

A JAPANESE NIGHTINGALE

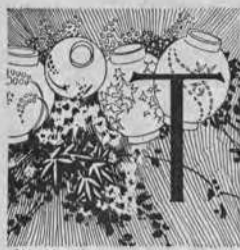
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Chapter V.

THE ADVENTRESS



HE man in the hammock was not asleep, for in spite of the lazy, lounging attitude, and the hat which hid the gray eyes beneath, he was very much awake and keenly interested in a certain small individual who was sitting on a mat a short distance removed from him. He had invited her several times to reduce that distance, but up to the present she had paid no heed to his suggestion. She was amusing herself by blowing and squeezing between her lower lip and teeth the berry of the winter-cherry, from which she had deftly extracted the pulp at the stem. She continued this strange occupation in obstinate indifference to the persuasive voice from the hammock.

"I say, Yuki, there's room for two in this hammock. Had it made on purpose."

She continued her cherry-blowing without so much as making a reply, though one of her blue eyes looked at him sideways and then solemnly blinked.

"What's the matter, Yuki? Got the dumps again, eh?"

No reply.

"Look here, Mrs. Reynolds," said he, decidedly, "I'll come over and elope forcibly with you if you don't obey."

She dimpled scornfully.

"Ah, that's right! Smile, Yuki. You're so pretty, so bewitching, so irresistible, when you look like that."

YUKI nodded her head coolly. "How you lig' me smiling forever?" she suggested.

"That wouldn't do," he answered, grinning at her from beneath his tilted hat. "That'd be tiresome."

"Tha's why I don't smiling today."

"Why?"

"All yistiddy I giggling."

He shouted with laughter at the word.

"Move your mat here, Yuki," indicating a spot close to his hammock; "I want to talk to you."

"My ears are—"

"Excessively small," finished her husband. "Please come!"

"Thangs," with an air of great dignity. "I am quite comfor'ble here. I don't lig' sit so near you, excellency."

"Why, pray?"

"Why—let me see! Hm! I understan'. Tha's because I jus' your liddle slave."

"You're my wife, you little fraud!"

"Wife? Oh, I dunno." She pretended to deliberate. "Then you've tricked me into a false marriage, madam!" declared her husband, with great wrath.

"Tha's fault nakoda."

"What is?"

"Thad you god me for wife, and," slowly, "servant."

"Fault! Come here, servant, then! Servants must obey."

"Nod so bad master," she laughed back, daringly. "Besides, servant must sit long way off from master."

"And wife?"

"Oh, jus' liddle bit nearer." There was a mischievous twinkle in her eyes as she edged perhaps half an inch closer to him. "Wife jus' liddle bit different from servant."

"LOOK here, Yuki, you're not living up to your end of the contract. You swore to honor and obey—"

"Ah—hahahahaha—aaa—!"

"Yes you did, madam."

"I din nod. Tha's jus' ole Kirishtan marriage."

He sat up, amazed. "What do you know of the Christian marriage service?"

"Liddle bid."

"Come over here, Yuki."

"You lig' me sing ad you?"

"Come over here."

"How you lig' me danze—liddle bit summer danze?"

"Come over here! What's a summer dance, anyhow?"

She ran lightly indoors, and was back so soon that she seemed scarcely to have left him. She had slipped on a red and yellow flimsy kimono.

"Tha's summer sunshine," she said, spreading it out on each side of her with a joyous little twirl. For a moment she stood still, her face shining. Then she danced softly, ripplingly, back and forth. The summer winds were sighing and laughing with her. Her face shone out above her lightly swerving figure, her little hands and bare arms moved with the inimitable grace that had so captivated the American.

"You are a genius," he said to her, when she had subsided in a laughing heap close to him.

"Tha's sure thing," she agreed, roguishly.

HER assurance always tickled him immensely. He threw his hat at her with such good aim that it settled upon her head. She approved his clever shot, laughed at him, and then pulling it over her eyes lay down on the mats and imitated his favorite attitude to a nicety. He laughed uproariously. He was in fine humor. They had been married over a month now, and she had not left him

"You've a fine opinion of me, Yuki."

"Yes, fine opinion for you," she repeated after him.

"There's enough money deposited in a bank in Tokyo to last you as long as you live. If it's ever necessary for me to leave you for a time you will not want for anything, Yuki."

"But," she said, argumentatively, "when you leaving me I henceforward a widow. I nod married with you any longer. Therefore, I kin nod take your moneys." This last with heroic pride.

"Boo! Your qualms of conscience about using my money are remarkable!"

"When you leaving me—" she commenced again.

"Why do you persist in that? I have no idea of leaving you."

"What!" She was quite frightened. "You goin' stay with me forever!" There was far more fear than joy in her voice.

"Why not?" he demanded, sharply, watching her with keen, somewhat savage eyes.

"My lord," she said, humbly, "I could not hear of it. It would be wrong. Too grade sacrifice."

He was not sure whether she was laughing at him or not.

"You needn't be alarmed," he said, gruffly; "I'm not likely to stay here forever." He turned his back on her.

Suddenly he felt her light little hand on his face. She was standing close by the hammock.

He was still very angry and sulky with her. He closed his eyes and frowned. He knew just how she was looking; knew that if he glanced at her he would relent ignominiously. She pried his eyes gently open with her fingers and then kissed his lids, as softly as a tiny bird might have done. Gradually she crawled into the hammock with him, regardless of the fact that he did not make any attempt to aid her.

"AUGUSTNESS," she said, her arms about his neck now, though she was sitting up and leaning over him, "listen ad me."

"I'm listening."

"Loog ad me."

He looked, frowned, smiled, and then kissed her. She laughed under her breath—such a queer, triumphant, mocking, small

laugh. It made him frown again, but she kissed the frown into a smile once more. Then she sat up.

"Egscuse me. I lig' sit ad your feet and talk ad you."

"Can't you talk here?" he asked, jealously.

"Nod so well. Permit me," she coaxed. He released her grudgingly. She sat close to him on the floor. She sighed heavily, hypocritically.

"What is it?"

"Well, you know I telling you about those moneys?"

"Yes," he said, wearily. "Let's shut up on this money question."

"I lig' make confession ad you."

"Well?"

"I god seventeen brudders and sisters!" she said, with slow and solemn emphasis.

"What!" He sat up quickly and almost rolled out of the hammock in his amazement.

"SEVENTEEN." She nodded with ominous tragedy in her face and voice.

"Where do they live?"

"Alas! in so poor part of Tokyo."

"And your father and mother?"

"Alas! Also thad fadder and mudder so ole, lig' this." She illustrated, bowing herself double and walking feebly.

"Well?" he prompted, sharply.

"I god take all thad money. Thad ole fadder and mudder and those seventeen liddle brudders and sisters, tha's all they god in all the whole world."



"Tha's most beautiful thing in all the whole worl'," she said, indicating the flowers"

since that first time. He had ceased to worry about that; he was growing pretty sure of her now.

She perceived his good humor, and immediately thought to take advantage of it. She put the rim of his hat between her teeth, imitated a monkey and crawled toward him, pretending to beg for her performance. He stretched out his long arms and tried to reach her, but she was far enough off to elude him.

"You god pay," she said, "for thad nize entertainments I giving you. I won' danze for nothing."

HE THREW her a sen. She made a face. "Thad all!" she said, in a dreadfully disappointed voice; but despite her acting he saw the greedy eagerness of her eyes. All the good humor vanished.

"Look here, Yuki," he said, "you've had a trifle over thirty dollars this week. I don't begrudge you money, but I'll be hanged if I'm going to have you dragging it out of me on every occasion and upon every excuse you can make! You have no expenses. I can't see what you want with so much money."

"I gotter save," said Yuki, mysteriously, struck with this brilliant excuse for her extravagance.

"What for?"

"Why, same's everybody else. Some day I nod have lods money. Whad I goin' do then? Tha's bedder save, eh?"

"I've married you. I'll never let you want for anything."

"Oh, you jus' marry me for liddle while."



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[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14]

HER husband went to the ticket-window, inquired where the girl was going, and bought a ticket for the same place. Then began the journey in the uncomfortable train. Yuki found a seat, and sat very quietly staring out at the flying darkness. After a time she put her head back against the seat, and despite the jolting of the train fell asleep. Her husband was close to her now—in the next seat, in fact. She had not slept more than half an hour when the slowing up of the train awakened her. She came to life with a start, gathered her little belongings together and left the train, her husband still following her.

Yuki had not far to walk. Only a few steps from the little station, and then she was before one of those old-fashioned, pretentious palaces affected by the nobles. There were signs of neglect about the house and gardens, which had fallen out of repair. No retainers or servants were in sight. At the gate she paused a moment, leaning wearily against it, ere she opened it and disappeared into the shadows of the palace. Her husband stood for a long time staring blankly into the gloom. Then very slowly he retraced his steps to the railway-station, bought his ticket and returned to Tokyo. Somehow, he could not have told exactly why, the events of the night had strengthened his belief in her. He felt sure she would return to him.

AND she did, hardly two days later. He was very gentle to her this time. There were no more questions asked and she vouchsafed no explanation.

And now she was docile, gentle, very clinging and submissive and loving. He called her his "Undine," and vowed he had found her soul at last. But once he found her in tears. She protested they had come because she had laughed so hard. Another time when he offered her money she passionately refused to take it. It was the first time since she had lived with him that she had done so. Thereafter she refused to take even the regular weekly allowance of fifteen dollars agreed upon. He looked in the little jewel-box and found her savings were all gone.

Her docility and gentleness confirmed his confidence in her. He was sure she would never leave him again. He even told her of his belief, and she did not deny it. They were like two happy children in these days. They played together like children, and laughed as joyously and willfully.

"I have conquered her—she is coming to care for me—that is it," said the young man.

"WHY are you so good to me, Yuki-san?" he asked her one day when she had sent the maid away and had waited on him at the table with her own hands.

"Jus' for liddle while," she answered, softly. "Little while?" This little pin-prick punctured his happiness and startled him.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, sharply. She could not answer. She put her head down on his knee and sobbed of a sudden with pitiful abandon.

"Don't you care for me, Yuki?" he asked. At this she threw her arms tightly about his neck and he felt hot tears against his cheeks. "My lord, I—I luf you!" she cried. "Then why do you talk about leaving me?" She sobbed even more violently, but gave him no answer.

After that day she was constantly melancholy, till her depression communicated itself to him, and he began to suspect her of once more deceiving him. He spoke to her sharply and watched her constantly and suspiciously.

AND then one day he found her clothes neatly packed in a bundle, as though in preparation for a journey, and his wrath burst its bounds. The full sense of her deceit smote and staggered him. Previously she had never taken any of her wardrobe with her. He thought that now she intended leaving him forever. He went to her and upbraided her cruelly. She denied nothing. She did not even trouble to mock or laugh at him; nor did she weep. She was mute, that was all; and he, infuriated, said things which rankled in his conscience for years afterward.

After this time a painful constraint and gloom settled between them. The girl grew white and thin and wistful, the man cynical and restless; and in the midst of their gloom came word from Taro Burton announcing that he had arrived in Tokyo. Laurin rushed off to meet him, telling Yuki he expected an old friend and would bring him home with him that evening.

[CONTINUED IN THE JULY ISSUE]

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