

A FATHER

By Onoto Watanna

Illustration by Louis Betts

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SO long ago that it seemed like a vague dream she remembered a fond little mother, who had waited on her hand and foot, and had obeyed her small imperious will. She remembered that they were on a dreamship, which went sailing on and on and on. There had seemed to be no ending to that long, tedious journey. Small wonder—it had taken them ten months to come from Japan to America in one of the old-fashioned, slow-sailing vessels. Yuri had once loved the sea. Always she was with the little mother, who would sit in front of her on the deck and tell her fairy tales of a great and wonderful prince, yes! a beautiful king, who had come all the way from a great country called "America," just for the sake of marrying poor little Madam Sunbeam, and this great prince was Yuri's very own father. They were going to America to seek him. Then the mother would tell Yuri how his hair shone like the bright gold in the Kwannon temple; his eyes were blue as the endless glow of the sea, and he was tall, tall as a young pine-tree. And so Yuri's heart became surfeited with tales of this wonderful father of hers, whom she had never seen, but whom they were going to.

Then one night a big, foreign, red-haired man, dressed in dark blue clothes, with big gold buttons on his coat, strolled across the deck and talked jestingly with the little mother. It was a beautiful night. Yuri remembered it distinctly, for the moon touched the waters to a silvery shimmering splendor that gave it the glow of magic.

"You sit up late, Madame Sunbeam," he said lightly.

"Yaes. I luf vaery much the—the night."

"Is the mat soft on which you sit?"

"Yaes."

"Let me get you a softer one. Ah! that's better. This your little girl?" He put his hand on Yuri's head and patted it, then he turned her little face up.

"She is very pretty. Does not look Japanese at all," he said with puzzled eyes.

Yuri's mother smiled happily.

"Ah! august Americazan, my child ees nod Japanese. Her fadder—a beautiful prince mans from the West," she waved her hand across the water.

The officer whistled under his breath.

"And where are you going?"

"To my hosban'—an tell him *thad* He got one liddle child—six years ole. I tekin' her there long time ago, *bud* whad *kin* I do? I mus' stay at Japan, mek money for thad old modder and fadder. *Now* they daed—we going now to thad hosban'," she added after a moment very softly, "an' thad fadder."

The tall man got up abruptly and took a few slow strides across the deck. Yuri crept nearer to her mother.

"Does my fadder loog' lig' thad?" she murmured.

"No," the mother answered reproachfully, "jus' liddle bit lig' thad" (they always spoke English to each other), "he grade deal more beautifullest."

The strange man came back to them.

"What was your husband's name?" he inquired.

"Willum."

"William what?"

She shrugged her shoulders, smiling confidently.

"Heavens! how do you expect to find him?"

Madam Sunbeam smiled blissfully. She drew a dainty card from the bosom of her kimono. The American took it. It bore the name of one of Chicago's most prominent citizens—a millionaire, and—a married man! Perhaps the officer meant to be kind. I do not know. But he told Madam Sunbeam the truth, adding in a strangely muffled voice that it was best she should not be deceived any longer.

Yuri remembered all this very distinctly, because her mother had cried out for a moment, and then had left her all alone, a pitiful, lonely, crying heap on the deck. Yuri crept down to the little cabin, as children do, toddling tumblingly down the stairs, one little foot following the other. The mother was lying on the floor—asleep. Yuri crept to her and kissed her, for she was smiling and looked very beautiful. Then something dark and red colored her little hand and she screamed aloud in terror, for she was very frightened at she knew not what.

Yuri cried all that long night through, for they carried her mother from her—two big, tall men. Some of the beautiful ladies on the ship had cried, and one of them had taken Yuri in her arms and tried to soothe her. She never saw her mother again. That was years and years ago.

Yuri was nineteen years old now. She wore American clothes—a cotton shirt waist and cloth skirt, but in her bosom she, too, carried a little card, as her mother had done; and the girl knew it bore her father's name.

Some kind American woman had given the little waif a home when they had arrived. She was a poor woman, however, and as soon as Yuri was old enough she secured her a position in one of the large dry-goods stores of Chicago, and here the girl had worked ever since. Her life had been uneventful since then. She worked from eight in the morning till six at night, and her beautiful little half-foreign face bore the pallor of the shop-clerk. The girl was a dreamer. If she had ambition it had been smothered from the stern necessity of the moment. Her kind benefactor had died, and she was left utterly alone in the world and altogether dependent on herself. Mechanically she took up the burden of life, going to and from work each day, ever gentle and courteous to her fellow-workers, never familiar with them, knowing none of them intimately. Instinctively the girl felt she was different from them, and she shrank in her supersensitiveness from mixing with companions who were as foreign to her as if they had lived in different parts of the world all their lives.

Yuri was beautiful, with a wild, inexplicable beauty that defied description. She did not look Japanese. She did not look American. Her face was mysterious in its dusky mixed beauty, but the immeasurable wistfulness and sadness of the half-breed were stamped indelibly on her features and reflected in the somber depths of her dark eyes.

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Gerald Latimer was in love. He had told his father so, and that gentleman was furious.

"A shop-girl! The idea was preposterous!"

Gerald's usually happy boyish face was very white and set as he listened to his father. That gentleman, still quite a young man himself, was highly incensed and disgusted with his young son. He himself was a rich banker, and he had married

a wife with the blood of Condé in her veins. He was one of those self-made Americans who reverence blood and aristocracy, and in return for the superabundance of wealth they bestow on their children, demand that they marry to please them. Mr. Latimer was thoroughly disgusted with his son. Is this all his Yale training had done for him? Where had he inherited his low taste from? Latimer, Sr., refused to even discuss the subject. A shop-girl! Gerald was to distinctly understand that he disapproved of it, and would cut him off without a penny and refuse to see him again if he persisted in his mad folly; and after having delivered himself of the foregoing to Gerald, Mr. Latimer betook him to the Union League Club and tried to forget in a bird and a bottle of Burgundy the irritating fact that his son had a will of his own also.

As for Gerald? He went to his lady mother. She lay back in her chair and cried weakly. She was one of those chronic invalids who pamper a perhaps imaginary malady, but she was kinder than the father, and really had more genuine love and affection for her son. She herself had been starved for want of affection. Her husband had never loved her.

"She is so sweet, mother; you could not help loving her," Gerald told her pleadingly. "Let me bring her to see you."

"Your father would never forgive me."

"She would win even him, mamma dear."

"Where did you meet her?"

"She lives at the same house as Professor Grenier, my old French master. I met her there. Every one loves her. I loved her at once. She does not know it yet, I have not told her, but I think she must guess. Mother, if you could just see her—"

He put his head down against his mother's and caressed her boyishly. After awhile she relented, and gave him permission to bring Yuri.

It was a bright Sunday afternoon that Gerald brought Yuri to his home. Mrs. Latimer was sitting up, with a bright color in each cheek. She was waiting for Gerald, who had gone to get Yuri. She wondered what her husband would say if he knew the truth. This was the first time she had ever dared defy him about anything. Downstairs in the library he was reading the Sunday papers and smoking. He had been in a good-natured mood lately. She knew he would join them soon in her sitting-room, and would know the truth. She rose nervously to her feet when she heard Gerald's quick, joyous tread on the stairs. Now she was looking at Yuri, the half-Japanese girl of whom Gerald had raved—the shop-girl her husband detested, without knowing.

The girl was the most composed of the three, for she knew nothing as yet.

"I am glad to meet Mr. Gerald's mother," she said simply.

She called him Mr. Gerald—always, the mother noticed, and it sounded soft and pretty from her

lips. Neither of the two women spoke much. Gerald monopolized most of the conversation, and told them bright, witty college tales, chasing away the constraint and fear from the mother's face, and lighting Yuri's with arch fun.

"Your house is so beautiful," she told Mrs. Latimer directly, looking about her. She got up and stood with clasped hands before a large oil painting in the room.

"That is mother when a girl."

"Tha's vaery beautiful." There was still a foreign lisp left. "An' your father? You have picture, too, of *heem*?"

"Well, not large like that. Mother, where's that small medallion of father, taken about the same time as yours? Ah! here it is." He put the miniature on ivory into the girl's hand.



"SIT IN FRONT OF HER ON THE DECK AND TELL HER FAIRY TALES"

Yuri had grown quite white, and her eyes were dilated and fixed on the miniature in her hand. She did not speak, nor did she hear what Gerald was saying.

"Wasn't he a handsome fellow though? He has scarcely changed now. Ah! here he comes, I hear his step."

The girl was not white now. A rich flush suffused her face, making it very beautiful, and her sharp, dark eyes held a strange magnetism as they looked straight at Mr. Latimer and held him in their power.

Gerald had risen to his feet with forced carelessness, for although he had confidence that his father, who was always so polished and gallant before strangers, would not betray his anger before the girl, yet he was afraid to actually displease him.

"Father, with mamma's permission I brought Miss a—a Sentaro to meet you."

Whatever surprise or anger his father felt he did not betray it, for the girl was very beautiful. He bowed courteously to her, murmuring something about "pleasure at meeting," and forgetting even to give a side glance of displeasure at his wife and son. The girl did not return the greeting in the slightest. There was a peculiar look about her face, and she was standing very straight and proudly. She turned to Gerald.

"I call you always 'Mr. Gerald.' Ees thad your name?"

The young man flushed.

"Yes, my first name; Professor Grenier always called me that and—"

"Oh! I din know thad. Whad ees—?"

"Our last name? Oh! Latimer."

The girl was quiet now, her eyes still on the older man's face.

She suddenly slipped her hand into the bosom of her gown and pulled out an old card and a faded miniature.

"Are these yours?" she asked Mr. Latimer. He took them wondering from her.

"Mine? Why, no; that is—yes. By Jove! Where—"

The girl interrupted him. She had forgotten the mother and son.

"You are my father," she said slowly.

"Your father!" they all echoed it—stupidly.

* * *

"Yaes!" Her eyes were stern with hatred and contempt now. "Yaes, my mother left me only that to know my father by. Do you remember her? Madame Sunbeam of Nagasaki?"

The man had come closer to her now, and was looking at her face with sad eyes.

"Yes, yes; and you."

"I was born after you left—nineteen years ago."

He saw his wife's white, horror-stricken face, his son's stupefied look of agony, and he tried to pull himself together.

"I—er—"

"My mother killed herself," the girl's voice was relentless as fate. "They told her you had a wife here in America. She did not care to live after that—"

"Father! Father! Yuri! What does it mean?"

Gerald's frantic voice broke on them now. He had stood there listening, only half comprehending the truth. The cry seemed wrung from him.

"Father, I love her. If—if it is all a hideous mistake, say something. Speak—for God's sake!"

"It is true," he said, brokenly.

Gerald rose unsteadily. He looked at his father a moment, and caressed the girl with one last look of love and heartbreak, then he turned and left them.

"He will recover," said the father, "he is only a boy. You shall have everything money can buy, all heart could desire; I will—"

The tense excitement was gone. Weary shadows of care crept into the girl's face.

"But I—I love him with all my soul," she said brokenly.