

# A COTTAGE IN MATSUSHIMA

By Onoto Watanna

Author of "The Wooing of Wistaria," "A Japanese Nightingale," Etc.

IT was blue dawn in Matsushima and the yellow gleams of the rising sun were already touching the slumberous waters.

Overhead a little restless wind awakened languorously and swept across the bay, moving to a gentle ripple its glassy surface.

Drowsy nature stirred lazily into life. There was movement in the trees, in the grass, in the very air. The birds stretched their wings and shook them, then, twittering softly, fell to the earth in search of breakfast. A little white fox came stealthily down to the shore from the cloudy hills above, then fled of a sudden, frightened by the chattering of a mischievous monkey.

On one side of the bay the land sloped up from the shore into symmetrical green hills. Beyond these hills there were valleys and slender rivers. Farther away still, gigantic mountains arose to a height, seeming from their distance like huge white clouds, spectral and transparent.

On the opposite shore, although distant two and a half miles, Mount Tomi seemed to bend his noble head forward, as if to peer at his reflected shadow in the bay. On the east was the Pacific and on the west the road to Sendai.

The stillness and silence of the early morning were broken by the distant pattering of the sandaled feet of *jinrikisha* runners.

There were two vehicles, and both were occupied by women. The elder one, evidently the mother, was sleeping uncomfortably in the carriage, her head bobbing and swaying from side to side with the jolting of the *jinrikisha*. The

younger one was awake, though her eyes were heavy from lack of sleep. As a matter of fact, they had spent the night in an uncomfortable train, which contained no sleeping accommodations whatever. They had reached Sendai at the hour of three in the morning. The station was worse than the train. Somehow they had managed to arouse a couple of runners, and undeterred by the early hour, proceeded on to their destination, a little village a few miles from Matsushima Bay.

The journey in the dawn had been shivery and weird, like some clammy, cloudy dream, the girl had thought, but as they swung into the sudden light of the bay, glowing from the first kiss of the sun, life assumed a brighter aspect. An ejaculation escaped the lips of the young woman.

"Oh, it is beautiful! beautiful!" Then to the runner: "Stop! Stop a bit, please."

Still running he called back:

"Good luck! Honorable sun arisen. We arrive soon. Heu-u-u-u——!"

"But wait a minute! Do you hear me?" she called. "I want to get out a moment."

He pulled up abruptly and looked back at her sulkily. The other *jinrikisha* sped on, leaving them behind on the shore of the bay. The young woman stepped down from the *jinrikisha*, and drew in great breath of the sweet, fresh air. Then with both hands shading her eyes she watched the slowly tinging sky, as one might look upon a picture. She pointed across the bay.

"Over there is what?"

"Mountain," said the runner, briefly.

"Oh! Mount Tomi, is it not?"

His voice was complaining.

"Honorable miss hired me to bring her to the village. This waiting was not part of the bargain."

She could not understand his muttering English.

"What are those flat, white spaces on the hills?"

"Rocks. Tombs."

"Oh, and who——"

She broke off, startled by the venomous expression of the runner. He had approached her closer, and now held out a heavy hand. The knuckles were hard and gnarled, and she became somewhat pale.

"You pay me!" said the man in an unnaturally hoarse voice.

"Pay you!" she faltered. "Why, of course. I—I intended to."

"You make me wait," he snarled.

"I lose customers, one, two, mebbe ten. No get back to Sendai before tree hour. You pay me! I go no further."

"You want me to pay in advance?" she asked.

"*Hoom!*" he grunted.

She put her hand to the little leather bag at her waist; but did not open it. Her horrified eyes were fixed upon the greedy ones watching the trembling hand on the purse. The runner's expression was involved. In it she read the sudden intention of the thief.

She threw one quick, startled glance about her. She had often laughed at grewsome tales of the deeds of these unprincipled wretches. With her strong, athletic, young womanhood, she could not imagine how men so small could attack one of a race so much larger in size. But now she looked fearfully at the thick, heavy hands, the muscular shoulders and limbs, and she knew here was a strength with which size had nothing to do.

All the money she possessed in the world lay in that little bag at her waist. She had intended to deposit it in some Sendai bank. It had been too early when they arrived.

Becoming conscious of the fact that the man was approaching her stealthily by inches, she began to tremble vio-

lently. Then something heavy and huge fell upon her hand on the bag, and she felt the clutch of terrible fingers, with nails as long and sharp as the claws of a cat. Desperately, wildly, she struggled a moment. She felt the straining at her waist, the breaking away of the little bag, then a crash and the ringing clink of coin falling upon pebble stones. As the bag fell to the ground the gold flew out, scattering and rolling. There were no bills, for she had foolishly changed her money into coin in Tokio.

As in a nightmare, like one paralyzed and unable to help herself, she saw that horrible form scrambling. She clutched her throat with her two bruised hands. Then a piercing cry burst from her lips and rang out through the silence, finding a terrifying echo in the hills. After that she heard dim sounds, the crashing apart of bushes, the sounds of running feet, and then she fell forward on her face, covering a remnant of the money.

The runner hastily thrust what money he had been able to seize into the bosom of his robe, then without pausing to look in the direction of the hill, down which he heard and felt the rush of hastening feet, he turned about and sped like the wind along the highway which led back to Sendai.

A moment later a young Japanese sprang upon the beach and paused in irresolute horror by the side of the unconscious girl. His first impulse was to pursue and punish the thief, but something in the helpless, limp attitude of the girl caused him to hasten to her at once. She had fallen face downward, her arms spread out as though she unconsciously had sought to seize and protect something beneath her. Her hands were badly bruised, one of them bleeding and scratched. They were thin, artistic hands, singularly white and expressive, the fingers long and tapering.

The young man gently lifted the girl upward and turned her about on her back. He paused a moment to look at the white face which even in insensibility bore the expression of blind, helpless fear and horror. The features were delicate, the nose and mouth sensitive,

the brow fine and broad. She had a mass of dull brown hair, and strands of it had become loosened about her face by the shock of the fall.

Hastening to the edge of the bay, the young man made a cup out of his two hands, which he filled with water. Then returning to the girl, he dashed the water sharply upon her face, then placed his cold, wet hands on her brow, pressing the temples firmly.

After a moment she stirred, and struggled toward consciousness. Her lips parted. She opened a pair of large gray eyes, and stared up dazedly at the face bending above her. Her hand wandered feebly to her brow, then fell to her side, the mere lifting of it causing her pain. She remembered everything, and nausea swept across her.

Then she was aware of a gentle, low voice above her, a voice speaking in English, yet with a slight accent.

"The lady has met with violence. It is a great pity and misfortune, but the guilty one shall be surely apprehended and punished. Have no further fear."

She raised herself up weakly to a sitting posture, and spoke faintly.

"It won't help matters for me," she said, hopelessly, "for the money is all gone. I don't know what we shall do."

"There is a little left," he said, hesitatingly. She caught her breath hysterically as he stooped and slowly picked up a number of pieces. He did not hand them to her, however, but placed them in his own sleeve, "for safety" he told her, smiling gravely.

She stared out miserably before her.

"The wretch also forgot his *jirikisha*," he said. "It is property, and worth somewhat."

She looked at the vehicle in dull thought.

"Are you strong enough—that is, do you think it would be asking too much to—to assist me into—it?"

"Strong enough!" He blushed boyishly. Then he arose from his kneeling posture beside her, and she saw he was quite tall, and she smiled faintly at the wounded pride reflected in his face. She took his extended hand simply, and permitted him to help her into the *jir-*

*rikisha*. She was surprised to see him go forward toward the shafts. Pausing between them he looked back at her.

"Where am I to take you?" he asked, simply.

Her head had fallen languidly against the back of the carriage. She lifted it slowly, while she pressed her slim, bruised hands together.

"We had rented a little cottage," she said, "but——"

"It is—where?"

"On the estate of the Marquis Date. We rented a little cottage they called Plum Blossom." Her voice arose piteously. "But we can't take it now. We can't take it now."

She wrung her hands in anguish.

"And why not?" he asked, quietly.

"Because we have not the money."

"But the rent is very small."

"Yes. It was why we came here. We are so poor, and we could not afford to live in the open ports, and our little income comes from a small Japanese legacy. We thought we could live here cheaply, and I could work at the same time. I—I am supposed to be an artist." She laughed drearily. "But now," she said, "we can't even afford the fifteen yen a month. We'll have to get back to Tokio somehow, and maybe I can get work more practical there."

"But the rent of the Plum Blossom cottage is only five yen," he said, slowly.

"Why, no, for the agent in Tokio told us——"

"Fifteen yen is a mere figure to name to foreigners. The Marquis Date will not charge the stranger more than the native. Rent is very cheap in Japan."

"Only five yen," she repeated, red fever spots appearing in her cheeks. "How much—how much did that—that man leave me?"

"I will see."

She noticed half absently that after he had counted the money he had taken from one sleeve he dipped into the other. Coming to her side he laid the money in her lap. Her eyes widened as she counted. She raised a blank face to his.

"But," she said, "he—he has not taken any, then."

"No?" Her companion's face, was coldly impassive.

"There might be a few sen gone, or even a yen or two, but scarcely anything. Oh, this is indeed unexpected."

He lifted the shafts.

"Shall we start now," he asked, smiling a trifle at the new light in her face.

"No, wait a minute. I have a few questions to ask you."

He bowed slightly.

"You are a resident here, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"And you really know that five yen only is the rent of this cottage?"

"Yes—five yen."

"How fortunate we are. Is it near to the Date palace?"

"Not very far."

"We have heard so much of this Marquis Date. He is a very great and powerful man in Japan, is he not?"

The young man smiled.

"He is very rich," he said.

"And of a very old family—the most interesting of families we were told."

"Yes?"

"Christians, aren't they?"

"So?"

"And philanthropists?"

"Sometimes."

"My head is throbbing. I think I fainted more from fright than anything else. I was fatigued, too, from lack of sleep; but you see, in spite of everything, how interested I am in my future home."

"Yes."

"I know you are a gentleman, and I feel ashamed to allow you to—to pull me to this cottage."

"It will be a pleasure," he said, very seriously, and lifted the shafts preparatory to starting.

"If you do not lean back against the seat," he advised her, "you will not feel so much the jolting."

"Thank you, very much," she returned, gratefully, and he started forward.

Miss Perry Nelson stood with head poised critically on one side, her eyes

half closed. The hand holding her paint brush was on her hip, the other held her chin, after a fashion she had when she paused to study her work. She turned about suddenly toward the little woman sewing comfortably beneath a plum tree.

"I tell you what it is, mamma," she said, "the scenery is *too* beautiful. It—I just can't rise to it."

The mother looked up mildly.

"I think you have done beautifully," she said.

"No—there's something lacking about my work. I don't know what."

She threw herself down on the grass and rested her head against her mother's knee. Her flushed face was uplifted, as though she enjoyed feeling the moving breeze upon it. The mother fondled the girl's head lovingly, softly smoothing back the little rebel curls which blew about in the breeze.

"Well, if my opinion——" she began.

"Your opinion is not worth a pinch of snuff," said the girl, promptly. She knew by the feel of the hand on her brow that the mother was hurt and stirred.

"You," she said, softly, "are the dearest mother in the world—but it's just because you are—just mother, that you couldn't be an unbiased critic of my work. You just can't see my faults."

"But, indeed, there are none, I'm sure—in your painting," replied the mother, with such pardonable assurance. "Now Prof. Loeb himself told me——"

"Yes, I know all about it. And not even Prof. Loeb would have the heart to tell you otherwise. Why, even Gonji praises my stuff *before* you, but when your back's turned—whew!"

"Why, Perry, you don't mean to tell me that Mr. Gonji would deceive me like that."

"Of course he would."

Mrs. Nelson looked only a trifle concerned as she folded her work accurately, and then smoothed it.

"Well, then, I am really disappointed in him," she said.

"Nonsense. He is really a dandy critic, mother, and anything horrid he has to say about my work is always, al-



ways true. If I were a wise person, I ought to profit by it, too. He's better than a hundred teachers hemming and humming over my defects, because he, Gonji, always points out the remedy."

Mrs. Nelson seemed to be thinking about something else. Her hand went back to the girl's head, and she bent over her.

"Perry, Mr. Gonji comes to see you a great deal," she said, suddenly.

"Yes, indeed, he does. We couldn't get on without him, could we, mamma?"

"Do you think *he* will be able to get on without us—you—after a time, Perry?"

"Without me?" said the girl, sitting up, and blinking. "Without me? I never thought of that. Oh, yes, I suppose he will."

"But suppose—he—well—thought he couldn't. Suppose, Perry, Mr. Gonji were in love with you?"

"With me! Mamma!"

She swung around and looked up with wide, amazed eyes at her mother.

"With me!" she repeated. "Why, what would he be in love with *me* for?"

"And why not?"

"Why? Because nobody ever gets in love with me. The idea! I'm a natural born spins—bachelor girl. Besides, he's a Japanese. The whole thing's a joke, mother."

Mrs. Nelson sighed.

"Well, dear, I'm very much afraid that the poor boy really does care for you?"

"Absurd! He's Japanese—Japanese, and me—I—I'm an American woman."

"Well," said the older and wiser lady, stubbornly, "it's my opinion that the Lord put the same kind of hearts in the Japanese as he did in the Americans."

She arose and shook the pieces of lint and thread from her skirt.

"What would you like for lunch?" she asked, irrelevantly.

"Wait a minute." Perry had arisen also, and was standing in her path. "You don't really mean what you've been saying, mother, about Gonji?"

Mrs. Nelson looked at her daughter's face, then hesitated.

"I may have been mistaken," she said. "But——"

"That 'but' speaks volumes," said the girl, solemnly. "You actually and really mean it, I see. Well! I'm going to sit here a while and cogitate upon it."

"He's a real nice boy," said the mother, "and quite handsome in his way, too. He's splendidly educated, too. He told me he had been to an American college."

"Yes—Hamilton College."

"And his people, I'm sure, must be very fine indeed. He seems to be connected in some way with the Date family, for he's always at their place, and you know how very, very exclusive they are. Their agent treats him with so much deference."

She sighed, and again hesitated, looking at her daughter somewhat wistfully.

"Oh, Perry," she said, "what a God-send it would be if some rich man would——"

"Marry me!" added the girl, derisively. "Mamma, in our wildest dreams we never thought of that, did we? Who ever dreamed of me—my person—being of market value. Ha, ha! Heu!"

Her mother regarded her, sadly.

"And why not?" she asked, stubbornly. "You are as attractive as other girls, and a million times cleverer."

"I'm not the sort, that's why," the girl snapped, with a trace of ill humor; "and what's more, Gonji—this little Jap—isn't the sort either. There, run along, matchmaker."

Mrs. Nelson turned toward the house, then paused after a few steps.

"Mr. Gonji is coming up the heights now," she said, quietly. "Shall we keep him for lunch?"

"Well, leave us alone a moment, will you?"

"Of course."

Perry sat down on a moss-grown stone, and clasping her hands about her knees, she stared out before her reflectively.

"I've half a mind," she said, speaking softly to herself, "to ask him point-

blank about it. It's different with him, of course. It's not as if he were an ordinary ma—American."

A few moments later she had arisen to return the low bow of her Japanese lover. She had not known that he was her lover, but he had never for a moment considered himself otherwise.

"Mr. Gonji," she said, with her eyes full upon his face, "you know I'm a perfectly frank and open girl, and I'm not accustomed to keep things to myself."

He appeared puzzled at her words, but smiled slightly.

"Now, mother says you're in love—in love, you understand—with me, and I want to ask you—are you?"

He flushed to the roots of his hair. His dark, poetic eyes enlarged and fairly shone. But he simply bowed his head, dumbly. She went a step nearer to him, and watched his face curiously.

"Answer me, please. Is it true?"

"Yes, it is true," he said, simply.

She started and caught her breath. When she spoke, her words came slowly, almost forcedly.

"You know—it is all very impossible. You are Japanese and I American. We belong to—to almost antagonistic races."

"Love knows no race," he said, softly, and turned his eyes from her face to look out dreamily at the bay.

"Nobody," she said, "ever made love to me before—that is, nobody ever told me he cared for me before. I am not a man's woman exactly. At college—I am a Wellesley girl, you know—I was one of the few girls who didn't have—well, admirers, sweethearts, beaux."

He did not interrupt her, and she continued somewhat breathlessly.

"Not that I was disliked, but I just simply didn't attract men. I was rather—clever, yes, I really was—considered so. Then, I'm not a beauty."

He turned and looked at her fully.

"To me you are the most beautiful being on earth. I thought so that first time I gazed upon you when you were unconscious and helpless. I have thought so ever since, dear lady."

She blushed girlishly, and did really look very pretty.

"Well, but other people don't think so. Maybe, though, I never had much of a chance to show off what little—looks—I might have. But, anyhow, I always was thought a plain, little body at home, you know."

"But you have soul."

"No-o," dubiously. "At least, I'm not so sure about that. Then, you know, I'm not very young. Maybe I'm older than you are."

"I am twenty-eight," he said.

"And I am twenty-eight, too," she said, smiling.

"That is good."

Her eyes were troubled.

"Mr. Gonji," she said, "you won't let this make any difference in our friendship, will you?"

He looked at her pleadingly.

"If you will only permit our friendship to continue," he said.

"Oh, I shall be glad, glad," she said, quickly.

"And I will never bother you or speak to you again about my love for you," he said, slowly, "but I will continue to adore you in silence. You will permit that, will you not?"

"Why, I—I couldn't very well prevent it, could I?" she answered, and wondered angrily why her voice trembled.

He moved to her work on the easel, and looked at it from different distances, his arms crossed over his breast.

"It's atrocious, isn't it?" she asked, forgetting everything now in her anxiety for his opinion.

"It is too exact," he said. "It is too, too western in tone. You must not copy nature's colors so realistically. Now, a Japanese artist would convey in a few brushes an impression rather—an ideal picture of such a landscape. You have made a photograph. The color is too heavy upon your cherry blossoms—see, from a distance how flaky, how cloudy even they really appear. Nature herself wraps about them a soft, gauzy veil which only the Japanese artist seems to see. There is mystery, illusion in such a picture."

She turned the canvas with its face to the easel.

"There, don't look at it. Some day maybe I will be able to see with the eye of a Jap——" She broke off abruptly, and colored warmly. "Come, I hear the lunch bell tinkling. You are the apple of mamma's eye, and she's bound to have something good for you."

He detained her a moment.

"I want you to go with me somewhere to-morrow," he said, in a low voice.

"Where?"

"Across the bay. I want to show you—something."

"Oh, all right. To-morrow, then."

The following day they crossed in a little *sampan* to the opposite side of the bay. Perry had never been across before. Her own side had kept her sufficiently occupied in exploration, for here were a thousand places of historical interest.

The opposite shore had always appeared to her vague and distant, an unexplored, unattainable, mountainous, forest region. She was surprised to find excellent roads leading up from the shore to the hills and mountain above. It pleased her, too, that Gonji had thoughtfully arranged for *jinrikishas* to meet them, and so the journey upward was quite delightful, with two stout runners to pull each vehicle.

They wound in and out of paths about the mountain, along through a wooded path by the side of a beautiful brook, and then suddenly they came to an iron and stone-arched gate. Passing through this, they entered what appeared to be an exquisitely-cultivated park. On either side of the long, winding path immensely tall bamboos arose to a great height, meeting at the top.

Perry decided that they had arrived at the private estate of some wealthy Japanese, and she was pleased and deeply interested. Leaning forward, she looked about her curiously.

Suddenly a strange sight burst upon her view. The path ran around a green, closely-cut lawn, in the center of which was a marble fountain, and facing this lawn was a large, stone house, plainly of English architecture and

build. The girl regarded it in amazement.

The runners pulled up abruptly before the front of the house. Gonji jumped down swiftly from his *jinrikisha* and, hastening to the girl, assisted her to alight. He was very grave and pale, and for some reason Perry became tongue-tied, and found herself unable to question him.

Almost dazed, she allowed him to lead her into the house. They passed through the wide, cool hall, with its heavy English furnishings, and the dark paintings upon the wall seeming almost weird in the yellow light that flowed in through the opened door.

Still leading her, though he barely touched her arm, they came to the dining-room, and she saw the table was set for two. She dropped into a chair, and he deliberately sat opposite her.

"Whose house is this?" she asked, in a strained voice.

"Mine," he said.

"How long," she said, "have you—owned this—house?"

"It is eight years old. I ordered it built the year I entered the American college. It was built by Americans for me."

She gasped, and stared at him in bewilderment.

"But you don't actually live here?"

"No."

"Then *why* did you build it?"

"Listen. Eight years ago I made up my mind that some day I would marry an American girl. I built this house for her."

"Oh!"

"I have been waiting," he said, "eight years. Think of it."

She caught her breath.

"But why did you wait?"

"I had not met the one. Don't mistake me. It was not merely an American girl I wanted. I am not foolishly enamored of your race. I simply knew that some day I *would* love a girl who would be American."

"And you built this house in anticipation?"

"Yes."

"But how could you think that even

if you cared for her, she would reciprocate your affection?"

"I did not think it," he said.

"Then was it not a perfectly useless undertaking?" she asked, in an almost despairing voice.

"No. One has a little imagination, Miss Perry. I thought this way. I will erect this house for the woman I will love. If she will not accept me for her husband, I shall at least have this monument for her. So, when the other day you told me my love for you was an impossible thing, I wanted to bring you here for once—just once, Miss Perry. When you are gone, I shall think of you just as you are now—sitting in the house I built for you. I shall wander through the rooms and imagine you are with me—married to me, and sometimes when I close my eyes, I will feel your presence and see your face."

She arose from her seat with a little stifled cry.

"I'm so *real*, Mr. Gonji," she said. "You mustn't, mustn't make a spirit—a ghost of me." She actually shivered.

He smiled, faintly.

"And," she continued, falteringly, "I don't like your house at all. It is oppressive, ghostly. I love the beautiful little Japanese houses infinitely better. I would rather live in one of them. It is lonesome and chilly here, and if you don't—don't take me home I shall become hysterical."

He sprang to his feet, remorse depicted in all his lineaments. He hastened to her side.

"Oh, Miss Perry, I am a fool-brute."

"Don't call yourself names. I don't know what's the matter with me. I feel choking, that's all."

"Let us go out. The sun is everywhere. It is better company than the shadow of such a house."

On the veranda he paused irresolutely by the door, then suddenly turned and inserted a key in the lock.

"I have closed it," he said to her, simply.

Her eyes were full of tears.

"And promise me, please do, Mr. Gonji, that you will not come here—when I am gone."

"It was my fancy," he said, sadly.

"You live with your people now, don't you?" she questioned, timidly. "You have brothers and sisters?"

"I am an only child."

"But your parents——?"

"I have a mother, the Lady Date."

"You—are—a Date?" she said, slowly.

He bowed his head.

"The last Marquis of Date," he said, somberly.

She stood perfectly still, and stared at him. Strange thoughts rushed through her mind. The Marquis Date was their landlord, that strange, wonderfully-kind landlord whom they had never seen. This, then, was the secret of the strange drop in the rent of the cottage as first quoted by the Tokio agent. This, then, was the reason for the service of a dozen coolies sent by courtesy of the Marquis Date to lay out and till for them the land which went with the house. He, this simple Mr. Gonji, who had drawn her like a common *jinrikisha* runner to her new home that first day, was that landlord whom they had fallen into the habit of blessing, because of his many favors.

She looked out vaguely at the opposite shore, and she could see from where she stood the white tombs of the great Date family shining out spectrally in the yellow light.

"It is the most wonderful family in Japan," she said, hardly aware that she was speaking.

"I will take you home now, Miss Perry, if you will allow me," he interrupted her troubled thoughts, gently.

Her eyes were bright with tears. She had never realized how sentimental she could feel. She spoke softly, with her wet face upraised.

"I think you are the noblest, grandest man I ever met. I can't—can't imagine any position higher, better, than that of your wife—if—if you still do really want me."

He took her hands softly in his own. His eyes widened as they searched her face eagerly, uncertainly. Then suddenly he slipped to his knees and put his face passionately against her hands.