottom of the net, she crept outside.

The household slept on peacefully. Not a sound had disturbed their rest.

No time now to pack her basket. Taking only her little stock of money and one other cotton robe, Fujiyé left the house: once more desolate and alone, darkness her only friend.

Out under the stars in the moonless night. She wandered along by the shore, scarcely knowing where she went. This was not the Hojima beach, with gentle waves lapping among the rocks, and far over the sea, hovering above the horizon, the glow that showed Tokyo. These billows crashed on shingle and dragged it down with a long shriek after each thud, tossing up phosphorescent spray. They wetted her feet, till all the lower part of her kimono was drenched. And yet—surely she was back again, outcast from her village, stunned by her father's death, facing sneers and poverty, that dull pain oppressing throat

and breast. The intervening year disappeared—she almost forgot it. How *could* the world change so suddenly, when we had done nothing? What matter what we did, if Fate hit out blindly at good and bad?

She stood still, and again debated the question, whether the world and its wretchedness was not better quitted, since there seemed no place in it for her. The present came back. Had she killed the man? Except for results to herself, she did not care a particle. If he was dead the police, she supposed, would soon be on her track. She felt too indifferent for flight.

The wind, though August, blew cool through the dark, and presently from her brine-soaked dress a chill shook her. Mechanically she changed it for the other which she carried, dropping the wet kimono on the sand, and walked on faster and faster by instinct to warm herself.

She came to the mouth of a wide river, and found a boat moored to the bank. Getting in, she loosened the rope. She thought the current would take her out to sea, where she might perish far from the eyes of men. No, not so definite an idea. Not consciously suicide—she only longed to lose herself on the vast, running tide.

But the tide was setting in, strongly, and as she crouched down with shut eyes the water carried her smoothly between darkened rice-fields till her little craft caught in a half-sunken snag and was still.

Dawn aroused her. She found the bank close at hand, and stepped ashore. Then, a little path running foot-wide across the fields, she followed it for miles and reached the road, going ever inland till the sound

of the sea was lost. Another dream-walk, balancing on the narrow clay track between flooded paddy and bog.

At last she reached a village, and the railway. Prolonged shriekings heralded an approaching train. Hurrying tired legs to a run for the station, she bought a ticket for Tokyo and scrambled through an open doorway just as the car was in motion. Tokyo, because she had no time to think of another name.

Hours earlier, Shimizu had awakened with an aching head and a long gash across the temple, which on enquiries he attributed to a fall in the dark on the upturned lamp. The wound soon healed, for he had healthy flesh. The hotel mistress accepted his account of the mishap, but had considerable doubts.

For soon Fujiyé was discovered missing, a boy picked up the soaked kimono on the beach, and all agreed that she had taken refuge with her only love, the sea.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CHILLY CITY

RICE-FIELDS know no Sundays, only the older festivals that wait on sun and moon, and week-ends hardly affect the peasant traffic; but when Chiba station was reached a Sunday crowd flooded the carriage. There they stopped and shunted. The fugitive wondered vaguely if she might not see a familiar face on the platform. What would her first mistress think of her now? What upset in that sedate home! They rumbled on. Hills were now left behind in their turn. For miles they traversed rich, muddy flats where the rice was already yellowing, where large lotus blossoms grew in wayside pools and drooped back into the slime whence they had sprung, where old men sat and fished in muddy ditches. Through straggling village streets the sea was sometimes visible, not the strong foam-capped billows that Fujiyé had loved to breast in recent months, but the placid waters of the Bay.

Near Tokyo she heard a name called that brought back sudden memories: Kameido!

Ages ago, in wistaria-time, she had visited Kameido, one of a jolly party from the school where she had studied. Fine after spring rain, how joyous everything! Crowds all going one road, to Tenjin Shrine gardens, famous from ancient times for the long, trailing tassels of wistaria which overhang its arbours.

Its small lagoon, full of fat, hand-fed carp, is spanned by a bridge shaped like half a drum, almost too steep to climb.

Wistaria beauty is short, as is that of most Japanese flowers. One warm day the first florets open at the base, and before the week is out the last petal has fallen from the tip of the tassel. So with the cherry—our people prize only such flowers. The hydrangea, that seeks to ignore the passing weeks that slowly ravage her first loveliness, till her great blossom-heads turn sere and rotten in the world's gaze, is despised by the sentimental.

They had sat on scarlet rugs underneath the tassels. The girls had hung a garland about her neck—Fuji, the maid among the fuji-blossoms. She loved her namesakes, bending daintily to their rippled reflections in the water, till they flutter down and down, out of sight in the cool depths. They sink untainted to their doom.

A last jolt; her reverie broke. They were at the terminus, Ryogoku station. She was hurried out with the stream.

There is a tram-line near; Fujiy  had thought of taking it; but, cramped with long sitting, she decided it would be pleasanter to walk. No hurry, for where was she going? Strangely, she had never given that a thought during her journey up. Let chance dictate the next step. She reached the swollen, muddy Sumida. Slowly, head bent, she traversed the long bridge, the long bridge that Ichiro had walked with such confidence in his future on that first day of his new life.

Through its jostling traffic the desolate girl threaded

her way. Nothing to call her own save the one dress that she wore and the little stock of money in her obi—no future and no hopes.

Under the bridge the river flowed darkly and swiftly away.

No hope—and yet it has been said that hope can never wholly die: or when it dies the body cannot long survive.

Reason came to the girl's aid. Was she indeed ready to die, to give up the struggle and acknowledge final defeat? No, she was still in her first maidenhood, the hour for yielding to the dark wrestler could not yet have struck. Three bruising throws she had suffered, but her wounds were all outside. She was mistress of her soul. Still, to live demanded some definite plan of action. What to do?

Possibilities revolved. Her friends? No, not that. Then the school where the kind teachers had told her when she left them that *if* she ever needed help or counsel (how unlikely, at that time, such a chance!) she must not fear to come to them for both?

Yes, she would go to her old school; they would find *some* way of livelihood for her. Foolish, not to have done so last year!

Some definite objective fixed, foot-progress seemed too slow. Cars running central-ways were lessening their freight. At the next stopping-place she would board one.

No change in the City since she had walked there a happy, care-free girl. Life flowed on evenly—was she the only one it had stricken?

Or not much change. She knew these streets well. Some fine, new restaurants had opened.

Through their large windows she glimpsed stiff, potted palms and brave dinner cutlery on marble-top tables, hurrying waiters and black-coated diners—or breakfasters. Big grape-fruit standing bulkily on a fruiterer's shelf brought another sudden memory—a summer in Hongkong, and narrow ways alive with blue-bloused, pig-tailed folk who chattered in an unknown tongue. Yes, she had seen life, and the world: and now—was her horizon to shrink to the small circle that encompasses the very poor? Was she to struggle life-long for rice among the millions of the heartless city?

If only she were a man! On memory's retina another scene took shape. Blue ripples and bluer sky, and distant grey-blue hills across the water, and a pair of honest, fearless eyes looking questioningly into hers; music of fifeing semi among hydrangea bushes, while a young man asked her guidance.

Did he, too, still remember? How should she know that, only a few streets away, that same scene etched itself on many a textbook page before the tired eyes of a lonely student, blurring the print till he recalled his wandering thoughts?

Self-reliant, he had gone forth to face destiny and fashion his own future. Would their paths ever meet again? In other days Fujiyé had thought herself proudly superior to the weakness that makes most women slaves of men or a man. Through unhappiness she had learnt her heart better, and knew that it, too, had a master.

A bitter feeling of loneliness—in all this world there was not a person that wanted her save for base reasons, if indeed this one man *had* forgotten her—

flooded her smarting eyes with salt tears. The cheerful traffic flowed past and on.

Two men standing at a street corner looked at her curiously and turned to follow as she passed. One of them touched her right sleeve and spoke in a low voice. She walked on, hardly hearing. He spoke again, while his friend sidled up to her left. Then a policeman crossed the road toward them, looking keenly at the trio. The two men dropped behind, and went off hurriedly down a side-street.

The officer had a kind face and a little grizzled beard. Should she ask his help? Ah, here was a car-stop. She remembered her project. The car was almost empty and going the right way. She got in.

A long ride, a change or two, and she reached that familiar corner where, so many mornings, hot or frosty, rainy or fine, she had alighted to walk to her school.

She tried to fancy herself a little girl again with a satchel on her shoulder. Then she reached the gates—those tall iron gates: not so tall now—but how she knew the very note of their shutting clang!

At the little lodge inside (the janitress had changed, for which Fujiyé, shrinking from recognition, was glad) she asked if she could see Miss Fortescue, the tall and serious lady of whom at first she had been so mortally afraid—who afterwards became the best-loved of her teachers.

The woman stared at her. No, Miss Fortescue was gone. She and Miss Sinnett had both returned, months ago, to their homes across the great ocean, and their places had been taken by two other teachers, Miss Howard and Mrs. Grant, both very nice ladies.

Then might Fujiyé see them if disengaged? Ah, to-day they, too, were absent, the autumn term not beginning for another week. Would the young lady like to speak to one of the Japanese mistresses?

No—though it seemed strange to herself, Fujiyé felt, at this crisis in her life, that she could ask advice and aid, understanding and sympathy, more easily from a Western woman than from one of her own race. She decided to call again. The iron gates clanged behind her.

Not for a week? Where to spend the interval? There were boarding-houses for girl students, but there she might meet some one who knew her. Something cheaper she wanted, too. Then she remembered the friendly-looking policeman.

The police-box at the next corner housed a younger man, but he proved quite eager to help. Not far off was a lodging-house chiefly used by the female staff of a Government office in that ward: quite a respectable place: he 'phoned to its mistress, vouching for Fujiyé (rather a bold thing to do, since he knew nothing of her, she thought), and gravely returned to his box.

In that house the next week dragged by, a week of rain and muddy streets. Fujiyé went out little. She saw little of her fellow-boarders—absent all day, and at night when they returned too tired to talk. She borrowed some novels and old magazines from one or two of them, and read for hours each day.

On Saturday there was token of better things. Clouds broke, and through the rifts blue sky peeped. Tired of staying indoors, she started after breakfast for a stroll. A car, taken at random, brought her to

the confines of the city, and from dingy streets cluttered with children she branched out into rice-fields. The fresh air cheered her and she walked for miles, listening to the cheeping of early autumn insects and the rustle of wind in the old pine-trees along the road, which brought to her ear the long-cadenced murmur of the surf. Life seemed to smile a little.

Then the sky darkened over again and it began to rain steadily, a small, persistent rain, soaking her cotton kimono. Dust turned to splashy mud, and cold mists wrapped the landscape.

Late in the afternoon she reached her lodgings, tired, drenched, and chilled to the bone.

Next morning on waking from an endless night which brought not sleep but haunting visions of despair and shameful misery she found herself with a burning forehead and aching limbs, unable to rise and barely able to speak.

The mistress of the house called in a doctor. He came, looked wise, prescribed powders and a draught, and went.

A week of wretchedness passed slowly. Then followed another week of lassitude and weakness. The book-lending fellow-lodgers came in at times with a few minutes' sympathy. Fujiyé felt too worn-out to think of anything, and too indifferent to care. The doctor shook his head and changed his powders. For simple influenza it seemed a rather protracted case.

After three weeks she felt well enough to leave her bed. Health flowed through her body again, but the looking-glass showed a woefully thin and pallid face.

The fever had burnt away a little more of her self-reliance; her funds, too, were running out. The doctor, good man, dealt very gently with her pocket, but board and lodging must be paid for, even with the kindest of landladies.

Another Monday came round, and she went again to the school. Some great affair was afoot. Rickshas, carriages, even a couple of motor-cars (rather a rare sight in Tokyo in those days, denoting riches), were lining the roadway near the iron gates, a few late comers, dressed out in silken finery, even now descending from their vehicles and splashing through puddles to the entrance. Pale sunbeams fought their way athwart the morning mists, and the day promised well.

Within the school compound were little booths of striped red-and-white canvas, the national flag festooning each doorway. Young ladies in purple hakama fluttered here and there chattering in cheerful tones to cover nervousness—they were important people that day, hostesses to shoals of relatives. A few of the eldest were drawn up as a sort of reception committee at the main entrance, bowing very low to each arriving party.

Three of these older girls had been school-mates of Fujiyé's, though in a lower class. She waited till their attention was engaged with an elderly couple preceding her and then walked swiftly up the path, slipped quietly by them, and entered the building.

The main hall was already crowded—ladies, girl-graduates, some children, and a sprinkling of frock-coated men looking rather fish-out-of-waterish. A few younger men in blue uniforms and square caps

flirted very discreetly with a girl-graduate or two. The balconies were draped with flags and gay with autumn flowers and grasses. A row of empty chairs were flanked on the platform by a small piano and a large pot of palms: in the precise centre a table with five glasses and two full decanters threatened good measure of speeches. A gentle hum of chatter and giggling dissipated the idea of an approaching funeral, and sometimes a baby wailed.

Finding a vacant place on a back bench, Fujiyé sat down.

Presently a little group of people entered by a side door. In dignified silence they progressed to the platform and flowed over the chairs. A self-possessed, plump damsel took her seat before the instrument. The cheerful strains of the Imperial Anthem smote the air. Everyone stood up faithfully to the end. Then Fujiyé could get a clearer view of the platform.

In the centre sat a grey-haired lady, slight, alert, in a simple kimono of brownish pattern, whose name has been for years a household word in educational circles throughout the Empire. On either side of her sat the foreign lady teachers of the school—one rather elderly, with a shrewd, lined face and tired yet kindly eyes: the other much younger, tall and somewhat stout, with pince-nez perched on an aquiline nose and a manner a little calculated to overawe such of the younger students as had not yet penetrated to the inner kindness of her nature: no, not calculated, for nothing could have been less intentional. Next in order on one side sat an aged nobleman with a bald head and contemplative air and a wooden leg replacing

one lost in a bomb affair of former days: beyond him some Japanese lady teachers of varying aspect, plain and earnest, or neither.

But Fujiyé's attention was riveted on the man whose chair was next to that of the younger American teacher, into whose ear he was whispering some remark that brought a smile to her scholarly features. His white front shone resplendent, his black boots dispelled with their polish the lower gloom: his grey frock coat draped his ample form without a crease, but a long red scar above his right brow marred to some extent the aspect of dignified benevolence with which the gentleman surveyed the meeting.

Fujiyé looked at the scar, as it blazed, a baleful meteor, beside the decanters. The sound of crashing billows on a far-away beach filled her ears, she lived again the silent struggle in that close and darkened room, and struck the blow that brought it to so sudden an end.

So he was not dead! For the moment she felt simply fiercely sorry: those men are better dead. Then relief—no one could brand her as a murderess. Then the sight of him seated smugly there, the trusted friend and equal of the very woman to whom she had looked for succour in her friendless plight, brought back that feeling of sick despair to the poor child's heart.

If she summoned courage to speak to those tall, serious ladies, how could she hope to make *her* word good against his? She, a mere tea-house girl, drifting along like the waterweed carried down by the current of the stream, with reputation at the mercy of every tongue! What consideration would

her tale, unsupported, receive from those highly respectable people on the platform? His wife's former maidservant, dismissed for good reasons—he would lie, of course, boldly and well—then found working at a small country inn. Now turning up here: blackmail, no doubt. What depravity!

Had Fujiyé possessed her usual sane and balanced mind she would, of course, have seen that her fears were largely nonsense, her outlook far too despairing. Probably the man, for his own sake, would have been only too glad to say nothing—might have prayed her to say nothing: no one blither to bury the dead past than this living philanthropist. Besides, had he tried to speak against her, her old record at that very school would have spoken louder. But the illness had robbed her of her dauntless courage and clarity of judgment; she felt timid, crushed, readier for flight than for combat. Physical sickness returned and weakened her limbs, her forehead beaded with moisture. That large round mottled slightly greasy face, with little piggy eyes and friendly smile! It seemed to grow larger and float nearer, as in a nightmare. She must not faint. . . .

One of the ladies had risen to open the meeting. She walked to the little table. The expectant audience scraped and rustled, settling down more comfortably to listen, and Fujiyé left her seat and crept quietly out. Two neighbours glanced with concern at her white face and half-rose to assist her, but she thanked them with a little shake of the head.

Unsteadily she passed through the iron gates into the roadway. Her feet carried her mechanically, her mind a perfect blank.

She tried to think where she was going, but every faculty seemed numb. A ricksha-man saw, hurried up, offered his services. She stared at him with so vacant a face that he turned away, thinking her mad or drunk.

Some time, perhaps only a few minutes, later she found herself sitting in a small milk-shop, her elbows on the table before her, her aching brow between her palms. Two aproned maids were looking at her curiously.

Gradually, as day dawns through a dull window-pane, her power to think revived. First she was conscious of some great, some irretrievable disaster. What could it be? There was still a large, empty space, a hiatus in her brain. That morning—yes, she had set out cheerfully to go to her old school, to ask help, confident of success. The two new foreign ladies were kind, the janitress had said. They must have returned by now—three weeks: then why was she, Fujiyé, here?

She groped for an answer. Suddenly it came, a burst of shocking light. The crowded lecture-hall rose up before her, and the hateful presence of Shimizu on the platform. Now she remembered. That avenue of hope was closed. She resolutely shut the whole thing from her memory: which was a pity, for a little thought would have shown her that the bogey in the avenue was of her own making.

What other hope was left? Hardly a coin now remained of the small stock that she had brought with her from the village. A week's board was yet unpaid at her lodgings. No more clothes to sell—should she cut off her hair? Girls did that sometimes.

Nothing mattered much, though, except that she must sleep. A strong desire for sleep out-fought all other feelings. In bed, not in this chair. She must go back and rest. Afterwards, perhaps, she might think of something, some way out.

The same ricksha-man was still waiting near the door, hopefully: drunk people's legs don't last long. He hurried up again at Fujiyé's nod. Ten minutes later she was spreading the "futons" in her little bedroom. Then, dressed as she was, she lay down and slept right through the afternoon and on past the dawn of another day. The best medicine.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HOUSE OF THE BADGER

A GOLDEN October sun, shining strongly on her closed eyelids, brought the girl back to the world and her present position. Her old resilience awoke, too, or some of it. Thrown sternly on her own resources, she nerved herself for another wrestle. Something of a more reckless spirit awoke as well. Luck had shown so long an adverse face, surely it would turn. Hope still remained, and youth.

She dressed, ate some biscuits bought two days before, and searched her purse. After settling all outstanding bills, some five yen represented her sole capital—about ten shillings. She also had a sapphire ring—last gift from her father. These, with hope and youth, she carried with her across the threshold.

Not far from Hibiya Park stands the office of a certain newspaper much read in middle-class and merchant circles. In this building, among the other various activities that Japanese journals pursue, is carried on the business of a registry office for servants. Hither Fujiyé turned her steps.

A young man sat at a lofty desk and pared his nails. A high and dingy collar rasped his unshaven jaw. Fronting him in the gloom along the wall beneath the grimy windows a row of greasy-looking chairs offered a dubious welcome to the weary. Most were damaged about the legs and back, and a few

already occupied. In one sat a country lassie, full-bosomed and round of face, clutching a fat bundle: next to her an older girl, plentifully powdered, with scanty eyebrows eked out with charcoal, features twitching, and disordered hair: then a red-faced female with large coarse hands, an obvious drudge.

At the end of the row an elderly woman sat bolt upright with eyes fixed on the door; every few minutes her eyelids drooped, and a fearful nod nearly broke her neck. Fujiyé walked quietly past her up to the desk and asked the clerk to enter her name upon his list of aspirants for domestic service.

"Name, address and age?"—this almost without looking up; then his attention was caught by the refined quality of her voice in answer, at variance with her poor, faded dress. Bored indifference changed to interest.

"Previous experience, last place?" She told him that she had spent some months as maid in a lady's house, and subsequently in a country hotel—without entering into fuller details. Could she furnish references from either of these places? She hesitated, and asked if it was necessary.

The clerk leaned back in his chair and pensively regarded her with an eye of gradual appreciation. No, it was not quite necessary. Would she take a chair and wait awhile? Probably some of his lady clients would look in before long; he thought that she might easily be suited—most of the girls who came there were either too ugly and clumsy for any but the poorest houses, or else too knowing altogether, spoilt by City life and gadding from one situation to another. All this spoken with an easy indifference

to the feelings of the patiently waiting and listening throng.

Fujiyé sat down. The young man seemed inclined to favour her with some more of his conversation, but her lack of response discouraged him, and he returned to his finger nails.

The morning hours dragged by. Women came seeking servants, haggled over wages and conditions, and sometimes engaged a girl. Two or three approached Fujiyé and asked her terms. She named a modest sum, and the Miyamachi Hotel as reference; the questioner would promise vaguely to write, and pass on.

Not long before noon a carriage stopped outside the door and a stout lady in rustling silk entered the office, a diamond clasp twinkling refulgently in the cord that bound her obi, and other jewels sparkling from the many rings that bedecked her white and fleshy hands. Her face had perhaps been beautiful and was still handsome, with something Jewish in the curve of her liberally-powdered nose.

She greeted the clerk familiarly in a rich voice of almost masculine quality as he descended from his throne to meet her. Then, after a little causerie, she made known her wishes. She wanted a girl—two girls: her maids were always leaving her: she did not know what maids wanted nowadays—the best of places seemed never to satisfy them for long!

As she spoke she glanced contemptuously round the room; clearly nothing here was good enough for her. Her scornful gaze swept past Fujiyé's chair—then suddenly returned and fixed itself in keen, cold scrutiny on the young girl's face.

She leaned towards the clerk and spoke in a low voice. He frowned a little doubtfully, as though at some rather distasteful idea, and muttered something in apologetic reply. Whatever it was, the lady received it with a merry laugh and shook him good-humouredly by the arm.

"Don't be silly, I'm not going to cut her up into 'sashimi!' I'll warrant she couldn't find a better place than with me. She won't get thin, anyhow. What do you think, child?" she continued, walking up to Fujiyé. "I want a nice, neat girl with good manners and a face that won't turn the rice sour, to wait on me and look after my cats and 'chinkoro.' If you please me we shan't quarrel about wages, and you will have a pretty dress every now and then. I haven't got a husband yet, so until I find one we won't have any men to bother us, except perhaps a visitor or two. Now, will you come? We'll drive straight back home. I know you'd like a ride in a carriage; all girls do, don't they?"

Fujiyé sat silent a moment. There was certainly something odd about the woman's manner, but of course rich folk often claim the right to be eccentric, and often the most eccentric of mankind are the kindest-hearted. Rather boisterous, she was a little coarse, perhaps, but undoubtedly good-natured, probably generous and free from narrow prejudice. And then there was no husband: after Chiba, Fujiyé had conceived a strong distaste for other people's husbands in the house. She was tired, too, bodily and perhaps spiritually, weakened a little in fibre. This would be a comfortable, easy home. Though not luxurious, she loved comfort, nice food, good

surroundings, as every young girl should. Well, she would accept. Something at the very back of her mind advised her not to.

The lady was delighted. She paid her fee, promised to call again in a day or two to see if another suitable maid had turned up, and departed with her new acquisition.

Before the horses had cantered a hundred yards the two women were on the friendliest of terms. The elder one asked a chance question or two, but showed no disposition to dive into Fujiyé's past history; nor did she say much about herself, but kept her young companion constantly amused by her caustic though good-humoured comments on life in general, and such of it in particular as appeared through the carriage windows as they drove along.

Her name, as she told her new maid, was Takashima Utayé, and she lived in Kanda, not far from the Myojin Shrine.

The cushions were soft and silky, the carriage was bouncy on its springs, the swift movement delightful. Fujiyé closed her eyes and smiled to herself; things were going to be pleasant now. Well, she deserved it, after what she had been through lately. The smile did not escape her new mistress, whose glance was observant. "Aha, what young man is missing the benefit of that very sweet expression?" she demanded slyly. "You must tell me all about him when we get a little more intimate." Fujiyé protested that he didn't exist, as yet, at any rate: but while she said it she flushed, unwillingly, the sort of flush that seems gradually to flow from head to foot, and Madam Takashima gurgled

richly. She was certainly a very friendly employer.

Presently the carriage drew up before a small and fancifully-decorated gate. It was sunk in a long and lofty wall of rough-set stones, bordering a very quiet side-street. They passed into the grounds. These were fairly extensive and very well laid out. Gnarled pine-trees spread round a little lake, at one end of which rose a craggy cliff in miniature; down its sides trickled a silvery stream sprouting ferns and mosses, the water falling with a perpetual tinkle into the depths below, while graceful palms and feathery bamboos rustled their foliage above; great fish moved, swift sinuous shadows and sudden flashes of gold, through the clear water. Under the silvery shower of drops from the waterfall gathered a multitude of greenish frogs, heads upturned thirstily, so cleverly chiselled that only their continued stillness betrayed that they were things of stone.

Here and there a rustic seat invited to repose—long, low and comfortable, more a couch than a bench; on either side of the entrance doorway an enormous badger, carved in stone and rearing upright, stood beating with his fore-paws on his hugely swollen stomach. Other statues, imitated, very poorly, from the Greek, shone pallid among the trees, a little plaster temple adjoined a latticed summer-house, and beyond that was a tiny red shrine to Inari, Goddess of rice and mistress of small foxes. A row of box-trees were trimmed into peacocks, carp and kangaroos, quite well done, and there was a live monkey fastened to a pole. An ingenious garden, which jarred on one's taste.

The house itself was built in native Japanese style, though the "genkwan" was replaced by an English porch and a front door of solid oak. One small drawing-room was furnished with easy chairs luxuriously upholstered, a soft carpet covered the floor, and the walls were decorated with painted frescoes of nymphs and cupids—rather short in leg, solid, and Japanese of face—and Persian prints in gilded frames. Beyond this were other rooms entirely Japanese.

An old woman and a boy of, might be, twelve, received them at the entrance, and Fujiyé was conducted by her mistress to the room that should be hers. It was small and rather dark, but the soft tatami on the floor, the sparkling sand of the plastered walls, and the tiny alcove at one side gave it the appearance of a bijou parlour rather than the bedroom of a servant.

Fujiyé's surprise showed in her face, and her mistress laughingly explained.

"You think this rather too fine for a maid's room? Well, perhaps it is: but you know I have my little whims, and one of them is to make things pleasant for all those in my household, especially if I like them. Do you know, I have taken a great fancy to you, you pretty demure mouse, and I want you to feel here just as if you were really at home. That is not very bad of me, is it? Now come and help me change my clothes, and then we will have some food and a good long talk."

Her kind tone won the lonely girl's heart, and within an hour or two she had poured out almost her whole life's story—with a few reservations—into

the elder woman's sympathetic ear. Now and then during the recital, had Fujiyé noticed it, a sarcastic smile twisted her "beni"-tinted lips, and at the end she sat silent for a while, regarding the girl with an expression of tolerant amusement and some doubt, thoughtfully inhaling the smoke from her Turkish cigarette.

Later in the evening a visitor called, a tall man with a grey moustache and upright military carriage. Fujiyé brought in the supper trays, and her mistress introduced her as her new companion. The visitor looked keenly at her, bowed, but said nothing. His face seemed vaguely familiar to the girl—she thought perhaps she had seen it in some newspaper. She noticed that her mistress never addressed him by name, at least while she was present.

He stayed late. Madam Takashima showed herself an accomplished entertainer. Hour after hour she kept up a constant flow of witty small-talk: the man was a good talker, too, when he chose to speak. The lady was no prude; as the wine, which she took freely, mounted to her head, not a few of her anecdotes and exclamations, by their freedom from restraint if not from decency, caused Fujiyé something of a shock. The guest mostly said little, drank sparingly, smiled gravely from time to time, but never laughed.

Not long before midnight Madam Takashima seemed suddenly to remember the young girl's presence, and ordered her abruptly but good-humouredly to bed. What time the gentleman took his departure, Fujiyé did not know.

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Soft silk futons and the morning quiet of a private house, to which Fujiyé had long been a stranger, kept the tired girl in the kind realms of slumber till well on into the forenoon, and on awaking she lay awhile in drowsy comfort, content to enjoy her unaccustomed ease. Little doubts—they had been there from the first—began to whisper in her ear; she tried not to listen. This was most enjoyable. Low voices reached her from some other rooms; soft footsteps passed at times along the passages.

She wondered what hour it was, and presently got up and dressed. Her thin cotton kimono had disappeared and been replaced by a pretty "awasé" of inexpensive silk.

Passing through two or three rooms, all empty, she reached the kitchen. A large cat lay stretched in comfort before the charcoal cooking-stove. In the room beyond she found the old woman who had admitted them the previous afternoon. The latter looked at her curiously and asked if she had breakfasted. On Fujiyé's confessing that she had only just got up, cakes and "sushi" and fruit were produced from a cupboard, and she sat down to this impromptu and somewhat unusual morning meal.

But what kind of household was this of which she was now a member? What duties were expected? This quizzical old dame might enlighten her. But the old dame, contrary to the usual habit of her kind, proved reticent. The "okusan" had not yet got up. She usually did not rise till noon. Fujiyé asked who did the cooking in the house; but the meals, it seemed, were almost always sent in from a restaurant near by. And the washing? That was

all done at a laundry; the old woman herself already cleaned and dusted the rooms.

Then, asked the new maid, what was her work?

The woman looked at her again with a sidelong smile, and began in her turn to question the girl about her own career. This time the latter was not disposed to be communicative. Those little doubts were stirring, slightly, uneasily. *Something* queer about all this!

By and by hand-clapping summoned them from a distant chamber. The next hour was spent in assisting her mistress to repair those Time-inflicted scars which the unkind finger of morn is apt to lay bare when youth is left behind. Such an extensive battery of pastes and creams, powders and scents and ointments the girl had never seen—hardly imagined—before.

At lunch, served in the next room, two more girls put in an appearance. Both were about Fujiyé's age, possibly older: both handsome and well-made, though with charms unduly heightened by cosmetics, which enlightened her.

"Oh, I must introduce you to my two nieces, Yae-ko and Fusa-ko, who are staying with me just now. Girls, this is my new companion, Miss Fujiyé. I think you will all be good friends. Now, child, don't be shy, but sit down and eat with us. I want you to feel yourself as one of the family."

Nothing could be kinder, surely. The other two girls greeted her languidly and turned their attention to the food, while the old woman waited on them. Rather a silent meal, and when it was over Madam

Takashima told Fujiyé to prepare for a drive. The latter took the opportunity to thank her for her new dress.

"Chut, child, that is nothing. When I like people I always try to make them happy, and I think the best way to a young woman's heart is through her clothes. Maybe we shall see something in the shops this afternoon to take our fancy. Shall we try?"

She was as good as her word. When they returned home in the evening the new companion was wearing a dainty pearl ring which her mistress had forced her to accept, declaring that if she didn't it would be really too unkind.

Among the other purchases they had made were some novels, and the girl was sitting reading one of these in her own room when her employer came in, sat down on a cushion, and began to talk.

"This evening we are having some guests, and I want you to come and help me entertain them. I'm very fond of visitors, you know, and that will be part of your duties. When one is getting old one likes to have young people about—which is really why I engaged you, my dear, and very lucky I was to find someone so pretty and well-bred—so I ask young men here rather often to keep me from feeling dull. Come into the foreign sitting-room after dinner, will you, and you will find us there."

The meal was brought to her little room soon after by the old woman, and having finished it she made her way to the "seiyo-ma," the room furnished in Western style.

Here she found Madam engaged in lively conversation with a young man of about twenty-five,

very correctly attired in a dark-grey suit of beautiful cut, but with neck-tie a little too large, thick and somewhat curly hair a little too long, and perfumed beyond all human need. He smiled ingratiatingly at the girl and rose politely to fetch her an easy chair, in which, when she modestly protested against the honour, he almost forced her to sit.

Then the old woman ushered in two more guests: one turnip-faced, rather bow-legged and with a bulging forehead, slightly over twenty, perhaps, who seemed to have been dining freely. He met his hostess with so gracious a bow that his forehead barely escaped bumping the table-edge, and to Fujiyé he almost cracked his back. The other arrival was tall and dark, rather thin, with a studious cast of face and large, melancholy eyes.

They were all evidently on the best of easy terms with the lady of the house and with themselves, and when, a few minutes later, the two nieces glided in and shook hands with each visitor in turn, the measure of their joy seemed full. The girls were now very different from the two listless damsels whom Fujiyé had met earlier in the day. Each looked the picture of vivacity, and under the shaded lights the delicate glistening of their powdered cheeks and necks enhanced the lustre of their sparkling eyes.

They greeted the assembled guests demurely; the elder niece, seating herself on the sofa, began to study the pictures in an illustrated magazine that lay to hand.

He of the long locks promptly joined her there. Together they turned the pages and discussed in low voices those portraits of vacuous-looking Society

women and still more vacuous singing-girls with which such journals are usually adorned.

The other niece, from a cellarette, produced wine, fruit and cakes. These were handed round and partaken of freely—especially the wine. Under its genial influence the flow of conversation grew ever freer and more gay: the young men venturing on remarks better suited, thought Fujiyé, to a tea-house than to a social gathering at a decent private dwelling. The two nieces protested—not very sternly—and themselves were presently shrieking with laughter at the latest and freest of the jokes.

The tall, dark man—evidently the eldest of the three by some years—took least share in the general cross-fire of jollying and repartee, and addressed most of his talk to the new companion, by whose side he had moved his chair. He spoke to her respectfully in a gentle and rather bored voice, and they soon discovered that in painting they had a taste in common. It was a long time since the girl had a chance of discussing favourite topics with an equal on equal terms, and in spite of the boisterous conversation going on around them she was really enjoying herself, though with those little qualms of uneasiness still unappeased—growing, in fact, livelier.

CHAPTER XXIV

“ I AM NOT LIKE YOU ”

CONVERSATION in other parts of the room died down and buzzed spasmodically. The two girls and Madam, who earlier had oiled its wheels assiduously whenever it inclined to flag, now seemed distraught, and gaps of silence grew longer. The young men gazed at the ceiling for inspiration to some new witticism; and after a very long gap one of the visitors proposed cards.

The younger niece rose to fetch a pack—several. The tall man, whose name was Furuya, excused himself from playing, and Madam Takashima said she preferred to look on. Fujiyé was not asked to join. The other four gathered round the table and were soon engaged in a vivacious game of poker, with which Western importation they seemed all more or less acquainted. Small sea-shells of different colours, of which a carved ivory box stood on the mantelpiece, took the place of ordinary chips.

Madam hovered about the table, standing oftenest behind one or other of her guests, a cigarette between her fingers, condoling with or congratulating the various players and keeping the glasses filled. The turnip-faced young man had frankly expressed his preference for champagne over the port with which they had at first been served (“He might be in a restaurant,” thought Fujiyé, “from the way he

talks!"), and two or three empty bottles now stood on the sideboard. The wheels of the social machine now needed no further oiling.

The nieces must have had an inborn genius for poker; either that, or luck stood by them amazingly: gradually all the chips of higher value were heaping themselves before the two fair gamblers. Fusa-ko, the elder one, in particular, seemed blessed by fortune. Her play, had Fujiyé known enough of the game to appreciate it, was simply wonderful. Intuitively she seemed to know when to bet high on cards that to the average poker-player would have looked risky, and when to drop out though holding hands that surely called for greater confidence: the event invariably justified her judgment. Nor did this prevent her from drolling continually with her aunt, who generally stood just opposite.

Yae-ko occasionally enjoyed less luck, or possibly less perspicacity, and sometimes when the cards went against her a little perplexed frown creased her smooth brow. From time to time, particularly after each fresh deal, it might have been observed that quick glances were exchanged between Madam and her young relations.

Fujiyé and the tall young man, lounging back in very easy chairs, watched the players idly, half-sleepily. sometimes passing a lazy comment on the game. Once, when Yae-ko, on a small flush, had run up the betting to a stiff figure and beaten Turnip-face, who had raised confidently on a slightly smaller one, Mr. Furuya's little wry smile may have caught Madam's eye. After the next hand she declared that there had been enough play for one evening:

"You boys will be making a habit of it, if you're not careful," she admonished them, "and I shouldn't like that to happen in *my* house!" Also she was hungry and positively could not wait for supper any longer.

Cards vanished, and they all moved into one of the Japanese guest-chambers and disposed themselves at their ease on the tatami.

Furuya and his friend shed their stiff hakama and haori (they had come in native dress), and he of the dark-grey suit begged the loan of a "yukata" from his hostess and retired into another room to change his clothes.

Supper was brought in, dainty dishes of varied form and taste, and bottles of fragrant Masamuné saké.

Saké alone is stronger than it smells and tastes, though with most foreigners a large quantity is needed to produce effects; saké on top of port and champagne works wonders. As supper progressed the last vestiges of propriety and restraint disappeared, and the little party settled down to much the same sort of revel as Fujiyé had sometimes witnessed with ill-concealed aversion in the Miyamachi tea-house, when a few young sparks were making a night of it with drink and geisha.

Perplexity and disgust fought in her mind. What sort of lady was this, that could allow such license within her own family circle? The "nieces" were reclining on the mats between the two younger guests, laughing loudly, exchanging wine-cups, and suffering familiarities which none but a singing-girl, and she not of the highest class would permit. Only Furuya kept himself apart, seeming to share

with Fujiyé the distaste which she could hardly help evincing for the Bacchic scene.

Yae-ko ran out and returned with a samisen, just what was wanting to complete the affair! The long-haired guest grabbed it and strummed, banjo-wise, not badly: but the song he sung, much applauded, was filthy. One of the girls took the instrument and capped his song with another, not much better. Madam smiled benevolently at her pleasant little gathering.

With a slight grimace and raised eyebrows, Furuya moved his cushion across the room and knelt down by the now-trembling girl. For a few moments they chatted quietly on indifferent topics. Gradually the conversation touched a more personal note. Madam Takashima had told him (Fujiyé wondered when she could have done so), the little history of her brave fight with unkind fate. He admired her tremendously—it was good to know that there were such girls in the world: those of his circle were all flappers or rabbits—she must let him express his sympathy. He spoke so nobly and gently that she couldn't help feeling touched. Then, she knew not how it was, she found that he was making love to her in the frankest, though still respectful, terms. Presently, as she sat there too confused to speak, bewildered by this unexpected development, an arm stole round her waist and the young man pressed her gently to his side.

For one moment, perhaps, she swayed toward him—then, as though hot iron had burnt her, she recoiled, drowsiness all gone, keen resentment stabbing from her eyes.

"A few minutes ago you were saying you respected me—is this how a gentleman shows his respect? It is true I am only a wretched girl, servant in a stranger's house—true I have lost home, fortune and friends—but one thing I have not lost, and that I will keep till I die. If you really had that respect and sympathy for me in which you almost succeeded in making me believe, you would help me to escape from this place which I entered only yesterday, thinking it—oh, what shall I do? What *shall* I do?"—and the poor child, her courage suddenly deserting her for the time, bowed her head down to the table in front of her, all littered with empty soup bowls and sticky lumps of fish and cakes, and covered her eyes with her fingers. Slowly a few miserable tears trickled between them. The sternest heroines have their off moments.

Mr. Furuya, looking rather foolish, rather guilty, and rather surprised, sat back on his heels and caressed his small moustache with a slightly quivering hand. He regarded his companion covertly, shooting sidelong glances.

Moved surely by some kindly impulse, Madam Takashima came swaying across the room and tapped the disconsolate girl on the shoulder. In her hand she held a brimming glass of sparkling Moselle. Several times in the course of the evening she had invited Fujiyé to drink. Her displeasure gradually became more apparent at the continued refusal of the latter to do more than sip a few drops. Natural enough in a hostess.

"Come, child, you look a little upset. I'm afraid we have startled you by our rather free-and-easy

ways, but you know I'm one of those people who don't consider themselves bound to obey all the silly narrow-minded conventions that most folks are afraid of. You'll soon get used to us. Come, drink this!"

Eyes dry now, Fujiyé raised her head and looked steadily at the woman.

"No, thank you, I don't wish for any more wine, and I should like to be allowed to go to bed, if you don't need me any more to-night."

She spoke in a low voice, but firmly, with a tinge of contempt which she could not keep out of it.

"But I *do* need you here," answered her mistress, a harsh laugh covering her annoyance. "Who is to clean up all these cups and dishes, I'd like to know, if you don't help? You may go to bed when I tell you."

Then, restraining herself a little, "Still, if you don't like wine, nobody's going to force you. You may have a cup of coffee if you prefer: please yourself."

So saying, she went out of the room into the kitchen at the back, beckoning the elder "niece" to follow her. In a few minutes the latter returned with a steaming cup of coffee as promised. To Fujiyé she presented it with a little mocking smile, remarking, "Since you are too proud to drink with us, I suppose you must choose your own drink."

The poor girl was thirsty, as Madam must have guessed. Eagerly she took the cup, with a word of thanks to the giver. Had it not been so hot she would probably have half-emptied it at a draught, but as it was, she took only a sip or two.

Coffee? Queer coffee this! In her old home Fujiyé had been in the un-Japanese habit—contracted from her school friends—of drinking coffee. It was indeed her favourite beverage, and she knew exactly what the taste should be. She even knew how to make it, quite drinkably. Now there are, as we know, coffees and coffees; one differs from another in aroma; but, in this stuff almost before the first drop was down her throat, she sensed an acrid, pungent bitterness that no innocent coffee could ever possess. And with the knowledge there shot through her brain the instant need of concealing that knowledge from her company.

Very languidly she set her cup down and pretended to stifle a yawn, while she felt her mistress's keen eyes fixed on her. Then Madam's attention was called away for a minute. No one else was looking, as she sat in the shade by a small latticed window. The window opened six inches. Down below in the quiet street a startled yelp told that the hot coffee had not been entirely wasted on the ground.

The gaiety in the room had now subsided. Yae-ko and the curly-headed youth had disappeared, while Turnip-face, propped against the alcove pillar and on the verge of slumber, was supporting the other girl's head on his lap.

Fujiyé noticed that her would-be lover had withdrawn to the further end of the room, and was listening with a discontented frown to the discourse that Madam Takashima, half behind a screen, was pouring into his ears.

With weary brain she tried to review the situation. Wounded pride and bitter disappointment stung her.

This house—only yesterday she had thought to find a happy, comfortable home here: what was it but a gilded brothel?

Well, no help for it! Once more she must turn out and face the world with only honesty and courage for her weapons. Once let those rust, and the world would have her down. It was probably long past midnight: could she trust herself here till morning?

Crouched on the mats, with head resting on hands and eyelids closed, she considered what she should do. Then she felt a pair of strong arms lifting her from the ground.

In a moment she was on her feet, eyes flashing, cheeks flaming crimson, a tigress ready to strike: honesty and courage for teeth and claws.

Furuya was standing beside her. His colour almost matched her own, but his mien was rather that of a sheep—if a sheep can look ashamed as well as silly—and his gaze fell to the floor before hers.

"I was afraid—at least, I—I thought, that is, that you had fallen asleep," he stammered.

"And if I had drunk the coffee that your friends had drugged for me, I *should* have fallen asleep, no doubt!" she returned bitterly.

For a moment he managed to meet her accusing eyes.

"No, really; I'm bad enough, but not as bad as that," he protested. "I didn't know they were going to put opium in your drink, and I was very angry with that old Takashima woman when she told me that they had done so—really!"

"Ah, so it *was* opium," remarked Fujiyé, half

absently; then, turning to the other, "Well, don't you think it's time that you returned home?"

"I suppose it is," he responded, looking still rather like a schoolboy detected in stealing apples. "But please do not think worse of me than I deserve. And *do* tell me that I may see you again some time, if you can manage to forgive me. May I find you here to-morrow in the forenoon?"

"If you find me here to-morrow, you may tell me anything you like," answered Fujiyé; but the young man was apparently too confused by wine and mingled emotions to gather the intention of her words. He thanked her, bade her a most respectful farewell, went unsteadily into the ante-room to re-habit himself in his outer garments of ceremony, passed her again with a deep obeisance, and departed.

She was quite alone. A faint sound came from some distant room. Bottles, bowls and dishes, mute tokens of a jolly evening, strewed the floor, and as the wearied girl was gathering them up a sudden sharp and dreadful clatter behind her sent the quick blood racing through her body. She jumped round, fists clenched: then an almost hysterical desire to laugh choked her, as she discovered the source of her alarm.

In the "toko-no-ma" alcove there stood two great suits of "yoroi"—old Japanese armour, complete and helmeted—built up as if still enclosing the bodies of the valiant men who once wore them, witnesses to the taller stature of a bygone generation. With a touch of infinite humour, Turnip-face had thought fit to place an empty saké-flask between the lips of one scowling mask and wedge a plate into his leathery

palms. It was the former slipping from its lodgment and bringing down the latter in its fall that had made that formidable noise.

Fujiyé gathered up the fragments of glass and crockery as she had the supper things. Then her eye fell on some fine Japanese swords in gorgeous scabbards on a stand between the armour suits. Two were of the usual length—two-and-a-half feet—and one was short, some eleven inches. Samurai ladies in olden days wore these eleven-inch daggers. Moved by impulse and the association of ideas, she caught the little weapon up and hid it in her obi.

Five minutes later Madam Takashima came in: not undeserving of sympathy, for the evening had been a disappointing one for her, too. Her hair was awry, her cheeks mottled from drink, fatigue and anger.

She walked straight up to the girl and shook her savagely by the arm, hissing in a voice half-choked with rage,

"You cursed little fool, what do you mean by playing the prim miss, as though you were still in the school-room? Do you know that that young Furuya will shortly be the head of one of the best and richest families in Tokyo? His father is a noble, and he is sure to succeed to the title in a year or so. And with a chance like that, you must put on your modest airs and pretend to be shocked! I suppose that's what made him take a fancy to you—men always want what they think they can't get. He never took much notice of the other girls, but he was always ready to play high—until to-night: your fault that, too—and now I don't suppose we

shall get him here again! What do you mean by it, spoiling my business like that? Do you think I took you for the sake of your pretty face? I could pick up fifty like you—better than you, in the streets of Asakusa any evening. Well, here you are and here you stay: I have some here, though you may not know it, who can see to that: and I have a good mind so to deal with you before morning that by this time to-morrow you will be glad to go on your knees to any man who offers you his favour."

Her hot rage had cooled, and she spoke the last part in a venomous snarl. Fujiyé took a step backward, and drew her little weapon, unsheathed, from its resting-place. She stood a good inch higher than the other woman, though the latter had called her little, and she was long-armed and alert, lithe as a squirrel. The glitter of her eyes out-matched that of the thin blade. She spoke in low, fierce tones which carried conviction.

"I stay here to-night, untouched and unharmed, and to-morrow I go unmolested: and if in the meantime any tries to come near me against my will, that person shall learn how a daughter of Japan can protect her honour."

No ranting: just a plain statement. Madam Takashima, pallid beneath her paint, had retreated almost to the opposite wall, but she took courage to reply as she saw that very bright dagger re-sheathed.

"Well, there's no need to get so excited; you're not in the theatre!" she muttered querulously. "That young man had taken such a fancy to you, you might have done anything with him. If you had played your cards decently, you little fool, you

might have become his mistress, or even, with luck and good management, his wife. Surely you're not in such a fine position that you could afford to despise that! Why couldn't you humour him a little?"

"Because I'm not a prostitute like you and your kept girls," replied Fujiyé steadily.

It was their last word together. The woman turned and left the room; and Fujiyé, after waiting till the distant creaking of a stair told that she had gone up to bed, made her way to her own chamber. There she lay down, but did not sleep. All desire for sleep had vanished; yet no pulses throbbed, she felt tranquil and almost happy. She was still stronger than Fate.

CHAPTER XXV

THE BEER-HALL

NEXT morning at a fairly early hour she rose, passed through the silent house, hearing nothing but light breathing from one or two rooms along the passage, and unbarred the door and outer gate. She stepped out into the road—empty yet of traffic, haunted by the swift ghosts of cats, and holding still a little the mystery of night—and shook off with a shudder the tainted atmosphere of the house of shame.

One more leaf turned down! What writing on the next page? She had no vestige of a plan—knew no more than a hunted cat where she should spend the coming night. But the cat has several lairs to choose from; she had none. Ten hours before that, though—time to consider.

She had turned into a familiar street, wide and busy, and found herself walking towards Uyeno. The morning was fine, the air dry and crisp, inviting to exercise. She continued along the road till the trees of the park barred its end, and there she sat down beneath the crimsoning maples and sparse-leaved cherry-trees. While little whispering autumn tokens drifted softly around her, she rested and took stock. How had she gained or lost by her latest situation?

Imprimis: for a thin cotton dress she now had a very much warmer one of silk, lined and more

suitable for the season: likewise a sword wherewith to defend herself should need arise—not very likely—or, at other need, to dispose of at a good price, for Fujiyé knew enough of such things to realise its value. She had, moreover, the little pearl ring that her late mistress had bought her. As to the ethics or legality of her acquisition of these, Fujiyé worried not a jot; the ring was a gift, the shopman could prove it if necessary; so was the dress—and for the sword, she felt herself normally entitled to it, and she guessed that the House of the Badger would never desire to court publicity by denouncing her to the police.

What else? Well, she could enumerate no other gains—unless it was a gain to know something more of the baser side of human nature. And loss? No; though she felt that if that revelation had come more gradually it might have found her with her defences sapped.

She sat and cogitated—drowsily: the hot sunshine conspired with last night's lack of sleep. A young woman, looking about the same age as Fujiyé but more lined and hardened, came up and settled on the bench beside her.

Moved by a simultaneous impulse, the two girls turned suddenly to inspect each other. A moment's wide-eyed and incredulous hesitation—then mutual recognition dawned on the face of each.

Recognition—and with it for Fujiyé two memories. First, a small group outside a dormitory window, youths in college caps and a couple of girls whispering and giggling, and a call through the window: "Aren't you coming with us, Fujiyé?"—then footsteps dying

down the street as she settled to her studies, the girls' faces back-turned for a moment under a street-lamp. Next, blotting out that memory, one of those faces, weed-covered and staring, glistening wet under dawn sunlight.

This was the other face: this the girl who had, perhaps, led poor drowned Teru from the dull path of work, and had left the school when Teru did. This was the girl, now sitting on the bench.

Four years since last they met! On each face the years had set their stamp. On the one, added character, inside, the refinement that suffering may—or may not—bring: on the other, coarsening of the lines, sagging of the cheeks and lips, an expression at once bold and shifty to the too-much-embellished eyes. The metal had been too soft, the die too hard.

Quickly the girl turned her head again and was rising to walk away, when Fujiyé laid a detaining hand on her sleeve.

"Why, Tama-ko, have you forgotten me? It is such a long, long time since last I saw you: do tell me what you are doing and how you are getting on!"

The gentle voice brought quick tears to her former schoolmate's eyes, and she sank down again on the bench, shy and constrained but trying to speak in ordinary tones.

"Not really *you*, Watanabé San? How very delightful—but what ages it is since last I saw you! And whatever are you doing here? You must have graduated long ago: have you left Hojima to come and live in Tokyo? I suppose you have got a husband by this time. How strange that we should meet here!"

It was a poor little attempt; the smile that accompanied it was almost tragic. For answer, Fujiyé took the other's hands in her own and pressed them, and suddenly the girl burst into a violent fit of sobbing, snatching away her hands and burying her face in the long sleeves of her kimono.

During the next half hour beneath the whispering cherry branches two sad little sets of reminiscences were exchanged. Clouds had obscured the sun, a thin drizzle was falling, passers-by were few; in spite of the dismal weather the pair sat and talked on, rejoicing in the luxury of mutual confidence and sympathy. What greater bliss than to meet someone from whom you need hide nothing?

Tama-ko's history was brief. Rumour for once had been right in saying that she had left the school with a lover. The lover had deserted her after a twelvemonth of bickerings and growing mutual indifference. They had lived in Osaka for a time, and after the parting he had gone away to Nagasaki or some other place—she didn't know exactly where. Then she had returned to Tokyo, but only to find that in the interval her father had married again, to a wife much younger than himself, and the step-mother coldly refused and forbade the slightest recognition of the hapless truant.

So, after vainly trying to win forgiveness from her father—a weak-minded man completely under the dominance of his new spouse—Tama-ko had tried in one way or another to earn an honest living, and was at present serving as waitress in a small "beer-hall" in the Asakusa Ward.

In her turn Fujiyé briefly outlined to her friend

the story of her own struggles and present plight. The other listened with little nods of sympathetic knowledge. When she had finished the two sat silent for a time, hand in hand and lost in meditation.

"What are you going to do now?" Tama-ko asked at length.

"I don't know," answered the younger girl drearily; "try to find some other place as servant, I suppose. Surely there must be *some* good people in this great city! Perhaps next time I shall have better luck."

The other opened her lips, hesitated, looked at her friend's pure, so-different face, and then burst forth, with eyes on the ground:

"Listen, Fujiyé San! Why don't you come to the beer-hall where I am working? They are wanting another maid just now. Of course the pay is small, and you are a hundred thousand times too good for such work; but the old man who runs it is very decent, and though the folks living round are mostly no better than they should be, and the young fellows are sometimes cheeky, yet—there's something about you that makes people keep their distance—not like poor little me!—and I know you'd have nothing to fear. *Do* say you'll come! It'll be like a new life for me to have you near me, you are so plucky and—and clean, somehow. *Do, do, please come!*"

The girl spoke with almost passionate eagerness, though small vulgarities of diction picked up in recent years jarred on her former schoolmate. Elegance doesn't thrive in beer-halls.

Fujiyé considered. Not exactly the kind of work that a young girl of breeding and education would

choose for her livelihood, but the proverb about beggars is a Japanese one too. What else offered? Honest, at worst, in itself, and she knew how to steer clear of attendant shoals and reefs. She was lonely, too. With Tama-ko she could enjoy the luxury, unknown of late, of a friend to talk to.

She gave a slow nod of decision.

"Very well, so be it. I will try. Shall we go straight there now? But perhaps after all they may not be willing to have me!"

"My dear," answered her friend, "girls are plenty in this rotten city, some good and some good-looking, but girls who are both pretty *and* good don't often ask for jobs in beer-halls—and, mind you, even for a waitress they prefer a good girl to a skittish one, every time, though you might not think it. It's the straight ones who draw customers. Why, they'll just jump at the chance to get you, you see if they don't!"

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The next six months of Fujiyé's life were passed in the little restaurant to which her friend conducted her that evening, in Asakusa.

Strange asylum for the sea-lover! Asakusa, pleasure district of the modern metropolis, where the crowded, noisy streets are blazing far on into the night with the lights of picture-palaces, billiard-saloons and theatres: where menageries, beer-gardens, booths and puppet-shows line the channels along which, work-day finished, the grey tide of workers pours, eager to rid itself of the wealth which it has spent the day in painfully tearing from the hard

cliffs of the world. Tawdry brilliance, vulgar tinsel, yet touched vaguely with something of the glamour of the East: all this gaiety grouping itself round the great red temple of the Goddess Kwannon, the great temple built there long ago when yet the salt waters of the Bay rippled in weedy lagoons about the outskirts of its wide grounds—the temple whose especial worshippers are rich City merchants and the women from the near-by licensed quarters—Kwannon, Goddess of Mercy.

It was a curious life to this modest and well-bred girl! It had its sordid and ugly sides, its moments of depression and almost of despair, when Fujiyé had to summon all her resolution and strength of mind to her aid. Sometimes she was tempted to give up the struggle and seek elsewhere for livelihood. Yet, too, it had its compensations. The men and girls around, common in speech and frankly animal in their outlook, were universally cheerful, good-natured, full of spirit, and mostly hard-working: sometimes showing traits of kindness and real unselfishness that surprised and touched her. By Tama-ko she was almost worshipped; that wayward and pliable character tried to build herself up on her friend's stronger soul.

The advent of the new waitress stirred no little interest among the customers and staff of the "Black Bat" beer-hall. Something out of the ordinary, this tall young maid. The first few days proved, as she had expected, decidedly an ordeal; the usual advances, more or less ardent, more or less in pleasantry, on the part of the "boys" of the place and of its frequenters. Finding Fujiyé of different stuff from

the common run of girls whom they encountered, their attentions slackened or ceased.

Next door was a small billiard-room. One or two of the young men who came to it night after night—office clerks, for the most part, with a few dissipated students wasting their parents' money, and an occasional hawk seeking lesser birds to pluck—paid more assiduous court to the slim, modest, self-possessed girl who seemed so strangely out of place in the frowsy clamour of her surroundings. They fared no better, for all their beautiful clothes and loose purse-strings: this girl was sadly unappreciative. One hawk, a really handsome and plausible scoundrel, hopeful of combining pleasure with future business, laid earnest siege. Heaven made unwary women for his benefit; but Fujiyé's virtue, he found, consisted not in ignorance of vice but in steady scorn of it.

All those country folk who flock to the great city, sight-seeing or seeking work, come once at least to Asakusa. By day its picture-halls are filled with school-children; at night the painted women saunter in search of prey, or sip beer in small saloons, awaiting patrons, uncountenanced by the State.

Away beyond the Temple and public gardens lie the licensed quarters of the Yoshiwara, where the inmates ply their calling beneath the sanction and to the great benefit of the Imperial Government—financially. The ground-landlords and owners of these fine mansions sit in the Diet, ever ready to repel attack on their ancient privileges: their motives largely altruistic—how could the safety of our wives

and daughters be secured without this outlet for the natural instincts of man? Besides, when hard times strike the farming districts, as must by the dispensation of Providence sometimes occur, how could the poor farmer tide over things if denied the chance to raise a lump sum by apprenticing one of his surplus daughters to the craft?

Wealthy merchants, nobles, journalists, small-salaried office clerks and students young and old come, on foot or rolling in comfortable car, openly or discreetly, to while away the night-hours and gild the pleasant halls with hardly or easily earned wealth. Should a bank-robber, burglar, or defaulting cashier get away with a large sum, the police comb the quarters of all the big cities, with the odds in favour of their rounding him up there. Of all these places, the reputation of the Tokyo Yoshiwara stands, naturally, highest.

To this the bright and bustling streets of Asakusa form, as it were, an ante-room.

Morning in the Black Bat was a slack time. Some revellers, rising early to get to a job in some distant City district, looked in for a snatched breakfast or a refreshing beer. Some of the local workers, billiard-markers and the like, came daily for their morning meal. For most of these, soon, Fujiyé had a smile and a word of greeting.

Then some lazy hours. The girls idled, gossiped, made up arrears of sleep, powdered their faces and sometimes even washed them, and perused the columns reserved for scandal and sensation in the *Miyako*, the *Niroku*, and other journals beloved of tea-houses.

About noon the real business of the day began: slackened a little between two and four, then swelled steadily till well on into the night. The late evening hours were the most trying. On the whole the Japanese rank with the soberest of civilised folk, but, naturally, sobriety is not always to the fore in a beer-hall. Still, it was rarely that the customers became uproarious; drink made them usually, according to temperament, jovial and good-natured or inclined to slumber.

But guests sometimes grew quarrelsome in their cups. Then the girls had hard times. Always, just then, the police are difficult to find: such things are better left to shape their own course—within limits, naturally; non-interference with sleeping dogs is wise—with snarling ones, wiser still; possibly the maxim is inscribed on official walls. One night, about eleven, there was a stabbing affray, blood over an up-turned table, dripping and clotting on the floor. The parties had been strangers—a carpenter one, the other a small shopkeeper—met by chance and drinking together. The third bottle found them still dear friends. In the middle of the fifth (it was only mild beer) the carpenter took fierce umbrage at some thick-witted gibe, and grabbed a chisel, a long, heavy one, from his tool-box on the floor. It was hardly a fight. The shopkeeper, still grinning stupidly, crumpled up, crimson-starred in the forehead, among the chair-legs.

Fujiyé disengaged the supine form from the furniture and, calling another girl, carried it dripping into a back room, where she explored and stopped the punctured wound. In school days she had taken a

six-months' ambulance course; one never knows when a thing may come in useful.

The striker, sobered, gathered up his tool-box and fled, to be arrested next night. The victim, at hospital, soon recovered, having missed death by a few millimetres. And the deft and self-possessed young waitress who had rendered first aid so efficiently was commended by the doctor; also by the police, who had arrived to ring down the curtain.

Fujiyé's prestige with her fellows rose noticeably, and the underlings bothered her less. Gradually beer-hall life was becoming more endurable, more in the nature of things. Thoughts of the past and the future became dimmer.

One thing distressed her. The girl, Tama-ko, who had brought her there, for whom she felt that affection, tinged perhaps with contempt, that stronger natures often bear for weaker ones that lean on them for help, was slipping; steadily, but gathering impetus, down the slope of moral restraint and self-respect.

Her father had been a noted tippler. Probably it was the same strain working in herself. She showed a growing fondness for drink—sipping with young men, emptying left heel-taps, even paying sly visits to the bar when the bar was shut. With Japanese girls, a taste for alcohol is the quickest, surest road to the pit.

Some of the guests, of course, soon learnt her partiality and were generous to gratify it. Her popularity revived. She hung, giggling and sharing glasses, round the chairs of students and shadier customers, sometimes glancing over a shoulder to see if Fujiyé's eye were on her; soon she ceased to care.

With two or three of the men who frequented the house Fujiyé herself became, after a while, on terms of something approaching intimacy—but no offered drinks. Her modest and composed demeanour compelled them, tacitly, to treat her with such respect as is hardly accorded as a rule to café girls by the men whom they help to entertain.

Of these favoured few two brothers headed the list. Great billiard-devotees, lovers, too, of out-door sports, they took but a vague interest in the studies which they were supposed by rich and rural parents to be pursuing in the Capital. Twins, very much alike, one was plump and the other inclined to leanness. They were tall, well-built, ruggedly countrified of feature, and with eyes continually twinkling; somehow they reminded her of that friend of a bygone summer whose image dominated her thoughts—when she let herself think.

Perhaps the younger of the twins, whom his senior by twenty minutes called simply Niban San—Mr Number Two—was her especial favourite. Both lads treated her with the affectionate respect they would have shown an elder sister. On occasion one or other had saved her from the disagreeable attentions of some more ill-bred student customer.

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Days were shortening again and frost glittered white on the ground. New Year's Day approached once more, the second since her father's death.

Great doings in Asakusa and adjoining quarters attend the old year's end. It is there that they celebrate with especial gaiety the festivals of Tori no Ichi.

The daughters of pleasure flock to the red temple at the Thunder Gate with offerings and vows, and hopes of many lovers in the next year. Rich merchants come, too, to buy those great bamboo rakes called kumadé—bears'-claws—which are supposed, if properly blessed, to rake in gains to the man who buys them. Those nights the beer-hall girls worked hard and late.

Then came the New Year, with memories of the last one, in the house of Shimizu, Chiba merchant. Where, she wondered, would her next be spent?

January was mild that year, February a month of deep snows and slushy streets. Again and again fell the snow, and on into March, blocking traffic on out-lying railways, and tending to depress beer-hall business. In such weather men prefer crouching within-doors round the hibachi.

Life passed swiftly—not, on the whole, unhappily. But sometimes when she sat apart and looked inwards at her mind Fujiyé was conscious of a slight loosening, perhaps a slight coarsening, of her moral fibres. The environment in which she moved, the daily and nightly scenes of which she was a part, were, she felt, leaving their impress on her; impossible not. And to what outcome could this life tend, ultimately? With all her ideals and her hopes, was she doomed to work out her days a waiting-maid in a poor restaurant, carrying cups, setting tables, listening eternally to the dull chatter of men drinking beer?

CHAPTER XXVI

BAD LUCK—GOOD LUCK

ADVERSITY, prosperity—which is better for us? Those eighteen months which, for Fujiyé, had spelt nothing but grief, disappointment and humiliation, had changed her from a wayward, imperious girl to a woman: refined, matured, armoured against the stabs of an unfriendly world. With Ichiro the world had gone very well—Fortune turned only her smiling face: yet the result seemed much the same.

He, too, had matured, filled out, viewed life with more tolerant eyes than those he had brought with him to the city. A power of detachment was budding in him: the universe no longer centred in that six feet of brown village muscularity. Tolerant, but not lax. He stuck to the rules and regimen that he had prescribed himself with faithful closeness, good augury of future things. The results, in increased brain-power and self-confidence, were already apparent.

Smallpox had broken out in Tokyo that winter, his first in the city, and the bookseller was dead of it. He survived the year by just seven days. Ichiro and the stock were duly disinfected, and it was a fortnight later that the former, staying in the little room behind the shop till the latter should, by auction or private sale, be disposed of, received an offer of employment. It jumped exactly with his needs and wishes.

There was a man, benevolent, childless, enriched by years of hard work and lucky trading, who was opening a school on liberal lines. It was for the encouragement of young men to follow in his steps. In the curriculum great prominence was given to the study of practical English, universal medium of modern commerce.

Among the various activities with which this man amused the leisure which his wealth had brought him—being of that rare wisdom which refuses to regard the continued amassing of money as the sole end and aim of life—was the part-ownership of a large daily newspaper. It was for this same paper that Ichiro's friend Mori chiefly wrote. Native of the same province, the magnate had conceived a liking for the vivacious journalist, enjoyed his conversation, and sometimes found his counsel worth taking.

So when the project of the new school was nearing completion its founder asked the young man one day if he had time and inclination to teach English for a few hours a week to the students of the lower classes. But both were lacking: to Mori's mercurial mind the drudgery of pedagogics had no attractions at all. Then did he know of anyone who might care to take it on? Mori bethought himself of his friend, the Student of Life; his lean purse, at least, might welcome the job.

He gave Ichiro a warm and sincere recommendation. A meeting was arranged, very satisfactory on both sides. Another bookseller took over the stock and fixtures, and Ichiro entered the ranks of the teaching profession at a fairly liberal salary.

His new duties still left him ample time for study, and the work proved increasingly congenial, stimulating his own advance along the paths of foreign learning.

It brought him, too, a new friend. For the higher classes an American teacher had been engaged. His name was Longfield—a man of moderately wide knowledge and good attainments, resident for some years in the country and familiar with its ways and tongue. He was an interesting companion, a Christian, earnest, but broad and charitable in views.

The attraction was mutual. This tall, brown, serious, yet pleasant-spoken and alert young fellow was just the sort of kindred soul with whom John Longfield loved to converse. He was a bachelor, a busy man, and of few intimates.

It was in the teachers' common-room, where during the ten-minutes' interval between lessons they sat and smoked their pipes, sipping tiny cups of amber tea, or discussed their pupils and their work, that the two men came together—one lean and slightly bowed, with scanty locks deserting a shining crown, the other just on the threshold of young and vigorous manhood.

They talked first of class-work—Ichiro gleaning much good advice: then branched off into the flowery paths of literature: here he surprised the elder man by the extent and variety of his knowledge. Their acquaintance ripened. Before the week was out Ichiro was invited to his new friend's house.

Sunday came, and rest from school work. Calling in the afternoon to borrow a promised book, the young man was lucky to find his friend within-doors.

They settled down to a long and comfortable chat. In the course of it his host asked him if he were in the habit of attending any church or chapel.

Ichiro replied that he was not. The religious side of Western culture had never attracted him. The endless discussion of creed and dogma that seemed to bulk so largely in modern as in ancient Christianity was to him no more than a beating of the air. Why nations should wage bloody wars and private men embitter their lives with dissension about such abstract points was a mystery which puzzled him.

To live honestly, in kindness with his fellows: to deal justly with all men, following always a definite purpose throughout his days, keeping always a good heart against perplexities and sorrows: to reverence the memories of his forbears that he might not bring them to shame: this was the scheme of life that he held all-sufficient. Deeper mysteries there might be. He was content to leave them to the professional expounders of religion. Of course he performed the rites of family ancestral worship, as he hoisted his sun-flag on national holidays—or as you remove your hat in church.

A narrow-minded man might have deplored this attitude as godless. Not so Longfield. Ichiro, who had met missionaries before, was half-unconsciously surprised and pleased at failing to detect in his friend's talk any of that air of professional wisdom and enlightenment in religious matters which he had instinctively expected.

Looking down the valley, on the further slope of which rose a great temple sacred to Saint Nicheren, they spoke of Buddhism and its popular influence.

Yearly, on October the tenth, enormous crowds flock there to worship, flowing in, a vast tidal wave, from all the country round. All day and night they tramp along the roads and up the myriad steps, battering on their little drums, till the measured din eats into the ears and hearts of the listeners. Longfield, whose house fronted on the road, told his young friend that for years it had been his custom, on that night, to go, dressed in kimono and carrying a lantern like the others, up the long steps and stay there till dawn: trying to satisfy, as he said, his unquenchable desire to study and understand his fellow man. Useless, besides, to think of sleep with all that noise going on.

Ichiro listened absently. Association of ideas brought back an evening in late spring, and a temple festival across the Bay. The semi that had piped their shrill refrain on that warm, bygone day were long since dead, and it was their children who fided now among the pines and cedars of Hojima village. The leaves then green on the trees were mouldering underfoot, but the seed that had sent its tiny taproot down into the depths of his heart was now grown into a lusty plant whose tendrils twined about his being, though even he hardly guessed their strength. He dallied with the recollection—then resolutely put it from him. Idle musing was a luxury rarely allowed himself except in small doses.

They fell to discussing the usefulness of these festivals. Did Longfield, as a Christian, approve them?—worship of a heathen god! His friend weighed the point. For most of the pilgrims they were little more than a picnic—for many an excuse, or at least an occasion, for much saké-drinking:

perhaps, so rumour said, in that great promiscuous gathering of both sexes, when thousands spent the night in ramblings through the dark and pine-needle-carpeted woods around the temple, for other relaxations: yet real piety brought many trampers. Hardly one in all that multitude but must feel, at least while performing the ceremonious devotion within the sacred precincts, a certain uplifting of the heart, a purifying, if only for a few brief minutes, from the grosser material preoccupations of every-day life:—thus Longfield.

They fell to comparing Buddhist and Shinto ways of thought and differences of ritual. The American displayed a knowledge of and sympathy with both that surprised Ichiro. The latter confessed to little interest in either doctrine. Religion was merely of civil value, serving to hold together the family and State life of the people—quoting in support some well-known words of the great scholar Fukuzawa, who had held all religions to be of almost equal worth, if sincerely believed and faithfully practised.

Longfield pointed out fallacies in this view: tenets and codes inculcated by the various faiths affected the value of a man as citizen of the world and member of a universal brotherhood. His young friend's interest was aroused by the force and shrewd application of some of the American's remarks. His logic was driven home with arguments from the history of nations, from incidents personally observed, from the daily Press: all with humorous tolerance and breadth of vision. This was different from the pious, semi-literate drivel Ichiro had heard at times in chapels. It made him think.

He continued to think as he trudged home. Here was a field of mental activity untrodden. Might it not contain treasures of value to him, invaluable perhaps in helping to correct appreciation of that greater world which he aspired to make his special study?

While pursuing his researches into the various aspects of Western life—its arts, sciences, business methods, social intricacies, familiar customs and ways of thought—he had often felt the need of something that might correlate these, supply a key to their complexities: might not the faith, and the varied forms of faith, that had grown up with them, supply that key?

He must enlarge his syllabus of study. Here, Longfield was just the man to afford him the necessary help. From that afternoon a new bent was given to Ichiro's mental progress.

Changes came, too, in his outward life. The little shop, reft of books, shelves and cases, had stood dustily empty for less than a week, when one morning great piles of cabbages and apples began pouring in. Next Sunday it re-opened as a fruiterer's. It was the honeymoon venture of a hopeful couple. Ichiro stayed on for a while in his tiny room behind the shop.

The arrangement was no ideal one. The young wife, though busy, was a chatterer and disturbed his work. The husband, a morose and dismal-faced youth with the air of one predestined to failure, viewed her incursions on their lodger's privacy with a jealous eye, yet let them continue. Perhaps he feared to lose the student's weekly rent: though small, it helped the household along.

This man was typical of a certain class. For some years he had pulled a ricksha. By frugal living and sturdy legs he had laid by a small store of paper notes. His calling involves short, violent stretches of breathless exercise alternate with longer periods of inaction, sweating trunk and tired limbs exposed to chill winds and rain. Phthisis dogs the ricksha-man's steps and often cuts short his career. It had attacked this one, so he fell back on vegetables. His new wife—small, flat features, vivacious manners, and a sort of cheap and vacuous prettiness—had been help in the eel-and-rice and "udon" shop where he had daily fed.

Against expectation, the shallow-pated and slipshod little flirt became on their union a shrewd, hard-working and self-denying wife. Throughout a dull and cheerless spring the couple strove to make the venture a success. In vain. Sales, never large, diminished. Piles of swollen and purple sweet-potatoes, boxes of late oranges, rosy Hokkaido apples, yellow persimmons mellowed in saké barrels and bunches of luscious Koshu grapes, all displayed their charms to an unappreciative world and grew hard and wrinkled or soft and mushy according to their several natures. The stock dwindled, but less by sales than by process of natural decay. A crisis loomed.

One night, in his little den, Ichiro heard the couple stirring till very late. Next morning when he rose the shop was still quiet: making up arrears of sleep, he supposed. He left by the back door and breakfasted on his way to school. At dusk he returned, but found the shutters still up; the business premises were untenanted save by joyous swarms of flies that buzzed

about the dismal remnants of the departed fruiterer's wares.

The couple had gone: whether in the darkness of the previous night or subsequent to his own departure, Ichiro never knew, for he never saw them again: he had paid them a week's board and lodging in advance. He heard later that they had fallen behind in rent, and owed, too, for purchased stock. Probably the man returned to his ricksha-pulling till overtaken by a consumptive's death—and the girl, maybe, to her commerce with eels-and-rice.

Ichiro felt sorry, but relieved: chiefly the latter. He determined to stay in the little room no longer. His friend Saigo, hearing of this, asked him to come and share his own lodgings, if he could endure the smell of leather that pervaded them. The offer was gladly accepted. In the succeeding months and on into mid-July work went forward apace, though the smell of leather was not the most disconcerting feature of co-residence with the medical student. Bones, of fresh odour or otherwise, sometimes littered the alcove; they turned up in odd corners of the room. Lumps of human tissue imperfectly preserved often gave keen notice of their presence, startling to a delicate nostril. But the Japanese, from force of daily living, are little distressed by even the vilest smells.

Barring this trifling drawback, Ichiro could have asked for nothing better. Some men prefer to study in absolute solitude; but for most the sense of silent, undistracting companionship with some other earnest chaser after knowledge is a help rather than a hindrance. They regulated their hours by a fixed

time-table; soon as the clock struck, books were put aside, and an agreed period devoted to the relaxation of friendly and sympathetic chat.

After that talk with Longfield at Ikegami, which led to others on the same topic, Ichiro sometimes attended church service with his friend on Sunday mornings. His interest broadened and deepened. Here Saigo failed to follow him. The medical student was by nature a materialist, basing all his ideas in earthly phenomena. The evidence of his senses and a sturdy patriotism—these were enough for him. He looked rather askance at his friend's new leanings. "Take care," he would grumble, "that the foreign virus does not enter, my friend, too deeply into your system; we shall have you beating the drum at street corners before long."

But Ichiro was not a regular attender; out-of-doors still had prior claims. One Sunday in April, about the beginning of the month, they planned a little party to go out and see the cherry-blossom. It was to be a picnic. The journalist, Mori, called on them at eight, bringing his sister and one of her school friends. Together they set out for Uyenoh Park.

The air was fresh, warm, delightful. Spring in Japan has its own peculiar charm, with the trees suddenly bursting into clouds of blossom, and the mercurial spirits of the people respond. Care vanishes, all the world goes holidaying.

Straw hats were already much in evidence, though many were relics of a previous summer. Every car was bursting, jammed, flowing over on to foot-rails, and waiting throngs beset each stopping-place. A

crowded half hour of gaily-kimonoed life brought them to the Park, when cramped limbs could be stretched and lungs filled once more.

Children, men and women, dressed as brightly as the season and chattering as light-heartedly as the sparrows which hopped beneath the branches, flowed like a tide through the open spaces. Overhead a cloud of pale-pinkish flowers swam in the gentle breeze against the clear blue sky, sending down occasional showers of petals like snowflakes delicately tinged with colour, drifting here and there about the ground.

Lower down, appearing in glimpses between intervening boughs, the placid waters of Shinobazu Lake glittered mirror-like in the sun, reflecting ethereally the mist of tinted flowers that climbed the slope; farther along dark masses of cedar and pine and evergreen oak relieved and made more fairy-like the faint hues of the far-stretching cherry-blossom. Small bright clouds moved across chance openings in the trees, the air trembled with fluttering petals, and a few early butterflies in their erratic flight seemed like flowers come magically to life.

Miss Aiko had matured with the passing months, and showed the influence of Tokyo culture in the style and pattern of her kimono and the dressing of her hair, and in some small affected mannerisms of speech. She stood a little in awe of the rather solemn Saigo, who was never quite at ease with the lesser sex, but chattered away as cheerfully as ever to her brother and his friend.

Ichiro had met her several times since their first encounter. Mori, with the shrewdness that his

habitual frivolity belied, had seen in this earnest and determined young student a man destined to succeed in what he might undertake. Not a bad match, perhaps, for his little sister. True, his folks were but farmers, while the journalist came of gentle stock, kin to an old Daimyo family: but these are democratic days. It was Aiko who had proposed this picnic. Talking to Ichiro, as he smiled down at some fanciful remark, she would sometimes touch his arm with a soft hand which sent a slight thrill through him; her cheeks glowed, and an added brilliance shone in her eyes.

And Ichiro? He had felt, at their first meeting, the fresh and unaffected charm of the young girl, the gay, unthinking innocence of a child, looking out on a world that contained nothing but pleasant things. Yet that feeling did not increase. Perhaps the growing demands of his work were armour against lighter fancies; perhaps those qualities were insufficient to establish deep hold on his inner mind; yet their intimacy might well have had different outcome had not the student possessed, firm-fixed and rooted in his memory, the clear image of a maid who answered and fulfilled every fine ideal of body and soul, with whom in his dreams he felt his future must be entwined.

For an hour they strolled, drinking in colour and gaiety, amongst the throng of pleasure-seekers underneath the light canopy of blossom and blue sky. To-morrow and yesterday vanished. They moved as parts of a tinted picture, drinking in colour and sunshine, murmuring nonsense or dreaming with open eyes. A small lounge of scarlet carpet spread on

boards and trestles outside a tea-shop invited to rest. They sat down and ordered food to supplement Aiko's luncheon-basket.

"Do you like foreign food better than Japanese?" Aiko asked Ichiro. "I do, now, though I didn't like even the smell of it at first."

"Do you like plum-blossom better than cherry?" he returned with a lazy smile.

Aiko considered. "No, I think I like cherry better. They say the plum-blossom is brave because it opens so early in the year before the spring weather comes; but I always think it looks so cold and lonely, and the branches are black and spiky, while cherry-blossom is soft and warm and rich-looking and—and makes me think of spring vacations and all sorts of nice things. I don't like being brave—it's so uncomfortable. But that's got nothing to do with food, has it? I suppose when you go away to America some day you'll have to eat foreign food for always. One of our teachers spent a year there when she was young, and she says she used sometimes almost to cry for a nice supper of properly-boiled rice (foreigners can't boil rice) and 'sashimi' and 'o cha zuki'."

"Well, I expect I shall cry sometimes: but perhaps I shall get over it after a time," said Ichiro hopefully.

"Do you ever cry? I don't believe you do. I should like to see you crying!" retorted Aiko. "Ni-sama, tell me what men cry about, if they ever do such a gentle thing. Oh yes, I know," she continued, suddenly clapping her small hands. "I saw you cry once, when you had come home from a political meeting one evening, and I think you must have been drinking lots and lots of saké. You were

trying to make a speech about socialism or something, and then you broke down and began crying so much you couldn't finish it."

"Be quiet, chatterbox," ordered her brother, joining in the laugh against him. "Never reveal family secrets! But, speaking of saké, what do you say"—turning to his friends—"to having a bottle now?"

"I knew that you couldn't look at the cherry-blossoms very long without wanting to drink something," said his sister. "Teru-ko San, shall we go off for a stroll and leave these men to their wine?"

Miss Teru-ko, a shy and spectacled girl, tongue-tied before the men, rose up willingly. The two walked away hand-in-hand, to criticise the kimonos and hairdressing of such other girl-students as they might meet.

The third saké-bottle was emptied before the picnic-party re-united. Then they all took car to Mukojima and roamed along the bank of the broad Sumida, where other rows of cherry-trees shook down their blossoms into the eddying current. It was a boat race day, and crowds of spectators surged up and down the river marge, and stood in serried ranks along the platforms of the college boat-houses. The afternoon wore on, the sun flamed westward, roystering among the onlookers became more evident and vocal. Men and girls grotesquely half-dressed staggered arm-in-arm, singing tunelessly, or embraced the ancient tree-trunks. It was all part of the festival—the decent folk ignored it with a condoning smile.

Clouds gathered with the dusk. Before the five friends had regained their respective homes, packed

marvellously in cars that snailed their way through crowded streets, a drizzly rain was falling.

They planned to make another excursion a fortnight later, when the single blossoms should have given place to their ruddier double sisters, and fixed a bridge over the babbling Edogawa as rendezvous: but the plan fell through. The day, when it came, dawned dull. Aiko had a headache and would not venture out. Her brother called alone on the two students, but found Saigo out of temper, and his friend in a lazy mood; then the rain fell, and poured unceasingly.

CHAPTER XXVII

TAKEN AT THE FLOOD

TEN weeks followed with little leisure for excursions. Terminal exams loomed near. Book-shirkers were desperately cramming, after long, idle months, in the hope of achieving by some benignant miracle enough success to justify the outlay of funds that distant parents or guardians had deemed sufficient for their education. Others who had worked consistently now redoubled their efforts; rose early, retired late, bolted meagre meals, and hardly poked a nose out of doors—laying up thereby abundant trouble for head and heart and lungs. The examiner in Japan has, yearly, long lists of suicides, sudden or lingering deaths, and asylum cases at his door. This habit of going to extremes is a Japanese characteristic. All things are either loved or hated: notorieties are lauded as heaven-sent benefactors or cursed for villains. Public opinion, as voiced by the daily Press, may shift from one view to the other within a month.

June came, the judgment hours arrived. In closely-windowed, dust-thick class-rooms youths bent over inky desks, scribbled in frantic haste with eyes turned ever to the clock, or lolled in pen-chewing desperation, hopeless and befogged. A few days, and it was all over. Students forgathered to discuss results, their faces speaking jubilant hope, sickening uncertainty, or reckless consciousness of failure. One of

Ichiro's classmates went off for a week to a mountain resort with a singing-girl, and took a dose of rat-poison at the end of it, leaving a note to say that he could not face the disgrace of failing for the third time; but the lists, when they came out, showed that he had just scraped through.

Ichiro knew that he himself had done well, and the event justified his confidence. Saigo, in his different sphere, had done even better. This was for him the final and graduating exam. His success entitled him to a diploma and licence to practise his profession. Third on the school lists, he received warm congratulations from friends and teachers.

Within a fortnight came an offer of work—position as assistant surgeon in a hospital some little distance north of Tokyo. A good berth for so young a man, Saigo promptly accepted, and a week later was gone. The leather business was abandoned.

More change for Ichiro—he must find fresh living quarters. Again things fell out opportunely. Longfield had left his Ikegami house and moved nearer the City. This house was bigger, there was a small spare room, and Ichiro, when he mentioned his need for lodgings, was made welcome to it. This was indeed luck. Next day saw the transference of his meagre wardrobe and growing library.

Classes at the new Commercial School finished in the third week of July, and its youngest teacher considered how he should spend his vacation. Hojima called him—the long, cool sea-line of the Boshu coasts, bright waves dancing along pebbled beaches, the sweep of the seagulls over the spray. Perhaps he owed it to his parents, too, that he should visit them;

his mother, at least, he knew, longed to see his face; and then that something else, stronger than call of sea or family, drew him almost irresistibly to the neighbourhood of the Fairies' Isle. Against that stood fear—fear that these things might weaken his resolution to persist along his chosen path—and pride. No, he would not return till he could show them—and her—some tangible and solid proofs of his success.

Longfield was going to spend a fortnight at Karuizawa among the mountains, near Asama's ever-smoking peak: then to tramp and climb among the craggy heights of Hizen and Shinano, as each morning's inclination might lead. Would Ichiro, if he had fixed up no other plans, care to go with him? Most decidedly he would!

It was a delightful jaunt. Karuizawa, summer rendezvous of foreigners from all parts of Japan and even from China and Korea, was discovered by missionaries, and even now retains some sanctified flavour: there are some things that one doesn't do there on Sundays. Gradually it has become a fashionable resort for the wealthier Japanese, and many of its religious founders have moved further inland to remote Nojiri, where, beside the beautiful lake, they have bought large tracts of land and made strict rules to prevent encroachment of the heathen on their two or three months' leisure from pastoral labours. In Karuizawa Ichiro made many new friends of various nationality.

Two more Americans joined them on their walking tour, good fellows both, amusing and talkative trampers. They roamed picturesque valleys and over

mountain passes, stopped at wayside inns or slept in old temples, lived simply on rice and savouries. Life was a glorious thing. One night, listening in a farmer's cottage to the purl of a rock-strewn brook, Ichiro dreamt vividly of Fujiyé. She was walking waist-deep in the sea, moonlit waves dancing all around, with a far, faint light on the horizon—no boat, no land in sight: only the girl. A shadow was on her face, so that he could not see it. Waking, and lying awake while his friends snored beneath the same big green net, he wondered what she might be doing. If dreams meant anything, she was still at Hojima beside the Bay: perhaps the sound of the brook had made him dream of water. Well, she was happy there, self-sufficient, yet with everything she might wish at command. Had she made other intimates? No village lad, he felt sure, could satisfy her mind. She was proudly secure from the ill-winds of life: yet he felt strangely uneasy. A great longing seized him to get up, leave the cottage, hurry down the slope to the nearest rail station—distant many miles—return to Tokyo and take ship across the Bay. Sometimes, half-asleep, he fancied himself already dressed and out on the road. Then he fell deeply asleep again and in the morning had forgotten everything except that he had dreamt of Fujiyé.

September saw them back in the city, sunburnt, wind-tanned, joints and muscles in perfect trim, ready for work. Ichiro, by this practice, had improved wonderfully in fluency and command of English.

The vacation had been for him one of the most pleasant periods of his life; he regretted nothing about it save its termination. He felt himself different,

grown, benefited immeasurably by the insight he had gained into Western manners and ways of thought. Some of the acquaintanceships formed in the hills continued and strengthened in the city. He was invited to visit, his circle of foreign friends enlarged. The men he met were, with some exceptions, to his mind. The women, less so: but Ichiro had never felt himself a lady's man.

The house he now shared with John Longfield was in one of those newer suburbs to the north-east of the City proper which are served by the electric cars of the circle line, where rice-fields are swiftly transforming into networks of narrow, lively streets, and ground-prices are shooting up. Longfield, good business man, had bought a patch of land a few years before, paying in ready cash: but the title-deeds stood in the name of a Japanese pastor of his church, for at that time no foreigner could own land in Japan.

Work through the autumn went on smoothly; no events of note occurred to mark the gliding weeks. No events, that is, save one, and that one the inevitable climax to which Ichiro's recent life had tended. By the beginning of December John Ichiro Koyama had become a member of the Christian Church, choosing his baptismal name in grateful recognition of what he owed his friend.

His parents, to whom he wrote at once, received the news with interest, but without lively expression of approval or otherwise. They took for granted that he would continue the little ritual ceremonies and observances by which even the hardest-baked materialist honours his forefathers' memory. Certainly Ichiro felt no call to discontinue them.

His mother, or sometimes a sister, still wrote frequently, and were content with brief replies: work left little leisure for correspondence. The trivial things of farm and field and beach could hardly rouse keen emotion in the young, eager student, immersed in so different interests. Of that one Hojima event that might have swayed his mind and actions to other channels he remained ignorant. Once, early in the New Year, he had written to Fujiyé, but the letter had come back unopened—here, the sender always puts his name and address on the envelope's back. That grumpy old dodderer must have interdicted their correspondence!—little did he guess that the ashes of the poor wreck had for months filled a tiny jar in the Buddhist cemetery on the windy hillside, while storms had blown the daughter's bark far from its safe moorings out over a wintry world.

She had doubted his power to succeed: well, some day, success in hand, he would return to prove her misjudgment.

Within a week of the next New Year, while gates and doorways were still gay with their pine and bamboo branches, Ichiro received an offer which seemed earnest of that success. A man, former college friend of Longfield's and now a lecturer and writer of some note in his native States, was visiting Japan and called often at their house. A good talker but sincere and clever was Percival Trench, and an astute business man. At almost their first meeting he saw that this quietly humorous and forceful young teacher who shared his old chum's dwelling and spoke such excellent English might be of use and value to him in a certain plan which he had in view.

A fortnight later he made Ichiro a definite business offer.

Once back in the States, Trench was to embark on a lecturing tour, Japan his subject. He had spent some months travelling through the islands on foot or horseback—a good rider, but heavy for mountain ponies—avoiding railways and beaten tracks, and filling note-books with miscellaneous items, some of them correct, on a huge variety of subjects. An enthusiast on lantern-slides, he had a large assortment prepared, coloured, and occasionally faked by himself from his own photographs, with which to illustrate his journeys. The tour should be a little gold-mine.

In Ichiro he saw an ideal ally. The proposal was concrete and blunt, and so unexpected that to the student, for a few moments, the large, stout, rosy man seemed to be speaking out of a dream. It came one Thursday after the evening meal, the three of them lolling in deck-chairs and puffing the sweet, idle pipes that reward a hard day's work.

"Young man," said Trench, "I've a commercial proposition to make you. I guess you've thought sometimes of getting across the water to my part of the world, haven't you?—in fact, I think I've heard you speak of it."

The other assented, wondering what was coming next.

"Well, by now you know all about this lecturing stunt that I'm contemplating to inflict on my long-suffering fellow-countrymen, and you've gazed at my little collection of pictures. As I've been pretty nearly four months in this delightful land of yours,

I guess I can consider myself an authority on the subject, right up from raw fish steaks to earthquakes—I understand that a fortnight is the regulation period of residence entitling a tourist to start writing books about Nippon, though some do it as soon as they catch sight of Fuji-yama from the boat. Anyhow, there may be some little matters here that I'm still not thoroughly conversant with. How would you like to come back to America with me, join my tour of instruction, and just gently shove me back on to the tracks when I seem in danger of wandering off them? I shall stay around here till the cherry-blossoms have performed their annual function—I understand the display is generally over by the end of April, isn't it?—and then make a straight line for San Francisco. Well, take a night to think it over—it's a firm offer—and let me know to-morrow."

A night! Ichiro felt that a minute was more than sufficient for that decision. What a chance, undreamed-of—no, dreamed of in idle moments as a golden impossibility—to realise so soon the first chapter of ambition!

Before him had stretched a long, toilsome road of work and careful saving, ere he could reach that ship that was to carry him across the ocean. Then, on the other side, more and harder work to gain the bare means to subsist. Now, magically, the gates were opened to the larger world. Some gallant steamer even now ploughed the sea, or lay perhaps at anchor, in some cabin and berth of which he, Ichiro, would sleep, while the propellers churned their way into new ports. And beyond, congenial and interesting work, travel through strange lands, chances of

meeting men and seeing cities hitherto little more than imaginary.

He returned to Thursday evening and a Tokyo suburb. Trench was mentioning details and definite terms—so much a month, all expenses paid. The sum he offered sounded to Ichiro like affluence. He wanted to clinch the matter at once. The American typed out a contract, read it through to him, but refused to let him sign it till morning. "No, my friend," he reiterated, "if I don't let you sleep on this proposition of mine before putting your name on the dotted line, John L. here will be telling me some day that I jumped you into it. To-morrow is yet a day!"

Later, when the two were alone, Longfield warmly congratulated his young convert on his promised position. Trench, he told him, was a man to be trusted, of solid worth in spite of little surface vagaries, and one with considerable influence in his State.

On Friday at noon—a day and hour to be remembered—Ichiro with shaking hand put his signature to an agreement whereby, for the period of one year from the date of leaving Yokohama or other Japanese port for the United States, he was to act as assistant, in certain specified capacities, to Percival Grant Trench, at a named stipend in gold dollars: the said Trench to pay all fares, hotel bills, etc., including return passage to Japan if wished.

His affairs in Japan were easily settled. For the classes where he taught, the school term and year ended in March, so he could give them ample notice. School and scholars alike were sorry to lose him, but

wished him well—lucky fellow!—and sent fine leaving-presents. That he must cut short his studies at the evening college was a great pity—he had set his heart on their diploma, and the full course lacked still half a year—but one can't have everything. On another red-letter day their passages were booked by one of the new liners of the Pacific Mail, due to leave on or about the twenty-fifth of April; so after school duties, as both pupil and teacher, were entirely terminated he would still have some six weeks of leisure on his hands. Needed preparations for the voyage were few and simple—a day or two would suffice for them: American tailors—delicious thought—would replenish his scanty wardrobe.

A month, a full month, he could spend in Hojima: no need now for shame, with earnest of success in hand. His heart, boyish still in spite of this vast accumulation of years and learning, leapt with pride as he pictured the home-coming. The future, immediate and further, gleamed with rosy tints like a bough laden with cherry-blossom swaying in the warm spring breeze, half real, half fairy. His mother, he knew, would have received him with joy however he had returned; but how much greater that joy and pride when she welcomed him back as trusted friend and chosen helper of foreign scholars, money in pocket and booked for a well-paid mission to those lands across the seas of which, while they smiled indulgently, he used to talk! And his father—a note of triumph mingled here—*now* he must acknowledge his son justified, his right established to something higher than a life of rice-field and dull village stagnation.

Parents, of course, should come first; that is the Japanese code; but was it filial duty that at that moment made Hojima the most desirable of earthly places, and brought the warm blood singing through the boy's veins?—till as he tramped through the crisping slush of dusk, in streets where the people seemed incredibly ignorant of his happiness, and along the willow-lined banks of the Palace moat, the soft blue skies and sprouting grass and green budding things of that triumphant spring-time seemed to join in the song that memory and hope were singing in his ears—singing as insistent and shrill as the earliest semi which, venturing out on some first hot day of summer, announce the coming of the great August host of insect fiddlers. Fisherman's daughter and Goddess of the Fairy Isle—how would she meet, how greet him?

Her warnings and her counsel he had flouted once, and now disproved. Must she not now confess that she had thought too little of his power to win through? Would she meet him now on more equal terms, laying aside that sweet, tantalising superiority which she had been wont so daintily to assume, admit that in some things at least he was risen to her level, let him into the inner communion of perfect sympathy and understanding? Or had she—but no, that was impossible: she *could* not have forgotten him, though for nearly two years no word had passed between them.

Two years! Had she, too, changed?

It was now mid-March. He leaned back in his deck-chair on the sunny verandah (last night's classes had been his last at school) and, breaking the strict

mind-discipline of recent months, gave unhidden play to the dreaming in which his fancy had loved to wrap itself in former years. He pictured the slight, swaying figure of the girl as she deftly handled the heavy "ro" and sent their small skiff a-dance over the sparkling waters. He traced on a background of fleecy cloud the fine, soft outline of her sun-kissed cheek and neck, and the mocking little curve of her smiling lips.

And he thought, "Within a week, she, herself, no vision, will be before me, her eyes looking into mine!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

ALL ROUND THE CITY

NEWS of the young man's intended journey to America had spread among his friends, and their numbers were attested by the sheaf of congratulations he received. Saigo wrote at great length, rejoicing in his comrade's good fortune, proffering advice on his dealings with the Philistines abroad, commenting sagely on the unforeseen turns of fate. Saigo was married! For a short time after graduation, in a factory suburb to the north of the city, he had patched up machinery victims, learnt new things about our industrial system, and healed the scabby heads of innumerable swarms of children. The patients liked him in spite of his country gruffness, but he failed to agree with his superiors, and one morning, after twenty minutes of most enjoyable plain-speaking, he gathered his belongings together and left. For an hour he sat in the grimy "park"—a dozen wilting shrubs in a small fenced area of trampled mud—and frowned things out: he had lost a good berth, he had got a lot off his chest, he was sick for the home-folks. Another hour, and he was sitting in the third-class express bound for Kyshu, a two-days' journey. Six weeks later he took to himself a wife—the very girl about whom he had once talked to Ichiro.

The latter wondered what motives had impelled

the philosopher to this step. Had her mind developed, or was it still only the outside of her that appealed to him? In the paragraphs of gently-smiling cynicism that conveyed the momentous news it was difficult to read between the lines.

That March, month of snow and slush, raw air and hanging clouds, with intervening days of brilliant sunshine which filled the open spaces of the fields and streets with steamy heat and drew the early vegetation up apace, passed quickly. By the end of the third week the weather settled, blue sky became more permanent, ground hardened, and peach trees bedecked themselves in pink and white, while the higan-zakura, earliest of the cherry flowers, heralded the unfolding of its more gorgeous sisters.

He would cross the Bay on the twenty-third. Monday, the out-going boats would not be crowded. The twenty-first was a holiday, the Vernal Festival of the Imperial Ancestors. Early astir, full of the pleasurable sense of good things awaiting that would not let him rest, he lighted a morning pipe, opened the amado, and looked out on a world rich with diamonds of dew.

A knock at the door (it had a knocker, imported from England), and Mori appeared. Mori, spruce and immaculate, confessed that he had not been to bed since the previous noon. He was frankly envious of his younger friend but shared sincerely in his elation, and chatted gaily on the pleasures and duties in store across the sea.

"See what it is to lead a grave and moral life! Here have I been pining all my young days for some discerning person to invite *me* to tour the world with

him and scatter my wisdom broadcast among the barbarians of the wallowing West, and no one takes the faintest notice of me! The world, stony-hearted and blind, condemns me to waste my talents in chronicling the footling words and deeds of that gang of pompous noodles at Reinanzaka who sway our destinies—when they're not throwing inkpots—and writing the family scandals and slips of anyone who happens to be in the public eye. What a life for a man of soul! Really, I feel like following your example, Koyama San, and getting converted. There must be a heaven somewhere, for me to reap the rewards of my deserving and ill-paid career."

His friend listened in amused silence. Past experience had taught him that comments were unnecessary for the continued outflow of the journalist's eloquence. He merely handed him another cup of coffee; there was a short appreciative silence. Longfield's coffee was good.

"By the way," Mori went on, "there's something I wanted to propose, now I think of it. Before you go we must spend another evening together—your last chance of seeing life in our gay and festive capital. Those Yankees will expect you to be a travelling encyclopedia on everything Japanese, and as Tokyo is the sum and centre of Japan you must be prepared to have folks file past with note-books asking about its arts, activities, amusements, industries, customs, morals (if any), manufactures——"

Ichiro rudely threw a cushion at him and went out of the room. But the idea struck him as not a bad one. In spite of two years' residence he had yet many things to learn of City life, or some sides

of it. Mori could help fill in gaps. Besides, a last view would be a pleasant indulgence. Monday for Hojima—to-morrow he wished to spend at home—why not to-day, if the other had nothing else on hand?

Mori had nothing else, and was delighted. A national holiday, the city would be at its best. Out they set.

Flags waved over every door and fore-and-aft every tram. Bright colours caught and pleased the eye down the long vistas of the streets. A string of rickshas rattled by, in each a brave, important personage, silk-hatted or glorious in gold-laced Court dress, which more than repaid the meagreness of his official salary. Then, with measured trot, a group of officers on glossy, well-kept Walers, tunics gay with decorations and ribbons, faces brown with exposure, good-humoured, determined, stamped with that mark of easy superiority that proclaims them, as a class, lineal and spiritual descendants of Japan's old Samurai aristocracy.

Strong sunshine beat down, dispelling early mists, warming roof-tiles and pavements, drying little puddles, and turning thoughts to lighter clothing. Ichiro was arrayed in his finest, bought under direction of his Boston friend—he must have *something* fit to wear on the boat. The two friends sauntered out to mix in the festivities. The Importance and Seriousness of Life were left at home and locked up. He would take one day off for enjoyment, start to finish.

They lunched at a neat restaurant in Nihombashi much frequented by Mori's craft, not well known to

the public but renowned among gourmets for certain special dishes. The other journalists whom they met here, staff men of big dailies, or free-lances who scorned their servitude but tried to get their jobs, were mostly entertaining, some really clever, and nearly all as active as a cageful of parrots in the Uyeno zoo. They had established here a sort of informal club, and were screened at the further end of the long room by a movable wooden partition from the herd of common diners. Here, among cutlets and glasses of Kirin, matters of great import to the Empire were discussed, the ménage of many a politician and business magnate, and the charms and failings of those ladies who beautify the Shimbashi or Akasaka geisha quarters.

After coffee and toothpicks had displaced the more substantial dishes several of these young men lingered to chat with Mori and his friend, and from their cynically-inconsequential comments on current affairs Ichiro did indeed learn many little facts worth noting. Gradually they drifted out to business or pleasure, and the group diminished to four, all at loose ends. How should the afternoon be spent? A famous play was running at a famous theatre; they had all seen it fifty times before, but there are some plays that the Japanese will go at intervals throughout a lifetime to see. They decided to go.

Tickets were procured at the tea-house near the theatre (this being the usual procedure), and by the power of the Press they got seats in a good part of the hall. Ichiro, during the frequent intervals, was regaled with piquant gossip concerning the Tokyo stage and its luminaries, and by his friend's kind

offices made the acquaintance of two or three young ladies whose dress and talk proclaimed them vividly as belonging to that gay and charitable world whose pleasant occupation is to please.

The pink glow of evening skies lighting up grey walls, reflected in shop windows and irradiating with level beams the faces of those who walked the streets, foretold a morrow of fine weather as they left the theatre. On all sides paper lanterns added to the genial brightness, and things grew gayer with the falling dusk. Squeezing into a car Asakusa-bound, they journeyed north.

It happened that to one at least of Tokyo's famous sights Ichiro had hitherto been a stranger—deterred from going by no special scruples, but lack of time and interest. His parents had been there, and thought it a gorgeous place. No country family coming up to Tokyo to see the sights or visit relatives, no conscientious guide escorting patrons to the things really worth seeing, would dream of omitting the Yoshiwara from the list.

You may see these families trotting down the long street, father in rusty black, spectacled, or back crooked from long rice-field years; wife trudging a little behind, reading in gratified tones, as she glances from side to side, the name of this house or that with which the Stage has made her familiar. Behind walk their daughters, all-too-painfully conscious of the countrified style of their hair and dress, dragging by the hand a little brother or sister who fretfully votes the show a dull one.

At the end of the street hung the sun, a golden lantern, pausing before his adieu to the Nightless

City. Behind the close-set bars of long verandahs the living wares displayed themselves, attired most brilliantly, hair decked with those long pins that mark the head-dress of the courtesan: chatting idly among themselves or gazing with cold, incurious stare at the world for ever moving past outside their bars, the immobile stare of feline creatures caught and caged and hopeless, the proud, expressionless stare of goddesses at the hosts of the devout who come to worship them, not for the sake of any abstract or attached idea, but for their very bodies, their incarnate selves. Only in the cheaper houses would a girl sometimes come to the bars to greet a passing friend or even pluck a likely customer by the sleeve.

Shocking to the West, no doubt, but surely an entertaining spectacle. Those swarms of summer visitors whom the tourist ships disgorge at Yokohama—how many, even among your women, will forego the pleasure of taking ricksha openly or by stealth, to pay a visit to the Yoshiwara?

Or did forego. Too late now—the glory of the Street has departed. After that tremendous holocaust in which hundreds of gorgeously-dressed girls shrivelled suddenly into ashes, in the barred corridors of the rebuilt houses customers may find only framed photographs, not flesh and blood, to help them in their choice.

In his character, then, as impartial observer of his country's ways and customs, Ichiro accompanied the journalist to the quarter of the courtesans. The place saddened and bewildered him: a year earlier it might have done neither. In those long walks with Saigo he had discussed the arguments for and

against such an established system which appear from time to time in the vernacular and foreign Press, but without reaching any final conclusion. Mori, in a reflective mood, philosophised as usual but without his wonted flippancy. Rather silently they retraced their steps toward Asakusa. There the bright streets noisy with holiday crowds, shook them from pensiveness, and they flicked appetite with a glass of beer.

A narrow, flimsy edifice of blue-painted wood, adorned as to its outside with crude pictures and an announcement in cruder English that good drinks and food were to be got within, drew Ichiro's attention. He wondered, in fact, if the weird spelling were not designed, with base cunning, for such very purpose. They dined on the third floor, speculating, as they climbed the crazy stairs, whether the building would fall a prey to fire, earthquake or wind: one or other must surely get it before long; but not, they hoped, that night.

Dinner done, they descended to the ground floor for an hour's billiards. Then Mori tired, threw down his cue, and proposed a move.

The two had another taste in common. Both loved to walk in crowds, especially evening crowds, most especially evening holiday crowds, when nature shines through a little the dull vesture of daily life.

For another hour they threaded their way at random through the jostling throng. Uniformed students, mothers with babies at back or breast, the horny-handed in blue tunics and tight blue drawers—carpenters, fish-porters, pot-house bullies, each with light-blue towel bound jauntily round his brows—

small clerks with anxious faces, portly merchants with their portly wives: cheery, worried, or drunkenly vacuous, they milled about in the brightly-lighted dust.

Walking induces thirst: so does dust. To satisfy that thirst and rest their legs the two friends entered a small beer-hall which they happened to be passing.

CHAPTER XXIX

YOUNG LOVERS MEET

QUITE a small place, this beer-hall. Eight or ten tables filled the room, with little space for walking. Two were already occupied. At one of these sat three young men, shop assistants perhaps, or clerks; one asleep, his chin sunk on his breast, snoring, while the other two were chatting noisily and laughing between every sentence. A girl in the neat white cap and apron of a waitress but with flushed face and feverish eyes was sitting on the knees of one of the customers, his arm encircling her neck, while she giggled in spasms at his remarks and looked round vacantly between-whiles. On the table before them stood two empty beer bottles, three empty tumblers, and a couple of smaller glasses smeared with dregs of wine, one overturned.

Two more young men wearing the square caps of a university were seated at another table more distant from the door, each with a half-filled mug in front of him, and a second waitress stood by them, her finger-tips resting lightly on the soiled tablecloth, bending a little forward, smiling at the younger man. Mori's observant and practised eye noted her trim shape and the refined and dainty-featured face beneath her little cap.

He sat down and stretched his tired legs luxuriously, his throat already making slight gulping movements as

it gratefully anticipated the cool fluid that would presently wash it clear of dust: then he glanced up at his friend, who was still standing.

Standing—standing as if frozen, bewitched, with face white as marble, matching his attitude: an image stricken into stone, stony eyeballs staring in front of him, mouth a little open.

Mori followed the direction of his eyes. The waitress by the other table glanced towards them.

The half-filled bottle she had just lifted slipped from her hand and smashed to splinters, frothing on the tiled floor. Her eyes dilated, her lips parted, showing a gleam of white teeth, a wave of crimson flooded face and neck—and sank again, leaving them ghastly. Some emotion—astonishment, guilt or expectancy—was graven so violently on her features that they seemed a mere incarnation of it: but what, Mori could not divine.

She held herself upright as an arrow, with head thrown back, but swaying slightly so that she clutched at the table-edge for support. Mori's eyes returned from the girl's face to his friend's. Ichiro's set stare was that at once of accuser and judge. His lips tightly compressed, eyes narrowed and brows contracted in a frown—the journalist thought he had never seen him looking half so old. He opened his mouth wide as though to shout, made a hoarse sound in his throat, advanced two or three steps towards the girl, and at last found utterance in a dry whisper.

"Fujiyé! You *here!* You! Impossible!"

His voice wavered into incredulity; he passed one hand across his forehead with an uncertain gesture—stagey, it would have looked to Mori, but for that

rigid mask. The critic's professional sub-mind applauded even while his pulse quickened with anxiety for his friend.

The attention of the other table had been caught by the smash. All—except the slumberer, who nodded and smiled—gazed oafishly at the sudden scene in progress before them. Ichiro had reached the girl and grasped her roughly by the shoulder, unconscious of what he did—so roughly that she could have cried out with the physical pain of it.

"What does this mean? What are you doing here? Speak! Answer me! What has brought you to this?"

His dry, hard whisper sounded more fraught with passion than the fiercest outcry; the eyes that stared down into hers seemed to burn into the girl's set and colourless face. She almost whimpered. Poor child!

"Ichiro San, please don't look at me so. I have done no bad things, and oh—I have been so unhappy! Almost ever since we parted last, my life has seemed like an ugly dream. Please do not reproach me until you have heard—until I have told you everything that has happened."

The words came from her quivering lips in a little piteous monotone like the pleading of a scolded child. Suddenly her strength seemed to give way, and she sank back into a chair and covered her face with her long sleeves. Gone were her pride and self-reliance—the courage that had carried her bravely through nearly two years, two long years of struggle and mischance, melted and disappeared; her spirit, never humbled yet by adverse fate, quite broken by

this last cunning stroke, she sat shrinking with hidden face, her bowed shoulders shaken now and again by silent sobbing.

To the twins, no less than to Mori, this was a wildly amazing spectacle. What meant this new aspect of their calm, masterful, rarely-condescending young Diana in cap and apron who had held herself so proudly aloof, enforcing respect from the most loutish, bestowing her smiles only as rare favours on the deserving, enthroned, superior to mortal weakness? No friendly eyes turned on the rough-mannered interloper whose coming had so cast down their friend. The slighter twin jumped up and planted himself squarely between the two protagonists. His brother half rose, bending forward eager to back him up. Mori, on his side, felt the lust of combat pleasantly bubbling in his veins with the mixed liquors he had drunk: he grinned sardonically, but knew that at the first blow he would rush into the fray. The stage seemed set for a row of the most generous proportions.

"What's the matter with you? What are you bothering this young lady for?" demanded Niban San sharply.

Ichiro's wrath and bewilderment, checked and softened for the moment by sight of the girl's pathetic grief, swelled almost gratefully. When wounded, our most instinctive ardour is to bite, hit out, or stab, according as we are beast or man. The other's speech was a welcome impertinence. Suspicion and jealousy fed the fires of his passion as he recalled the intimate little scene on which his own coming had broken in. An angry glow of crimson

clouded his brow. The stale-scented beer room danced redly and hazily.

The twin found his neat linen collar and imported tie crushed in the cruel grip of the enemy, whose thumb at the same time pressed on his wind-pipe. Before he could improvise any counter-movement the girl had come, in her turn, between them, pushing them apart with her hands. Her face, still colourless, had regained its calm, her voice, too.

"Ichiro, listen to me! There are some things that you *must* hear—then you may leave me if you will. Sit with me at the furthest table while I speak. And you," she went on, turning to the twins, "you two please go home: yes, please, I beg you to do so, if you wish really to help me"; adding, as they showed somewhat mutinous under the goddess' behest, "I am quite safe, and I have something that I must say to this gentleman. Please go."

Very slowly, reluctantly and doubtfully, like a pair of bulldogs ordered out of a promising tussle, the pair took themselves off. The other three customers, or rather two of them who still preserved their faculties, seeing that something was afoot that did not concern them, had enough sober decency left to do likewise, violently haling along their sottish friend. The girl, Tama-ko, must have gone with them, for when Mori remembered and looked round for her she, too, had disappeared.

Mori himself was uncertain what course the proprieties demanded of him, whether to go or stay: so compromised the matter by seating himself at the table nearest the door and therefore furthest from

the one now occupied by his friend and the remarkably pretty waitress, the sight of whom had had such a wonderful effect on that model young man. He ruminated sadly. Human nature!—you never could tell.

Fujiyé sat in the straight-backed, uncomfortable little restaurant chair, her two hands clasped in front of her, her head turned sideways, looking at the floor. The noises in the street outside had died down. The hour was late and a misty rain had begun to fall, belying the evening's promise. The clatter of ricksha wheels, increasing and decreasing as they neared and passed the window, the stumbling squeak of "geta" on the pavement or the heavier plod of boots became less frequent, for the restaurant was off the main arteries of traffic.

Inside the room, stale and close with the smell of spilt beer and cigarette ends and faint odours from the kitchen and rooms beyond, a few flies circled intricately over the table with a low buzzing in the unflickering glare of the electric lights. The steamy panes dripped moisture, the marble table-tops sweated glistening beads. A cockroach, encouraged by the quiet, ran furtively along, followed by another, a monster. Mori wondered if they were man and wife.

An old woman selling "tofu," a kind of bean-curd, came by along the street, crying her wares in a thin and lamentable falsetto, as if she were keening for an empire's ruin. She stood still outside for a minute, trying to peer through the glass: lucky folks!—warm in the rainless paradise. Then she passed on, and her cry receded in the distance.

Fujiyé sat silent, looking at the floor, telling herself that this was not a dream, searching for words. Her faculties of thought seemed numbed by the sharp blow of this meeting. Ichiro, both elbows on the marble, glowered at her across the narrow table. Her face—for two years he had longed to see it: now he was having his wish.

"You have heard, haven't you, of my father's misfortunes and death?" she began hesitatingly.

"No, not a word," was the curt reply.

"I thought perhaps your friends might have mentioned it in their letters, or—haven't you been over to Hojima since—since you first left?"

"No, they didn't say anything about it, and I have never been back." A sudden ache wrung his throat at the last word, as the sun-kissed Fairies' Isle flashed across the darkness of his brain; but his grim brows never relaxed.

"Then," said Fujiyé, her heart failing her at his surly and uncompromising tone, "of course you know nothing about it. My poor father lost all his money not long after you went away—his affairs had been going wrong for some time, and then in the great typhoon that autumn his fishing-boats all went down. Then—he died, and I was left with nothing, and with no one to help me. Ichiro!" she broke off, sharp with grief: "Why do you look at me with such unfriendly eyes, as if you hated me? I thought you liked me once, and would sympathise with my unhappiness."

Her voice quivered off into silence. Why didn't Ichiro respond? In dreams he had defended her against villains and dragons, and poured out gallons

of blood to save her little feet from the merest scratch. Waking, he had often beset her, in imagination, with the most appalling misfortunes, simply that he might have the pleasure of dragging her out of them. Now here she was, in tears, asking only a kind word, while he sat and glowered like a Chinese idol. The devils of jealousy and suspicion stood either side of him, binding his heart with coils of steel.

"I *did* like you once, Fujiyé: I loved you! My God"—gulping down another aching lump—"I little knew then how much I loved you! I was blinded by the dreams of what I was going to do in the world, and so left you for the city. But my heart—I know now—I left behind in Hojima. Gradually I have been finding out in the past two years how you had twined yourself around it as the fuji, your namesake, twines round the "tsurubé" rope of an old well, and from all the other girls I met my thoughts turned only to you. I put you on high in my heart, like a sacred image in a shrine: I thought of you as something apart, above ordinary men and women, a goddess of wit and purity. And now—now I find you in this wretched den, living comfortably, just suited to such living, laughing and drinking easily with young fools, like any other tea-house waitress—sitting, no doubt, on their knees and letting them cuddle and kiss you as that other girl was doing as we came in."

He ran madly on, tearing his own heart to tatters with the vile picture that he drew; suspicion not merely feeds on itself—it blows itself out, a huge balloon, soaring into insanity.

"No, Ichiro, that is untrue, unfair!" broke in the girl passionately on his passionate speech. "Why do you think such things of me? You don't know—I have always kept my self-respect. Oh, *won't* you listen to me, haven't you any feeling for my wretchedness?"

"Your self-respect! Do you call *this* life respectable?" he retorted sullenly—torn as he was with pity for her and furious anger and bitter tormenting jealousy at what he feared of her, and stamping down the softer emotion that moved him to take and crush her in his arms: "I am sorry for your troubles, yes, but they should never have brought you to this. If you had been the girl that once I dreamed you—that I have always dreamed you—you would have died sooner than descend to this shame."

"I wish I *had* died! Ah, why didn't I die, as often I have thought of doing?" moaned the poor child. "Ah, cruel, unkind! What have I ever done to deserve all this? In all the dreariness of the past two years, the thought of seeing you again, sometime, somewhere, was the only thing that has kept life in me—and now this meeting is worse than death!"

She pressed her locked hands tightly across her eyes, and swayed to and fro in the utter depth of her misery.

"And I"—Ichiro responded, bitterly but sadly—"I have looked forward to meeting you. I thought to see you again in Hojima when I went there, as I intended doing, in another day or two"—what a triumphant meeting he had pictured, and now this hideous parody of it!—"to tell you of the love that had grown up for you within me, and to ask if you

too felt love, as I hoped and dreamed. And to-night I meet you indeed—but not the Fujiyé of my dreams. Dreams—all dreams! Living the life that all girls, I suppose, in these places lead—their main thought to please the men that come here and drink and talk tea-house talk and worse to the girls, and take them out at night.”

The philosopher’s logic, smothered by his two attendant devils, had fallen overboard in the storm. Ichiro’s voice, which at sight of her woe sounded at first a gentler note, hardened as he went on: suddenly the remembrance of his own dealings with Kaoru flashed across him, and the night on Benten’s Island; with a man’s justice he felt in a moment the conviction that all women were alike and would act alike—he pictured Fujiyé’s gay smile at the twins just as he came in—and visited the consequence of his own past weakness on that bowed and innocent head. The memory of these, and of all the vicious, loose and degrading scenes that he had witnessed that afternoon with Mori, rose up suddenly and choked his speech.

He got abruptly to his feet, pushing the chair over as he did so, stumbled across the room to where his friend still sat reading with half-attentive eye the columns of a beer-stained evening paper, and shook him almost savagely by the shoulder.

“Come along, let’s get out of this: I’ve had enough.”

The almost coarse tone of his exclamation startled the journalist more, perhaps, than anything that had occurred that eventful evening. The young man seemed transformed, Mori thought: his sedate young

Christian friend had disappeared. Unknowing, he had consorted with a walking volcano: he felt that he could never patronise him again.

They went out without another word and walked silently along the quiet street to the car-line. Mori, loquacious but a gentleman, feeling it too delicate a topic to ask for an explanation of the scene just enacted. The car was too crowded for talk. When their homeward ways divided he called a good night to his comrade, but the latter, lost in frowning thought, did not reply.

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Fujiyé never noticed their going. Her sorrows and piled misfortunes no longer troubled her, for she had fainted.

At that hour in such inclement weather few thirsty souls were still abroad: none, at any rate, came for comfort to the beer-hall before Tama-ko's return, which was some twenty minutes later. She was amazed to find her friend alone and unconscious (dead, she thought at first), but being herself half fuddled with drink was quite content to leave the mystery unsolved—yet mistress enough of her actions to close up the place, turn out the lights, and help the other girl to bed. They shared a little room with an old woman beyond the kitchen.

CHAPTER XXX

THE DARKEST HOUR

MERCIFUL sleep closed Fujiyé's eyes for many hours. Then came grey dawn, but in her mind all was black. The flickering candle-flame of hope had at last gone right out. With hope gone, as she had told herself before, life could not long continue. Now for the final step: remained only to choose the gate of exit. Her mind, not wracked by suffering, was in the torpor of despair.

She would have liked to die in the clean sea, but could not: so strong a swimmer, her body, in soul's despite, would insist on keeping itself alive. Strangulation, puffed and livid, repelled her, and poisons were difficult to get.

There remained a way, swift, almost painless, taken yearly by thousands, which might leave her mortal parts almost beyond man's recognition.

While the streets still slept, except for a few clattering milk-boys, and round the far edges of the land an orange tinge stained faintly the deep indigo of the night sky, Fujiyé rose silently and dressed herself. Her companion still lay in stertorous slumber, one arm under her tousled head.

She put on a cheap cotton kimono, searching carefully in the sleeves lest they might contain anything that could lead to her identification. A suicide in Japan customarily leaves a letter to the police,

relations, or the world at large, explaining motives, but Fujiyé felt that she owed justification to no man or woman. Then, without backward glance, she went out into the street.

It must be done at some distant spot. A suitable place suggested itself: had she unconsciously, in the past, thought of it as fit for such a purpose?

Changing cars once or twice to confuse possible trackers, she finally alighted. The line there ran close along the edge of a high, steep, grassy slope. Far down, the waters of the Palace moat gleamed like a mirror. Beyond it the ground rose sharply again, but between the water and the base of the opposing slope another railway ran, carrying both steam trains and electric cars. There the cars travel at far higher speed than on the street lines, a person walking (strictly forbidden) on the rails would hardly be observed from the high road across the moat. The last step could be taken without risk of interference.

To reach that railway she must cross the bridge that spans the moat a little higher up, and on the further side descend the slope by a narrow, slippery path among turf and bushes. She went slowly—no need now for delay or haste—her mind emptied of all conscious emotion, features pale and fixed, with the wide-set eyes of a sleep-walker. On the bridge she passed, though without noticing her, a lady—oldish, tall, a foreigner, dressed in black. The latter glanced at the girl's haunted and rigid face, and, moved by some premonition, turned after a few paces and followed her.

Fujiyé gained the opposite side, found the top end

of the path, and stepped swiftly down it. At the bottom—how welcome!—lay her way out.

She stopped at the pebble-covered track and looked to right and left. Round the curve of the line, in the little station whose iron roof appeared above intervening shrubs, a train, her gate-keeper, was even now waiting. She heard the shriek of the whistle announcing its start. In a moment or two it would be swinging swiftly past the spot.

Without further preparation or ceremony of farewell to a world that had turned so sharp a face to her, but instinctively choosing a position that would least soil her dress, she knelt down with her forehead to the cold iron rail and closed her eyes.

The roar of the approaching train dinned her ears. Then a firm hand clutched her shoulder, and she felt herself wrenched back with so much strength and suddenness that she was pulled half to her feet, fell over again sideways, and struck her head against a stone. With a rattle and whirr of wheels the train swept by. A cold wind puffed in her face, the flying dust smarted in her eyes and throat: then the noise sank, died to a distant pulsation, and was gone.

Someone was raising her from where she lay. In her dulled ears was a kind voice, emotion-shaken.

"You poor girl, how *could* you be so wicked!"

The words were English, for the speaker forgot, in stress of feeling, the unlikeliness of their being understood. Fujiyé, dazed by this abrupt recall to an existence which she had seemed in the act of shaking off, looked up to the woman whose arms were supporting her and answered in the same tongue.

"How are you here? Why do you stop me?"

"Oh, so you speak English! I'm so glad, it will be much easier to explain things, won't it? Oh, I was *so* afraid I should be too late—you walked at such a rate down that path, and I'm rather fat, you see. My name is Mrs. Ashton—Anne Amelia Ashton—so you see there's three A's for you to remember me by, and I'm living in Bancho, near the Kudan Shrine. Now come right along and tell me all about it. I'm sure we shall be able to put things right. How lucky that train-man didn't see us and stop. Now nobody need know anything about this foolish, terrible thing you tried to do except just our two selves."

She rattled away cheerily to give the girl time to recover. Reaction setting in, Fujiyé could hardly force her trembling limbs to carry her up the slope. At the road her rescuer hailed two rickshas loitering near the bridge-head.

A little later Fujiyé lay on a couch in a small, neat, cosily-furnished bedroom, crying as if heart-broken. Gentle and refined words, kind-hearted tending, understanding sympathy—so long—the revulsion—it was too much for her. Joy hurt like a pain. The past two ugly years were wiped out, even last night's meeting, and she was a care-free girl again. She wept on, till, exhausted, she fell asleep: the sleep that men out of the trenches know.

That afternoon, dressed in a costume (a visiting niece of Mrs. Ashton's had left it behind) that fitted her slight figure perfectly, she sipped sugared tea before a blazing fire, while drifting snowflakes attested the uncertainty of Japanese spring weather.

Under a running fire of pitying interjections she told her story; but her motherly hostess scolded her gently for that self-sufficient pride which had withheld her from seeking help from those who would surely have been only too glad to give it. She knew well the ladies now teaching in Fujiyé's former school, and when the recital reached the point of Shimizu's appearance on the platform she could not restrain herself from shaking the teller by the shoulders in half-exasperated reproof.

"Oh, you *foolish* child! Do you know your own sex so little as to imagine they would side against you there? *We* know what men are, and what horrid things almost any of them can do. That Shimizu, too—I never liked him, though he was free with his dollars: I'd like to go and take him by his fat ears and shake him! Of course girls aren't always blameless, but—well, go on with your story, child, and then we'll make plans."

The tale at last finished, Mrs. Ashton got briskly to her feet—and upset her cup on to the tiled hearth.

"Never mind that broken crockery: now our programme for to-day. First, if you're not too tired, we'll go right away to the school. You'll like those ladies. Mrs. Grant is a very old friend of mine; we were at college together, and I can tell you she's just one of the nicest women in the world. Miss Howard I don't myself know so well, but she's quite nice too, though you might be a little bit scared of her at first, when she's got on what I call her examination expression. After that we'll take two rickshas and bundle off to that wretched place in Asakusa where you've been living so bravely, and take away the

things you've got there. As it's so near the end of the month there ought to be some wages due to you, too, and in this hard world it's just as well to get all that one's entitled to, isn't it? Anyway, that'll close *that* chapter of your life. Now, what are you looking so doubtful and rosy about?"—for mention of the beer-hall had recalled to Fujiyé that passion-fraught meeting and its sequel.

Hurt pride and anger at his readiness to believe the worst of her were mingled with longing to see Ichiro's face turned to her with that frank expression of boyish love and admiration that it used to wear. From his own lips, though lips that curled in scorn and wrath, she had learnt how much he loved her; his very violence caused, now, a little retrospective throb of joy. Now, when they met, on so different a footing, would he not listen to her story, re-erect the pillar of his trust, beg humbly for pardon?

Should she grant it if he did?

It was this flow of thought that crimsoned her pale face and lowered her gaze to crackling hearth. The shrewd eyes fixed on hers smiled kindly. "Ah, yes, of course—that young man! Well, I must say, from what you've told me I don't think a deal of him. He didn't condescend to tell you, I suppose, what *he* was doing, going round to beer-halls at night instead of being tucked away in bed! That's just the way with men, isn't it? It's my belief he's not half good enough for you, my dear, and the best thing you can do is just to let him slide out of your little mind altogether. If he'd really felt such a lot of you I don't think he would have been so ready to jump at conclusions and think the worst."

"Perhaps it was *because* he—he l-loved—he thought rather much for me," murmured Fujiyé in a tiny voice, stumbling shyly in her English at the word "love," "that he became so angry at seeing me there."

"Well, well, perhaps you are right, you demure little mouse. Now go and get your cloak on or we shan't get to Mrs. Grant's by daylight. I've a hat upstairs that I think will suit you, though it isn't quite the latest style; my niece left it in Tokyo when she went back to Boston, with a pile of bills for her old aunt to settle. Now run!"

Back in the old remembered living-house next the school, the little bustling sounds of girls' school-life drifting in from the other building, it seemed a pleasant dream: surely she would presently awaken, as too often before, to dreary and forlorn reality.

The pretty, headstrong pupil of other days had been a favourite among servants and teachers; many of them still remained and welcomed her. Sympathy in plenty was hers, but reproof too. Now, with clearer eyes, she wondered at her own foolishness. These friends could have found her a dozen openings for work, good work. Blind, too-sensitive pride—yes, she was to blame. How worldly-wise and old she had thought herself in those summer days when she had counselled Ichiro! Now she had learnt, and was humble.

A long ride in rickshas from there to Asakusa; they set out at dusk, but soon the paper lanterns were lit. Bowling along by the moat behind a mushroom hat, Fujiyé could see by dim moonlight a scurry of the small wild ducks that find winter

sanctuary in those waters. They topped Kudan Hill, pattered past crowded trams in Kanda High Street, lights danced by as sparks stream from a wind-blown torch, the rattling wheels produced a drowsy content—how pleasant life was!—all noises mingled in a long, continuous drone. . . .

She started awake: the ricksha had stopped: Mrs. Ashton was asking her to explain to the man just where the little beer-hall was to be found. A few minutes later, and they were there.

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Now for Ichiro. That long ride home was a bitter one, and the few hours of night that followed the bitterest in his life. The blow was too complete, too unexpected. Never in any imagining had he dreamed that Fujiyé could be other than the perfect ideal—in mind and thought and action, as she was to him in face and form. His own time in Tokyo had glided by so smoothly, he had never pictured how Fate could throw the skeins awry, tangling with knots and snarls into hopeless misfortune. How could he make allowances?

Dawn! Sunday! He had planned to go that day, light-step, to the little steamboat office at Reiganjima, climb aboard the smelly packet, and cross the Bay. Long before noon—to-morrow's noon!—he would have been walking the beach road, trembling with expectation, straining his eyes. . . ."

Now all that dream was gone, vanished, a soap-bubble. His ideal, did not exist: perhaps had never existed. Fujiyé was a beer-hall wench, cheapened to the level of the bar-room, talking intimately with

such young men as caught her fancy. Again the memory of that other girl, the Ginza waitress, bit his mind, and how she lay in his arms on secret Enoshima; she, too, had wit and intellect, yet gave herself to him with a smile.

He blamed himself for that: not deeply: the rules for men and women were different. In theory of course they should hold the same for both: he had upheld this with both Mori and Saigo—the former dissenting gaily, completely: the latter cynically reserving opinion on so academical a matter.

Some day he might have confessed that lapse to Fujiyé's ears; she would surely understand and forgive. Men, after all, are men.

But to find spots in the perfection of this spotless image of his creation—to find her no better than the common run of women! His creation—yes, poor fellow, poor fool—duped by himself! He fell for a moment into self-pity: then climbed resolutely out. Still, it was inconceivable.

His thoughts took a gentler turn. She had met misfortunes, grief, loneliness; her story unrolled in his memory—he had hardly seemed to hear it when she spoke. Her father dead—poverty—struggles. His selfishness had deafened him; she had suffered, bitterly; some excuse, perhaps; had his own love been true, to let him turn against her at a word?

So her father, that obstinate old man, was dead, ruined! She had become a pauper. She had, he remembered, no other relatives. But friends, well-to-do—why had she not gone to them? How, he wondered, had she spent that long stretch of time since they parted—so busy and fruitful for him.

What mischances had reduced her to that sordid place? He cursed his unreasoning folly in refusing ear to the poor child's eager pleading. Was he so very perfect, to be judge? A story in the Bible came to mind. Was he to fling the first stone—he, her lover? Had he the right? And to condemn unheard! Where was his fairness? Surely his love must have been of a poor, animal sort, to turn to angry jealousy the moment he saw her with other men!

These thoughts trooped and struggled tumultuously through his mind for a long time, repeating themselves, with many a back swing to savage suspicion. Gradually his resolve grew fixed. He would go back, save her from that miserable place (what an oasis in the desert it had seemed when he entered it with Mori on that thirsty night!) and they would make a new start together somewhere. His journey? He must give up that. Surely she loved him still: her words and grief proved it. He would get work, teaching, in a country school, perhaps.

Again his thoughts darkened. That tableau—the two little groups, the other waitress on the fellow's knee, Fujiyé chatting and smiling with her student friends as they swilled beer, the snug and accustomed security of it all—rose up before him in the blackness. Curse her, he would cut the girl out of his life—have done with her—better fish in the sea than that wench!

And even as the resolve shaped, he wavered again. What proof of her wrong-doing had he? He reviewed minutely the first Fujiyé, Fujiyé of the Fairies' Isle. No. Impossible. He was a gross fool. Nothing impure could lodge in that soul. Appearances were

liars; she was still a maid untainted, and he an unreasonable brute to turn away callously when she begged kindness and sympathy. So his mind swung this way and that. Then, little by little, the storm died; his emotions ran permanently in smoother channels. Suddenly he fell fast asleep; the breakfast gong called in vain.

He slept till noon, and on waking thought it was still early, for the shutters were closed. All silence: Longfield was out. He dressed quickly, in haste for Asakusa, and bolted a meal. Then a visitor came, Church member, nice fellow, full of good-byes and good wishes. He flowed on interminably. Ichiro, his forehead veins swelling black blood, chatted, glared, smiled, and damned his caller; after weeks, months, he went. Ichiro fled out to a car. Then the current failed or some fool was run over, and the cars, dozens of cars on end, were tied up. Ichiro danced to and from his seat; he would have called a ricksha, but there was none in sight: should he run on foot? Suddenly the cars went on. They reached the end stopping-place, and he trudged through slush; then, trembling with emotion, he was standing outside the beer-hall door: opened it with a mighty effort: looked round. Tama-ko was there; the other girl was not.

The place was busy, five or six tables full, and Tama-ko had her work cut out to attend all. She spotted him at once. Ah, that was the handsome chap that raised such a rumpus last night! What did *he* want now? She felt perturbed yet curious. She might hear news of Fujiyé, who hadn't turned up to-day.

She went up and asked what he wished to drink. In return, glaring sternly, he demanded, "Where is the—the one who was here last night, the one I spoke to? Where is she? Tell me!"

"I don't know, really I don't. We haven't seen her all day. We were thinking she had run because she was scared of you—or perhaps you had taken her away. Haven't you seen her?"

"Run away? Are her things still here?"

"Yes, every bit, I think. She hadn't got much."

"But—then she must intend to come back," said Ichiro, half to himself: and even then another possibility grew, a little cold cloud within his mind; his skin went clammy and his tongue dry. Again he heard that heartbroken cry: "Why didn't I die, as I have often thought of doing?" It echoed in his ears from the place where she had crouched against the wall. He stared, dumb, chilly and sick, at Tama-ko's smudgy face. She turned away. The door opened, and someone, some woman, speaking Japanese with a nasal American accent, was asking the waitress a question.

He looked dully at the speaker—a moment's distraction from this awfulness. An elderly lady, spectacled, stout, but with an air of consequence. Beside her was a slim and graceful girl, with masses of black hair under a smart hat matched by great black mournful eyes, and——

A sudden leap took Ichiro out of his chair. Impossible! His senses were tricking him. He must be dreaming—or was last night a dream? Were the old tales true, and some fox had assumed that form to tease him? There are moments when the mind turns

back for a wink to the beliefs and nursery legends of childhood and, the night world is peopled with little supernatural things—those beliefs that lurk, forgotten and disavowed, in some tiny corner of the soul to pop out unexpected, like a lizard from a crevice in an old wall.

The thought passed like a flash. Fox maidens in kimonos, yes: but a fox in foreign coat and skirt!

Yet any other explanation seemed almost equally far to seek. Last night a waitress fetching beer, and now, with this stylish American woman!

One thing was certain. It *was* Fujiyé.

He walked swiftly towards her. She saw him, raised her eyes to his with an expression he could not divine, then drooped her head till the hat-brim hid her face. Stood, shoulders bowed, a slender and pathetic figure.

The elder woman glanced from the man to the silent girl.

"Why, my child, what's the matter? You've gone as white as a sheet, as if you'd seen a ghost!"—then intuition told the whole story at a blink. "Oh, so this is the young gentleman who has stolen your roses! Well, there's plenty of him, at any rate. I suppose he's come back to beg your pardon—though I'm not sure that he deserves it. I'd like to see him on his knees, but I suppose the young men of Nippon are too superior for that."

She talked to deaf ears. The youth and maid stood face to face. He gripped her arm and looked steadily into her eyes—his eager, humble, questioning. Slowly hers rose, struggling, met his, flashed an answer back, then sank again, while cheeks and brow

flamed at the tacit avowal. Her left hand held tightly the lapel of his coat. So they stood: for a life-time—or a minute.

Someone's voice broke the spell. They came down to earth, Mrs. Ashton speaking.

She suggested dryly ("I wanted to weep over the two foolish dears and tell them to kiss in each other's arms—only they would think it really horrible to kiss in public—and I had to talk like a mother-in-law to keep from breaking down," she told a friend afterwards) that a beer-hall was not the best place to discuss personal affairs, and requested Fujiyé for an introduction to her new-found acquaintance.

That young lady's further business was soon settled; her few belongings bundled in a "furoshiki," she bade good-bye to Tama-ko. The latter cried and clung so bitterly—who would stay her now in her descent into the gulf?—that Fujiyé must promise she should not be forgotten; for her, too, a hand would surely be held out.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE FAIRIES' ISLE

IT was autumn, October—all gold and blue. A breeze wandered in from the sea, but the fields were silent, for the rice-stalks were bowed low with their fruitful heads of grain, and their rustling was stilled. Silence: but presently the ear detected a tinkling murmur of water, millions of little rills and tricklets slipping down from ledge to ledge of terraced fields, whispering and gurgling and singing till they ran into the stream: the stream, winding irregularly along the winding road, rippling swiftly over its smooth black stone-bed, falling in frothy cataracts of a foot or so, broadening into pools above small weirs, rushing silently through deep rock-cuttings. It had rained in the night.

Inland ran the road at a gentle gradient. Mighty camellia and camphor trees stood about it, maples were crimsoning, and in farmhouse gardens the persimmon branches swayed earthward beneath loads of golden fruit. Twisting like an eel, the stream companioned the road for miles, now this side, now that, sliding under dozens of narrow plank-and-sod bridges; and on one of these, watching a kingfisher at his rainbow work, stood Ichiro, waiting for a girl.

He let his mind travel pleasantly back over the half year.

So many events since that beer-hall meeting. Percival Trench had changed his facile mind. He would spend that summer in Japan: the States would keep. He did, ranging from the stormy Kuriles to tropical Formosa, and with him his invaluable secretary; who, perforce, put off his own trip home. Now that he knew the place robbed of its lodestone filial regrets lost him little sleep.

For Fujiyé there was no anxiety. Had she wished employment her old school would gladly have arranged it, but Mrs. Ashton's claims were not to be denied. "Finding's keepings, my dear," she asserted. "I don't know how the law stands about such matters here, but I'm not going to give up my share in you to any old Lord of the Manor or anyone else, until (oh yes, don't look so imploringly at me!) the young man comes back who thinks he's got proprietary rights over you; and I'll not deny that he's a well-set-up looking boy, and really seems to appreciate that he's not half worthy of you in spite of his inches and diplomas. Now scurry away and write another few yards of letter to him. How long does one roll last you?" Fujiyé blushed and vanished.

So autumn came: thin morning mists, bright noontides, crisp air and hard soil. Trench and his man—almost brothers now, the two had come so near—returned to Tokyo with a rich cargo: photographs, information, memories: these needed time for sorting out.

So after busy months the lovers came together. Now, as he stood waiting in sweet, pensive idleness on the bridge, Ichiro re-tasted the emotions of that meeting. He stood and dreamed; dreams, formerly a snare, now justified by achievement.

They—he, she, with Mrs. Ashton for a third—had come across in the little fish-smelly steamer, the *Tokai Maru*—grimy, hand-maiden to seasickness, crammed with passengers, but a ship of faerie to two of them.

Midnight at Reiganjima. Three rickshas dumped them outside the steamboat office. Inside, a crowd jostled and chattered, women suckled babies or sipped tea, benches and tables overflowed with piled luggage. Up went the shutter of the ticket window, and the whole crowd fought for tickets—sheer habit, since there were tickets for all and to spare, and no one could go aboard yet. A siren mournfully hooted, the wicket opened, the travellers filed through.

Bright moonlight irradiated the pool, black hulls of ships made inky patches here and there, the slender masts of coasting vessels clustered the shore. Lamps in house windows cast flickering, many-pointed reflections on the oily water. A pair of herons flapped raucously across overhead, waves gurgled round the pier-bases as the tide rose, from landward came the grind of distant tramcars and the hushed evening voices of the city.

A searchlight swept inquiringly athwart their faces, wavered this way and that over the flood, and picked out dark spots that the moon could not reach—a line of figures moving stealthily beneath a bank, a small skiff with one occupant, sleeping on unlit waters within a tiny dock. Then a big barge took them out to the ship, poled by three ebony figures, their long wet poles streaming silver.

All dark on board—a dead ship. A flap opened in her side, a rope ladder dangled from it. Good

heavens, was Mrs. Ashton to tackle *that*? But she did, and gallantly, even to the bumping of her head in the tiny, black hold. Then, by sweating engines and over tubs of powerful brine, they reached the cabin. Its furniture was simple—clean straw on the floor and a swinging oil lamp. There was room for all to sit down on the floor, but not to stretch their legs. The captain, kindly man, sent cushions and apologies for these superior passengers, but before long they left the stuffy cabin for moonlight and the deck. Mrs. Ashton had brought rugs. In the lee of a stack of boxes they passed a good night. Dawn was crimsoning before Hojima was reached, and they were carried ashore pick-a-back by sturdy fishermen whose landing-boats' draught was too deep to reach the stage.

Then that day which followed, the happiest in his life! The ladies put up at the Pine-Breeze Inn, nearly opposite the school. Ichiro trod the old road; the well-remembered roof appeared among the trees. How his heart beat! Two years ago! Now he was returning, his dreams justified, his visions in fair way of fulfilment. The homestead enclosure—so little changed, and he changed so much. He entered.

His mother and sisters—they could not make enough of him. Warned by his letters, both girls were there. He felt humbly that their quiet acceptance of duty was worth all his success, but could not stop them from worshipping. His father was proud, too, of this sturdy son who was going to show the people of America how things should be done; but he was careful not to betray this, and greeted Ichiro with reserve.

He, when the first flood of mutual news and gossip had subsided, broached, with trembling, the subject next his heart. How would it be received?

The reception was better than he had feared. It was not quite news to them. Hints at his hopes and plans for marriage had crept into his letters to his mother: would she soften the sterner parent? At first both had been a little displeased; former plans were upset by it. Soon they grew accustomed to the idea, and were reconciled to it. The old rancour between the families had died out. Old Watanabé was gone—let it rest with him in his grave. There was none against the daughter. The household listened, open-mouth, when the young man told all the tale of Fujiyé's wanderings and misfortunes, and the chance meeting that had brought them together.

Then he had gone back to the inn, and returned with Mrs. Ashton and his intended bride. It was a new Fujiyé. That old air of amused superiority, almost of disdain, was gone. Shy and deprecating modesty disarmed any resentment that the other women might have felt for this new sharer in their lord's affections. Her place in the family heart was safe. And that foreign lady friend and guardian of hers! What fluency in Japanese—one thought that those stupid foreigners could never learn to speak our tongue! Her pronunciation—peculiar, certainly, but so distinguished! All the fisher-boys were trying to speak Japanese with an American accent.

Ichiro smiled to himself. All this, from their leaving the steamer, had been yesterday. Now it was morning, and Ichiro was waiting by appointment at the bridge. The morning sky was washed clear of

clouds. He looked expectantly up the road, and presently his waiting was rewarded.

She came up silently on the damp road, but he had marked her approach from a distance, and left the bridge to meet her. With a little bow and a little smile—only that!—she slipped her hand into his, and they walked along without speaking.

The road twisted suddenly, and on the left hand stood a stone "torii," the gate-way of a shrine. Above three flights of steep steps the roof-angles showed through the trees. They went beneath the grey cross-bars and mounted to the shrine. The doors were closed, the place deserted, sparrows hopped on the wooden platform that ran round it. Far below stretched a sea of green, uneven billows of lush, leafy knolls and fields, and beyond a sea of blue, flat and glittering. Descending to the road, they reached the house to which they were going—a farm kept by a relative of his mother. There they stayed, shared the farmer's noon meal, and returned at dusk.

Side by side they sauntered: hand in hand when the road was empty, a discreet pace apart when people passed. Rather quiet, perhaps, for lovers who had been six months separated. A question was debating in Ichiro's mind.

"Fujiyé, tell me what do you really think about my going to America? Of course I have promised, but Mr. Trench would, I feel sure, release me if I asked him. If I go now, it may be two years more before I return. We have been separated so much, we have had so little time together. Two more years! Must we wait all that time apart? I am a man now, Fujiyé, and you are a woman. The spring-time of

our lives is going by. Who knows what may happen in two years? Tell me, Fujiyé—must I go?"

The question—almost the same that this boy had asked her in almost this very spot—touched a chord of memory in her heart. In golden summer sunshine while the semi shrilled and blue waves lapped the shore, she had bade him stay—and he had gone. Should she bid him stay again?

They had come to the stretch of sandy beach where once she had sat on a log and sketched; the log, rotted a little, was still there. A straggling thicket screened them from the road. Fujiyé stopped and took both his hands.

"Of course I should love to be, from now onwards, always by your side; but a promise must be kept. You know that Westerners say that we Japanese are far too ready to lightly break a contract. Perhaps among merchants it may be so; but we must not do that. Besides, I think it will be good, in many ways, for you to go. I know your nature, Ichiro, and if I were to hold you now, and you missed this golden chance of foreign travel and all that it may lead to for you—such chance as may never come again—in after days you would sometime surely regret it. You are not one to be long content with the limited life and narrow horizons: perhaps even you would blame me, at least in your heart. No"—as he started to break into impetuous protest—"you would be right to blame me; we must not take the risk."

She spoke with her old air of gentle authority. His mind thrilled with memories of the past, and of the place which now they were treading.

"Then, Fujiyé, if go I must, and if you are bent on

our separation—no, I know you wish it all for the best, dear: I was only talking fretfully,” he hastened to add, as the brown eyes filled with sudden reproachful tears, “but as my promise binds me to go, why can we not marry first? Our lives are slipping by, we are young now, but in a few short years we shall be no longer young. Fujiyé, let us marry now! Some weeks at least must pass before Mr. Trench can sail. We will snatch what happiness we can from the present. Cross the Bay with me to-morrow—to-night—and we will be married in the City!”

They still stood close, facing. At first mention of that word Fujiyé had raised both her hands, clasping his, to her cheeks as though to hide their crimsoning blushes—belied by the mischievous sparkle of her eyes. Then she dropped his hands and turned away—walked off a pace or two, turned back, and led him sedately down to the water’s edge.

A boat was beached there—was it the one in which a boy and girl had planned and argued in a bygone summer? The owner was nowhere to be seen.

She smiled—the little mocking smile that he knew so well—looking up at him as he stood behind her on the beach, and pressing with slender palms against the boat’s stern, bedded in the sand.

“Come, Ichiro, shall we go for another voyage together and discuss your future? Last time, you know, you asked my advice—and didn’t take it. If you had—ah, who knows what might have happened? Perhaps you might have been married long ago to your cousin—what was her name?—and been a happy husband and father, with no more problems to solve! Come, help me with this into the water.”

Again they were afloat together: Fujiyé at the stern and the young man sitting in the bow, chin on knees, looking up at her face. Near at hand rose the little pyramid of the Fairies' Isle.

On the leeward side there is no landing-place. The rock shelves steeply to the water and swift tides run always through the narrow gut. Across this separating neck of sea a little muddy path, hardly discernible among the weeds, follows closely the crumbling edges of the shore—dangerous to tread, for the waves eat continually at the softer earth—rising here in miniature cliffs a dozen feet above the sand level—and they have in places scooped out long gulfs or inlets, caves and tunnels. Trees, their roots undermined, fall headlong down into the water. At the bottom of these gulfs the rising tide churns and gurgles fearsomely. An unwary footstep too near the brink may send you down.

Only to the hard worker comes the full joy of holiday: only the ascetic can relish the rare flavour of his long-self-denied dainty: and only he who has lived, year in and out, along the rigid lines of a pre-arranged career, straining muscles and wrinkling forehead to forge ahead on his fixed course, can know the blissful relaxation of sitting a passenger in the boat of Destiny, careless of the tiller. The hospital casualty may know it. But with Love for steersman!

Easily sculling, gracefully swaying, bending her shoulders to and fro with the rocking of the boat and the motion of the "ro," Fujiyé directed their course to the island, and the flat keel soon grated on its rocks. She leapt out and pulled the stern out of the water—her sudden action almost upsetting the

young man who still sat dreamily at the other end, absorbed in his fair companion's face.

"Climb to the top? It's steep. Come, I'll race you!"

And like the tomboy whom Ichiro had romped with when Time was younger and clothes a thing for only parents to worry over, Fujiyé tucked up her pretty grey silk kimono and swung herself, clutching hand-over-hand at the little pine-trees and tougher weeds, up the slope to the Island's summit, Ichiro following. There they sat down flushed and panting, and there she answered him.

"Ichiro San," she began, in the old, gently derisive tone that carried him back to that other day, "I seem to remember a certain boy who told me of his plans just by this very spot, and when he spoke of marrying said that thirty-five or forty was the proper age; early marriages, he said, were a sad hindrance to success. No, wait a minute"—and as her lover tried to break in she covered his lips with one little soft hand. "The boy, Ichiro San, was right perhaps in that last, though not in all that he said that day. Are you afraid that if we do not marry now we shall forget each other before the two years are out? No, not that, I know: don't look so indignant!—but that perhaps our minds and outlook may change? If so, far better never marry; unless the heart still binds, legal ties or promises are vain chains. Wait, let me finish!"

Her voice faded, her eyes softened half-maternally on his eager face, then dreamed mistily away to the skyline over the water. "No, Ichiro," she went on. "Go out as you planned and see the world with no

fetters but your own wishes. For me, too, I think, a time of waiting and learning will be good. Don't you think"—and she spoke in a gentler, shyer tone—"Love is a fruit that grows purer and sweeter with waiting? Suppose we had married when first we met—the first time after childhood, I mean, of course—should we have known each other as we now do? I think understanding is needful for the highest love, and to have understanding we must have tasted sorrow. Human love should be different, Ichiro, from the love of birds or beasts that mate in the spring. What they call love—in these past two years it has sometimes shown so hateful to me, I felt that I could die a nun."

She broke off and sat, chin cupped in hand and elbow resting on the rock, looking over the Bay to the faint murk that was Tokyo. A bright drop fell, glistened, and sank into the moss and then another.

"What is it?" asked her lover contritely. "Something I have said?"

"No—oh no! Only—I was thinking of the different fate that people have—of a poor dead girl, floating among lotus leaves in a temple pond, once a school-girl with me. It was the very morning, Ichiro, that I met you with your sister on this road. She had struggled in the city, too, as I had done, but went down—crushed, as the priest said, like a green lotus bud."

Ichiro (pity that Mrs. Ashton was not there to see it) knelt in Western book style, on the uncomfortable rock before her and took possession of her hands. In his voice was a newer note, of knowledge and masterfulness.

"Not fate, Fujiyé, but ourselves make our lives: you know what the English play says. When I think of the ordeal that you passed through unscathed, as gold through fire, I feel ashamed of my own self—all those sordid and ugly scenes that left you without a spot or stain. You seem to me, Fujiyé, like the lotus which rises steadily up through the muddy water, petals tightly closed, to open at last in the sunlight and pure air. But you are beginning to shiver. The sun is setting; shall we go back?"

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LOTUS THROUGH THE SLIME

By OMORI HARRIS

AGainst a vivid background of conflict between the headlong westernising of Japan's teeming cities and the age-old calm of its rural life, Omori Harris presents an unusual human drama in *Lotus Through the Slime*.

Ichiro and Fujiyé were the son and daughter of the Japan that is rapidly dying out except in its secluded hamlets, the Japan that slumbered changeless through centuries.

They found themselves thrown into the maelstrom of city life to fight for their very existence. In his treatment of their reactions Mr. Harris reveals not only facets of the oriental character which are new to the West, but also that he is a keen observer of human nature.

Ambitious Ichiro went to Tokyo as the first step in his mission of carving his own destiny; Fujiyé went also, but because she was friendless and alone.

As he follows them Mr. Harris paints an absorbing picture of Japan, its dignity and gaiety; its weaknesses and vices. Not the least of this fine novel's charm lies in the tuneful and dignified language in which the story is told. The scent of cherry-blossom and the tinkle of temple bells pervade its pages. It is a colourful and stimulating experience.

