



His Interpreter

By Onoto Watanna

ILLUSTRATED BY C. ALLAN GILBERT

PART II.

LONG after the clerks had closed their desks and ink-stands for the day, and until the sun began to sink to rest, the American remained in his office absently glancing over stray newspapers, though taking no note of what he read. His house adjoined his office, and his man had been over twice to call him to his supper. At the second call Arthurs locked his heavy desk, and with the keys jingling in his hand passed absently out. But that evening he did not visit the tea-houses on the hill after supper. Instead he remained quietly indoors. His thoughts kept wandering to Inouye and his betrothed. He could not help being interested in the girl whom Inouye had been in such a hurry to defend from the imputation that she was a "female." He smiled whimsically as he thought of this, and wondered whether she would be happy after marriage with Inouye.

"If she is like the rest of them she will be," he thought, half scornfully. He would not acknowledge to himself that the reason why he did not go to the tea-houses now was because of Inouye's half-contemptuous allusion to the geisha and dancing girls. It ruffled him when he recalled Inouye's remark, "But you have had no acquaintance with my countrywomen." After all, that was true. All the Japanese women he had met had been dancing and tea-house geisha girls. He had thought them charming. He had not often come in contact with the daughters of the nobles; indeed, he could not recollect ever having seen any of them. They did not live in the city, as a rule, or when they did they lived in great seclusion, seldom frequenting the street save on their way to the hills and mountains, when they rode past in graceful robes in their kurummas. There were some Japanese women who worked in offices and hospitals, he had heard, but he had never spoken to any of them, and in appearance they reminded him of English and American women, as they wore European clothes, and most of them had been educated abroad. Arthurs felt a desire to know something of the real Japanese ladies of whom Inouye had spoken.

THAT same night the American had a visit paid him at quite a late hour. He was preparing to retire for the night when the light tapping of his man on his wall made him push back the folding fusuma. He took the card and read the name, "Mr. I. Takamine." The American tossed the card into a tray, and in a few minutes was with his guest.

The old man was sitting sadly and forlornly on one of the American's rather high chairs, and because he was such a very little man he looked in the half-light almost like a child. After the usual exchange of compliments the old man drew from under his hakama a document. It was the betrothal contract Inouye had made out that afternoon. In trembling voice the old man inquired as to whether he had anything to expect from his investment soon, and upon the assurance of the American, said in halting English, "Then can this not worry me."

The American scanned the contract curiously, but as he was unacquainted with the language was unable to make out what it meant until Takamine said:

"You will understand that I want marry my daughter to some one that I approve. I approve this young man, but I must also approve what can give. He is poor, and my daughter not understand to be poor. I thing that if I go lose my money on this invest I will marry my daughter to Mr. Inouye. And if I not lose my invest I keep her with me, and marry her to some man with much rich also. So I come ask you that I lose my invest."

The American listened to him gravely, and when he had finished speaking he said:

"But Inouye is hardly a poor man. He is practically the manager of the whole business here, and is, in fact, receiving quite a large salary. He might make your daughter a very good husband. He is honest, conscientious, and—but you doubtless know his character and good qualities. His prospects are good at present."

The old man's face brightened.

"If you lig' that my daughter marry with Inouye—"

"No," the American interrupted, a trifle provoked. "I merely wanted to explain things to you. You see, when Inouye first came to me he was poor enough. His services have been invaluable to me. The road has kept growing, and I have advanced him considerably; and I judge from the clever way in which he looks after the work he is in a fair way to promotion right along."

Takamine looked very much impressed, as the American's words always went a great way with all who knew him. He rose to his feet, bowing politely and humbly.

"I am thousand thanks to you until before I die," he said. "I shall consider—the proposition?"

The American smiled pleasantly.

"If the young people like each other I wouldn't stand in their way," he said, feeling quite fatherly and benevolent.

The Japanese's polite eyes shifted ever so little. "My daughter not lig', but that I lig' I make her that she lig'."

As he passed out, bowing at every step, the American felt a sudden shiver at his heart.

"Poor little thing!" he said, half vaguely, to himself.



"He turned and took Haru in his arms"

"I suppose he'll barter her to the highest bidder." The thought made him restless through the night. He felt an instinctive pity and sympathy for Haru, as he remembered how Inouye had refused to give him a direct answer as to whether she cared for him; and now the father had lifted the veil a bit, and he had a conception of the mute rebellion the girl must have shown.

HARU's little heart was very heavy, and there was no gaiety in her smile, which was pathetic and sad. Her father tried to rally her out of her sadness, telling her that soon he was going to betroth her to a young man who was good, fine-looking, of noble parentage, and who

would perhaps give her all the luxuries she had always known. But the girl protested pitifully, declaring she wanted not to be married, and that her heart was set on going to her brothers, and receiving like them a foreign education. Haru belonged to that type of Japanese women rarely seen in Japan save in the homes of the noble and wealthy. Her mother had been of noble parentage, and it was from her the girl inherited her innate modesty and native beauty and grace. Like most Japanese women, she was small; her face was oval, the features very regular, with small mouth, and eyes that had a pathetic, subdued look about them. But her eyes were larger than the average Japanese eye, being wide as the Shizōkū ladies' usually are. Her little hands and feet would have served as artists' models, and the soft, rounded neck that rose gracefully above her kimono was slender, with a grace and strength that made it wonderfully pleasing and attractive. Although she had attended the finest schools for girls she was still wishful for a higher education, which her father had been slow in gratifying owing to his desire to make an early marriage for her. Haru was past eighteen, and quite old enough to marry. Her father spoke to her constantly on the subject, and since his interview with the American, and others he had had since with him and with Inouye, he had ever been urging her to marry Inouye. He loved her very dearly, and did not wish to force her into a marriage that would be obnoxious to her, but he was determined that she should, as soon as he could get her reconciled, become formally betrothed to some one before she reached her nineteenth year.

"He will make a good husband," he told her of Inouye many times a day, and the girl would say:

"But I like not him, my father," which would irritate the old man very much, and he would make harsh answer:

"Who then you like? Who then must I give you to?"

"Not any one, my father," the girl would say, clinging to him. "Let me stay by you, and take care of you when you shall be very old."

But Takamine was stubborn, and would answer, "No! then; because you are fair and my daughter you must marry and bring me more children."

ONE day, when the air was very still, and the cherry-blossoms were falling from the trees, and the very birds hushed their little breaths because of the beauty of the scene, and then thrilled of a sudden with their joy, the American visited at the house of Takamine.

The old man was quite flattered.

for the American had become a very big man in the city, and every one honored and loved him because of his kindness to all. Haru was playing Karutta at the side of the house with a friend, and as the American's tall figure passed up the little garden walk to the house the girls nimbly stepped out of view, though they peeped curiously at him from behind a bank of wistaria and ferns.

Takamine lived quite a good distance from the city. The American was invited in the most polite manner to enter the house and spend the afternoon with the old man indoors. He saw nothing of the daughter, though once or twice he fancied he heard a ripple of laughter in the next room.

Finally he asked his host bluntly whether he could not see Haru. The old man bowed politely, and said she would appear at the dinner-table.

Just when the sun began to tip over the hills some one drew aside the sliding fusuma screens between the rooms, and

the American saw before him a

pretty, bright room and a couple of maids preparing the dinner. His host

bade him enter this room, and as he

passed through he saw a little form clad

in a rose-colored kimono with red flowers in

her hair sitting on a mat. He could not see

her face at first because her head was bending

almost to the floor in her greeting to her father's

guest. The old man introduced them, and once

more the girl's little head almost touched the

ground.

ARTHURS had never before dined at a Japanese private house, though he had now been three years in the country. He had lived like most foreigners who come to the country—half the time at the American hotel, and half the time in his Japanese-American house. As he gravely took his seat on a mat placed for him he saw Haru's face. The eyes were downcast and refused to look at him. The man's heart rose in his throat, for she was very beautiful. From the floor, padded perhaps five feet with soft rice-straw, to the exquisite walls, the rich silk robes of Haru and her father, the dainty china placed before him, Arthurs recognized the home of Japanese wealth. He could not have told what he ate. He had made a solemn resolve to follow the national etiquette and eat all placed before him, and this he did in the most heroic manner. Often through the meal he found his eyes wandering to the girl, as she lifted her little bowl of rice with one hand and daintily manipulated the chop-sticks with the other.

Although Takamine spoke a great deal to him through the meal the girl never once addressed him. Once Arthurs himself addressed her, asking if she had ever met an American lady, and the girl had turned her face to her father, who replied for her, saying that she had had an American teacher once who had taught her the language and physical exercises.

Arthurs found himself wishing to hear her say something, and impatiently wondered to himself whether she was dumb.

After the dinner they retired into the room where he had formerly sat. Then Haru lit sticks of incense in the room, and brought trays with cigarettes for her father and the American. She herself found a seat in the shadow, where the American could not see her well, though he felt that her turn was now come, and that, shaded in her retreat, she was studying and observing him as he sat awkwardly in Japanese fashion.

AFTER this first visit Arthurs came with fair regularity for some time, and soon became a welcome and familiar guest of the house. His persistence in his calls had been more than repaid, for now Haru was permitted to talk a little with him, though always in the presence of her father. She would glide about the room in the prettiest ways, bringing odd, comfortable cushions and wraps for her father and guest to sit on. But the greatest treat the American had was one night when her father had bidden her bring her samisen, and she had played ever so gently on it, and sang to them in the moonlight in a weird, sweet voice, which was plaintive with longing and so subdued that it gave one a suggestion of the woman heart beneath. Arthurs had heard the Japanese geisha-girls sing before, and many of them had sung much like this, but he did not know it, because they had not the same interest and fascination for him, with all their brilliancy, as this gentle little Japanese lady, who obeyed the enforced rules and etiquette of her class.

The American was in love in earnest this time. He forgot all about Inouye, all about the promises he had made to him to become more familiar with the father so that he might have more power in making him take the boy as son-in-law. He knew only that Haru's voice was sweeter than anything he had ever heard, that her little shiny head was prettier than anything he had ever seen, and that she was the most desirable thing on earth.

One day he broached for the first time the subject of the girl's marriage.

"In my country," he said, speaking more for Haru than her father, "the women choose their own husbands just like the men choose their wives. That is," he corrected himself, "they seldom marry any one they don't want to."

The girl's eyes were lowered. Arthurs saw a flush creep over her face, and the little fingers on the samisen trembled.

Haru spoke English very prettily, and for the old man's pleasure they generally conversed in that language.

"Here," said Takamine, with conviction that his own country was wiser, "our daughters marry whom we choose for them."

"Ah, yes. Then I suppose your daughter, Haru-san, will not marry whom she chooses?"

Takamine smiled. "I will try to please her," he said, simply, and the girl's wistful face relaxed.

IT WAS six months since the date on which Inouye had drawn up his betrothal contract and had presented it to Takamine. During this time the American had become an almost daily visitor at Takamine's house, and the old man was quite seriously under obligations to him, for at a time when he found his resources were running down to a low ebb he had half apologetically offered his bonds for sale to the American himself. This Arthurs rather brusquely refused, assuring the old man that the profits would eventually be such that he felt Takamine ought to wait still awhile longer, but knowing of his absolute present need for money he advanced Takamine a sum of money, asking no security therefor whatever. Takamine told Haru that he was under eternal obligations to the American. He knew of only one way in which he felt he could give genuine pleasure to him—that was to grant his request, made some months ago, giving his daughter in marriage to Inouye, the friend of the American. As her father recounted all the kindness he had received from the American, and enlarged on it, Haru answered never a word, but sat very pale and quiet, her eyes looking far out with an expression of longing and sadness in them that the old man could not fathom. When the father asked her if she would not now be a dutiful daughter and help him to fill his obligations, she passively assented, smiling so gently and meekly that the father put his hand lovingly on her head, and said she was ever his dutiful and loving daughter.

TWO mornings later, as the American sat at his desk signing a batch of letters that Inouye had dictated to the stenographer, Inouye, who stood at his elbow, said very softly:

"When you are not much busy I would wish to speak of some private business."

The American pushed the letters aside, and looked up at the young man with his usual kind, attentive smile.

"Well, Inouye, I'm at leisure now," he said, encouragingly.

Inouye looked at him the least bit uneasily, and then began to thank him in the formal words of a Japanese to his benefactor for his kindly offices in his behalf, finally telling the American of his betrothal to Haru. The American did not interrupt him once as he spoke, but the keen eyes of the Japanese saw a gray shadow creep over his face.

When Inouye had finished the American wheeled slowly

around on his chair. He had no word of comment to make. Suddenly he got up abruptly from his seat and crossed to the door. He stood looking out at the endless glow of the Oriental landscape with a sudden tightening of his heart-strings, with a pain that was terrible in its numbness and helplessness. A couple of doves in a neighboring cote were crooning mournfully, and two little geisha-girls waved their hands joyously to him.

He was thinking of Haru, just as Inouye had done three years before, and he had forgotten his interpreter and his work—forgotten all save that the joyous day-dream in which he had reveled ever since that first day he had met her was all passing away, and that life was not worth the living now that it had ceased.

The Japanese watched him with a penetrating look. Perhaps he guessed the truth. He could not restrain the half smile of triumph as he realized how he had worsted the American. A formal betrothal in Japan is almost as binding as a marriage. When the gifts are exchanged in token of engagement the pair live on, each feeling they belong to the other, and as a rule the time is very short between the betrothal and the marriage ceremony.

Inouye did not break in on his master's reverie. On the contrary, he returned to his desk, and started at his work in his usual methodical way. After a time the American also returned to his desk, and the Japanese, glancing sideways at him, saw him nervously fingering a half-withered red flower. It had lain on the American's desk for some days, and no one had removed it.

Later, when Inouye brought some papers and letters to be signed, the American went through them calmly, but his face was quite pale. No word passed between them beyond a few questions and answers about the work. Perhaps the American shrank ever so slightly as his secretary stood by his chair.

EARLY in the afternoon he closed his desk, and passed out of the office with the pale, absent-minded face he had worn all day.

He hailed a kurumma, and jumping into it gave orders to the kurumaya to drive him to Takamine's house.

The American had found no word to say to Inouye, because in his usual generous and happy heart had risen a deep indignation and rage against Inouye. He knew Inouye had left him no grounds to attack him. What could he say? He only knew that he had loved Haru for months now, and for this reason he had sought her out constantly. Inouye knew this, and had taken advantage of it to work on Takamine, and make him believe it was on his behalf the American had singled him out and paid him so much attention.

He thought of little Haru, and how her voice had trembled when she said:

"Japanese ladies *naever* love where they marry."

He had looked in her eyes and whispered, "Promise me, Haru, that you will be an exception."

A cloud had gathered across her face, and she had raised it pitifully to him.

"How can I then help?" she had said, vaguely, and the first tears Arthurs had seen in Japan clouded her eyes, and shone glistening there. Had he misinterpreted that look when he had imagined she had half reproached him, and if she wished to reproach him then did his heart not tell him it was because she knew he loved her?

Takamine was surprised at such an early call, but welcomed his guest as courteously as ever. Haru was nowhere in sight, and the American felt strangely weak and hardly knew himself what he had come for.

"Inouye tells me of his betrothal," he said, abruptly, looking the old man in the face. Takamine's face beamed.

"Ah, yes," he said, bowing his head again and again, and folding his hands in blissful satisfaction. "We are waiting for the brothers to return to the wedding from abroad," he added.

"Does—er—Haru care? Will—a—does she love Inouye?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" answered the old man, hastily, shrewdly conscious that this would please an American.

HIS assent astonished Arthurs, and he hardly knew how to proceed. He looked about the room at the objects that had become so familiar and dear to him, and he felt the same strangling at his heart as when Inouye had broken the news to him. But his pain gave him speech this time.

"I don't believe it," he said, harshly. "She has herself told me repeatedly she did not care for him."

Takamine was trembling.

"My daughter was most rude that she tell you that. I assure that this will be happy marriage that you have helped."

"I helped!" said Arthurs, wildly, walking up and down the room. "In what way? You are all mistaken, Takamine. You have been deceived. I never countenanced the—a—match. I never—I thought Haru—Confound it, she is too good for the beggar! He has deceived all of us in the matter."

The little Japanese gentleman wobbled after him across the matting in trepidation and astonishment.

"But you—you tell me—some months that come—you speak he is good, and for him you ask. For this I marry her with him, because that I like you much and would please."

"It must be stopped, Takamine!" said the young man, hotly, pausing in his walk and looking down at his little host. "Yes," he repeated, "it must be stopped—unless," and his voice wavered, "unless it is true that she—that Haru told you she cared for him."

There was a rustle at the other side of the fusuma, and by the way it was shaking Arthurs knew some one was standing close to it listening. Then a little broken voice trilled out:

"It not true—I not tell that I care."

The ludicrousness of the situation was lost on the American, who had become accustomed to such things in Japan, and knew that any one in the next room in a Japanese house could hear and through small holes see as plainly as if in the same room. He turned and faced the direction of the voice, saying:

"No, Haru, I don't believe you could care for him, after—after all we have said to each other."

Takamine sat on his mat in silent misery and shame.

"What for shall we do?" he said, looking helplessly at the American, who had so thoroughly taken his household by storm; and he added, ambiguously, "Do as you please that you like it or not."

THE American forgot all about Japanese etiquette. He pushed the sliding screen back. There was Haru, standing perfectly still, her back turned to them, an odd little figure with head drooping half in shame, though she showed a strange willingness to stay with them.

The American turned her round, a silent, obedient little figure to his every touch. Then he looked down at her and saw she was weeping.

"Haru," he whispered, softly, "do you love Inouye?"

The girl shook her head violently. Old Takamine came beside her also, and watched the American in a half-fascinated way.

"Who do you love, Haru?"

"The Amerikazan—him I love," she said, scarcely above a whisper, and Arthurs laughed outright in very joyousness.

"You see," he said to the astounded father. "I told you you were mistaken—that Haru did not love Inouye;" and as the girl smiled through her tears he added, very tenderly, "I knew what I was talking about."

A silence eloquent in its sadness and helplessness fell between them. Both Haru and her father were sad and hopeless, but the American's face shone with delight at the girl's confession.

"The thing to be done now," he said, in his usual authoritative way, "is to have this betrothal contract broken at once. Then we'll make a new one for Haru and myself, and as I am to go to America on business soon, I'll take Haru with me, on our honeymoon. Ever hear of a honeymoon, Haru? Then she'll have her heart's desire—seeing foreign lands."

Takamine rocked back and forth in distress.

"If that Inouye will not release—this is most binding."

"He will release," said the American, with a glint in his eyes, stooping over the old man and reassuring him with his usual confidence.

Before leaving them he turned and took Haru in his arms before her father, and raising her little, tearful flower-face, kissed her so tenderly and lovingly on the lips that the girl's face shone with its artless pleasure.

"It's like this," the American said to Inouye a couple of hours later. "Haru does not love you. She *does* love me."

Inouye was perfectly silent. If he felt any indignation he would not let the American see it.

"Will you release her?" said the American, encouragingly.

"No!" said the Japanese.

"Will you tell me why?" said Arthurs, sharply. "Have you any particular affection for her? You have often told me you have not."

The Japanese was dogged, and Arthurs continued:

"Now, I'll tell you, Inouye. I think I know you pretty well. You are too ambitious to have much sentiment in you. You are a first-class man for this company. As one of the directors of the road I can advance you here just as I choose. I want to return to America, for various reasons. Some one must fill my place."

He leaned across the table, and looked full at Inouye.

"If you want this place I can give it to you. If you do not want it, keep on persecuting a girl who does not care anything about you. Make her father wretched, and—er—perhaps lose your present position in the end."

Arthurs felt like a conspirator after saying this, though he knew it was the only way to conquer Inouye.

The young Japanese remained with hands clasped on the desk, immovable, thinking bitterly. After awhile he rose, and said very politely to the American:

"I will accept the position you offer."

THE END



IN AUTUMN

by Marco Morrow

THE morning when you wake and find the first few flakes of snow upon your window-sill,

And know the Autumn's blight has come to fill The world with corpses of what Summer nursed,

In pain you cry, "Why is the Earth so curst?" But when the morning sun lights up the hills

Rich-robed in red and gold, their beauty thrills

You through, and joy comes back with sudden burst.

So, when you find a flake or two of snow

Upon your head, which only yesterday

Was crowned with Youth and all the joys of May,

Let Sorrow gnaw not at your heart, but know

The ripe October days will with them bring

A glory richer than the green of Spring.