

THE DIARY OF DEWDROP

By Onoto Watanna

THE fifth day of the eighth moon of the thirty-third year of Meiji.

"On the day of my betrothal, I shall begin a little journal of my insignificant life." This, I many a time told myself. "By that time," I thought, "I shall have ceased to be a child, and must exchange the laugh of girlhood for the serious problems of the woman."

To-day I am fifteen years old, and to-day I was betrothed. Pray, why is it, then, my honorable diary, that save for the tears I have wept this day my heart is still the heart of a child?

I can remember right back to my seventh birthday. I was then a tiny, small creature, with a flower ornament in my hair, and a red crêpe kimono tied about with a purple *obi*. My father took me by the hand, and together we crossed the fields until we came to the old-fashioned, but always beautiful, home of Count Kaneko. His little boy, Ido, who was but three years older than I, ran out to meet us, and pretended to chase me, so that I hid behind my father's *hakama*, and peeped at him with shy, glad eyes, for even at that early age I loved Kaneko Ido. All morning, we two played joyfully together, whilst our fathers smoked and talked.

On our way home, I begged my father to bring me more often to the Kaneko home, and I remember well the words with which my father answered me.

"Yes, little Dewdrop," he said, "you shall play as much as you wish with Ido. Some day, I shall give you to him for a bride."

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I danced with delight at the prospect.

And the years of our childhood passed like a glad song, and each of my succeeding birthdays, and, indeed, all the days between, were spent with my playmate and little lover, Ido. But, one day, a dreadful thing happened. My dear old father died, and trouble thereafter took up its abode with us; for, scarcely three years later, my beautiful mother married again, and I became the honorable stepdaughter of Yoshimori Genjiro, who was proud and cold and stern. From that day to this, I was kept under surveillance, for my stepfather disapproved of freedom in the life of a young girl; he banished Ido from our house, declaring that as he was a boy he was no fit companion for me, and bade me cultivate such qualities as humility, meekness, obedience, grace and gentleness. Shortly afterward, Ido left the town to attend some big college in Kumamoto; but he wrote me a sweet love-letter before leaving, swearing that he would return some day, and claim me as his little bride, as our fathers had promised.

And I waited days and weeks and months, and then years for him, but he came not back to me, though I prayed to all the gods that they would give me back again my little high-born lover.

Yesterday, my august stepfather said to me:

"The honorable Shinobu family have formally asked for thy unworthy hand to be given in marriage to their honorable son, Shinobu Taro. Tomorrow, you shall accompany me to their august palace, where the family

desire to hold a look-at meeting with you, subsequent to the betrothal."

"But," protested my mother, with some surprise, and despite her respect and fear of her lord, "the Shinobu family are of low caste, and Dew-drop's father was a descendant of one of the proudest families in Japan."

"Just because our family is of the nobility," said my father, coldly, "that is the reason the Shinobu family wish to be allied with us. They own hundreds of rice-fields, and are the richest parvenus in the country. Our poverty is unbecoming to our rank. Our unworthy daughter shall restore us to our rightful splendor."

After making this long speech, my stepfather glared at us icily, and then added, turning directly to me:

"You are a very fortunate girl."

I bowed, obediently, before him, murmuring my filial submissiveness to his will; but to myself I was saying over and over again:

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" For I was thinking of Ido. And, when my august stepfather gave me permission to return to my room, I crept from his presence like one whose spirit is broken, and I fell down before the little shrine in my room, and, stretching my hands imploringly upward to the pitying face of Kwannon, I begged that she would have mercy upon me.

This morning, my old dear servant, Madame Summer, awoke me with her weeping. She had come to dress me for the odious meeting which I was to have that day with my future husband. The poor old woman wept bitterly, for she feared that, like my mother, I might marry some one who was taciturn and unkind.

"Do not weep, dear my old friend," I consoled her, in my sweetest voice; "wherever I go, I shall have you always with me. Now, dress me, and be sure, dear Madame Summer, that you make me very beautiful, for this is my betrothal morn, and, besides, I am fifteen years old to-day." And with that I fell to laughing; but my mirth ended in tears.

Shinobu Taro, my future lord, lives in a big, ugly palace, overcrowded with costly new furniture. His mother has cruel eyes. I shall be her slave, doubtless, when once I become her daughter-in-law. His father has a big, coarse, red face, and little, keen eyes that look at me in the same calculating fashion in which, I am sure, he regards the wares in his stores. Shinobu Taro himself is perfumed and greased all over, just as if he were some geisha girl or actor; and he has sly, proprietary eyes, like his father, and a cruel mouth, like his mother. He paid me extravagant compliments as to my beauty and virtue, but his compliments were as ungraceful as himself. We exchanged marriage presents, I giving him a sword of one of my ancestors, and he presenting me with a priceless kimono of the brightest red and yellow shades. Besides this, his family surfeited us with countless other gifts, so that we were forced to borrow five of their servants to carry them home with us.

After all the foolish compliments had been exchanged between us, we returned to our home, my stepfather in high spirits, my mother meek and timid as ever, and I in pale silence.

It is raining now, and Summer rain always makes me melancholy and sad. Such sweet, soft, slow, oppressive rain! I opened a sliding door of my chamber, and looked out at it with a miserable face. My little garden, with the drops like tears upon the leaves and flowers, seemed to look up at me pityingly in the twilight, for, despite the rain, mellow sunset had tinged the sky, and it was still quite light.

I suddenly began to weep, in thought that I must so soon leave my dear home, and my tears were like the rain—quiet, subdued, unavailing.

THE NEXT DAY

When I awoke to-day, the morning was tapping at my blinds, so that I opened them wide to receive the air and sunshine. The rain had all passed

away, and the flowers, in their bright dryness, had lost their look of sympathy.

"Ah," I sighed, "they are fickle as a child, whose tears are for the moment only. I will not look at them. They are hard and cold and soulless." And, with that, I was about to close my shades petulantly, when a voice sprang out of the garden, and, from behind an old cherry-tree, a young man's face smiled up at me like the rising sun.

"Good morning, Dewdrop! Won't you come down and play with me? I shall teach you how to fly my old Chinese kite, and, if you are very good, I shall take you out in my small sail-boat, and you will be the daughter of the dragon king, and I the fisher-boy Urashima, and we shall sail away until we find the shores of the island 'where Summer never dies.'"

"Oh, Ido, Ido, Ido! is it really you?" I cried out.

He came close under my window, and blew kisses at me, as he used to do when a little boy. My hair was all about me like a mantle of lacquer, or a cloud about the moon, and I knew my cheeks were flaming like the poppies in my garden.

"Ah!" said Ido, softly, "you are more beautiful than ever, my little love. You are the sun-goddess! Behold me! I worship thee!"

"Hush!" I whispered; "do not joke, dear Ido, now; but tell me, where did you come from?"

"Oh, dear my little friend," he cried, in a joyous voice, "I have dropped down at your feet from another planet."

"No, no, pray do not laugh at me," I beseeched, so earnestly that he quickly changed his tone.

"Well, I have just returned from a long sojourn in the West. I have been in Germany, in France, in England, and even in America. And I have come back now to the Land of God and Home and Beauty, and—to you, Dewdrop!"

"Me?" I whispered, wistfully; and then I heard my stepfather's voice,

and all of a sudden I remembered everything, and my teeth began to chatter with fright and misery.

"Go! go away quickly, dear Ido! Here comes my august stepfather, and he will surely kill me if he catches me."

But Ido stood his ground fearlessly and bravely. "And why, pray, may I not speak to my old playmate?" he asked.

"Because—because—yesterday I was—because—oh, Ido, just because!" I answered him, for I could not bring the words to tell him of my betrothal.

I closed the shutters sharply in his face. A few minutes later, I made a little peephole with my finger through them, and peered out, with bated breath. He was still waiting there, his head thrown back, his arms folded across his breast. He looked like the statue of a young god.

Just then, Madame Summer entered my chamber, and I rushed to her and frantically besought her to get rid of the boy, but to tell him nothing of my betrothal. I would tear her to pieces, I promised her, if she did so.

Later in the day, when I drove out in my *jinrikisha* to go to the city to purchase material for my wedding garments, Ido stepped from out a small wood close to our house, and, stopping the runner with a peremptory voice, he spoke to me distantly and proudly.

"You have changed much, my old friend," he said. "It is true that your beauty of face has increased with the years, but how is it with the beauty of your soul? I do not recognize you in your new pride, which ill becomes my little friend Dewdrop."

I leaned far out of the vehicle. "No, no, dear Ido!" I breathed, so softly that the runner might not hear me; "I am the same little Dewdrop to you, always and ever. I pray that you will think kindly of me."

His face lighted up gloriously in a moment, and he stood aside for my runner to pass, with a courtly, graceful bow for me.

ONE WEEK LATER

All day long, I have been sewing and embroidering on my wedding garments. My fingers are all pricked and sore, and my mother declares I have grown clumsy and stupid. She does not know that I am trembling with excitement and nervousness. For, oh, that voice in the early morning!

"Dewdrop!" he calls softly, with his lips right close to the thin, partitioned window; and then again, a little louder, "Dewdrop!"

I shrink back behind a screen, quivering. If my august stepfather should awake and stroll through the garden! How good were the gods to place the trees so close together!

"Dewdrop!" How sweet and winning his voice is! How different from the guttural, stupid sound of that hideous Shinobu Taro's!

"Dewdrop! Are you awake yet?" Silence a brief time, and then: "I have been waiting here since sunrise. I thought I heard you move. Pray, if you are indeed awake, will you not come out to me a little moment only?"

Again silence.

"Just one glance at your face!"

He waits in vain for even one little word or sign from me. Then, he taps hard on the metal gable.

"Dewdrop! Little Dewdrop!"

I creep from the room with stealthy step. I fling myself, sobbing, into Madame Summer's arms.

"Oh, go to him, dear Madame Summer! Tell him the honorable lie—that I am away visiting—that I am ill—that I am dead, even!"

Such a long, heavy day! I thought that the sun would never, never go down, and that it was making mock of my misery. Every stitch I sewed pricked not only my fingers but my heart. A few tiny red drops fell on some silken *omeshi*.

My mother scolded me, shrilly. "Stupid girl! That is no way to hold the honorable needle. Is all my teaching to come to nothing? See how your fingers are bleeding!"

"It is my heart!" I said, within me.

Twice to-day, I have applied my eye to the little hole in my shutter. I do not see him, but I feel his presence. He is somewhere near me. What does he think of me? What can he think?

To-night, I coaxed Madame Summer to go out with me for a little stroll in the moonlight. As we were stealing from the house, my stepfather, who was drinking, heard us. He called out, drowsily:

"Where are you going, my honorable daughter?"

He addresses me so since my betrothal. He used to call me, "unworthy daughter."

"For just a little maiden walk with the stars, dear my honorable father," I returned; "Madame Summer accompanies me."

"It is well," he answered, still more drowsily.

Ido followed behind us all the way. Some naughty spirit caught hold of my tongue, and I rattled on continuously to my old nurse, laughing merrily at the smallest provocation, and making much fun and nonsense at all things.

Ido said never a word to us; he merely followed close behind. I wonder whether he feared old Madame Summer; or was it his honorable respect for little insignificant me?

A WEEK LATER

I dreamed all night long of the morning when I should hear that voice calling me. From the sheer force of my dreams, I awoke before daylight, and there I lay for what seemed an interminable length of time, waiting and listening. Not even the tiniest whisper of my name! Three times I arose, and crept to the window, and peered out, wistfully, and three times I returned to my couch, there to toss and turn and complain. "Why does he not come any more? He has not been near me since that night when he followed me, and I laughed and mocked and made light of all things."

Finally, I drowsed off again, know-

ing I should awaken if he but breathed my name without. But, when I awoke, there was no sound. Again, I crept to the window. No boyish face was without to welcome me with eager, beseeching words of love. But something lay on my window ledge—something that made my heart stop beating, because of its rapture and pain commingled. It was a huge bunch of cherry blossoms, skilfully and carefully arranged. I knew their message. I do had resorted to this, the old, sweet method of asking me to become his wife.

With trembling fingers, I slid back my blinds, and, bending over the flowers, buried my face in them. Then, I drew them close into my arms. As I took them in, he came out from behind the cherry-tree, his face ecstastic with hope and happiness.

"See, ah, see, dear Madame Summer!" I cried, waking her, as usual; "his flowers for me! You understand?"

She took hold of them sharply. "Go put them right back, quickly!" she said. "You foolish girl! Do you not understand that he will conclude that you have accepted him?"

"Ah, but he has already seen me take them in," I declared, clinging to my happiness, piteously.

She took the flowers from me, scoldingly, and herself replaced them.

TWO DAYS LATER

To-day, he placed a scroll where the flowers were. How could I resist taking it in? I did so, laying it flat on the floor, as my shaking hands would have made it impossible to read it otherwise.

It was a poem. My beauty, grace, goodness, virtue, was its theme.

I piteously besought Madame Summer to let me keep it. But, on the threat that she would tell everything to my stepfather otherwise, I was forced to relinquish this treasure also to her. She relentlessly replaced it. She says he will understand now, as he has been refused twice.

"But once more," I encourage my-

self, "yes, three times, of course, he must ask me."

THE NEXT DAY

I sat up all night long. Madame Summer, too, came into my room, meaning to be kind with her firmness. She fears something dreadful will happen to me.

I took in his fresh flowers. I knew it would be the last time. I hid them from Madame Summer. If she finds them, she will again replace them. Then, he will become discouraged. Maybe, he will then go far away, and never return to me again.

THE NEXT DAY

To-morrow, I am to be married. All my friends in the village come up to the house to visit me now each day, and they say pleasant and flattering things to me. They actually envy me! Me!

I have gone to my blossoms fifty times to-day, and have kissed them, and wept over them.

I wonder whether Shinobu will permit me to keep just this one little bunch of flowers? Maybe, if I go down humbly on my knees to him, and beg him to grant this little favor, he may allow me to keep just one little blossom.

I am keeping this, my little diary, in the sleeve of my kimono. On my wedding-day, I shall write "*Finis*" at the end of it; for, like my life, will it not have indeed ended? Poor little short-lived diary! Poor little short life!

THE WEDDING-DAY

Early this morning, Madame Summer found my flowers. I threw myself prostrate at her feet, just as if she were my almighty mistress, instead of my servant. She raised me up tenderly, and tried to console me. I clung hysterically to my flowers.

"If you take them from me, Madame Summer, I will kill you, and sell your soul to some wicked fiend in a horrible pass to the hades."

She wrested the flowers from my hands, despite my threats and entreaty. Then, she threw them out of the window.

"Wild girl!" she said; "you will ruin yourself!"

Down-stairs, in the presence of my august stepfather, I tried to summon all my hereditary courage and filial obedience to his commands. But, as he spoke to me in his kindest voice, I kept saying to myself, over and over again:

"Now, Ido has just found the flowers; he has just picked them up!"

"You will be a great lady," said my stepfather.

"Maybe, he is weeping," I thought.

"And you must not forget your honorable parents."

"Perhaps, he is cursing me." And, at this thought, I all but fainted as I kept bowing my assents to my stepfather.

"Dear my honorable parent, will you permit me to pluck with my own hands a little bunch of flowers in a field only a short distance away?"

"Have your own wish in all things to-day," said my stepfather, graciously.

I tried to stay my wild feet, which were longing to fly from his sight immediately. I felt faint as I reached the little gate; but, when it banged to behind me, all my courage returned. I told myself that I was the daughter

of a long line of brave men, notable for their fearlessness and courage. Should I, then, not be worthy of them?

Where was Ido? That was my next thought.

Ah, I could see him slowly climbing the hill, his flowers hanging sadly in his hand.

I ran like the wind after him, and I called, panting as I ran:

"Ido! Ido!"

He turned like a flash, and, like a flash, his pale face grew suddenly luminous.

"Anata!" (Thou!)

"The flowers!" My breath failed me.

"Ah, you have returned them again?" he inquired, sadly.

"No, no, no, dear Ido!" I cried, frantically. "Give them to me! I must have them! Don't you know, Ido? My august stepfather is marrying me to-day to Shinobu Taro, whom I hate and loathe. I have come to you——"

"Ah-h-h!" he said, slowly; "I understand now."

His serious face lighted up. "Dew-drop," he whispered, "yesterday, I purchased a ticket on the steamer *Belgic*, against the event of your refusing me. Will you go with me now to America?"

"To the end of the world, and beyond!" I said.



ECONOMY

FIRST DOCTOR—Well, did old Miserly survive the operation?

SECOND DITTO—No; he refused to undergo it. He said he could save money by dying.



Gossip—They say that Blanky was pecked to death by that wife of his.

UGLYMAN—I'd like to see any woman peck at me twice!

Gossip—She'd have to be mighty hungry if she did.