

# The Little Geisha

By ONOTO WATANNA.

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Okikusan was in trouble again.

This time she had offended her master by refusing to dance for the American who threw his money so lavishly about. He had specially asked that the girl with the red cheeks, large eyes and white skin be asked to dance for him.

The dancing mats were thrown, the music started, and Kiku had thrust forward one little foot and had courtesied to the four corners of the earth. Then she twirled clear around on the tips of the toes of one little foot, her hand tapering out toward the American. She had started to dance without once glancing at the visitor. By chance her eye happened to fall on him, and with a sudden whim she paused in her steps and subsided to the mats, her little feet drawn under her.

The American was watching the girl with amused eyes. Then he crossed to where she sat on the ground.

"Why did you stop dancing?" he asked her, in fairly good Japanese.

She answered him in broken English:

"Tha's account I nod lig' to danze for you!" she told him, candidly.

The girl still sat on the mat, looking straight out before her, her face unreadable in its cold indifference. Hilton could not understand her. She was so unlike any Japanese girl he had ever met, for they generally were so willing and eager to please. After a time he broke the somewhat strained silence to say, in his soft, drawling fashion:

"Would you not like something—er—to drink? Shall I fetch something for you?"

The question was so absurd that the girl's studied indifference broke down.

"Tha's nod your place to waid on me!" she said, loftily, rising to her feet. "I thing thad you lig something to dring. Yes? Thad I git paid to worg here. I thing I bedder bring you something to dring," she added, stiffly. "Bud I nod lig to waid on you. I prefer vaery much waid on Japanese gents."

There was a sibilant softness to her voice that was bewildering in its charm and sweetness, and her broken English was prettier than anything he had ever heard.

When she brought the hot "sake" back to him her face was smiling above the dainty tray, and as she knelt at his feet while he drank it, he could see that her former petulant mood was gone, and that she was now using every effort to please and conciliate him.

"Now you look like a Japanese sun-beam," he told her, softly, looking unutterable things at her out of his deep gray eyes.

"Tha's account I 'fraid gitting discharged," she told him, calmly, still smiling. "Mr. Takahashi tell me if I nod vaery kin' to you he goin' to send me long way from here."

"Ah, I see. Then you are only pretending to smile?"

She shrugged her little shoulders.

"Yes," she said, indifferently. "Tha's worg for geisha girl. What you thing we goin' to git paid for? Account we frown? Or account we laugh? I thing tha's account we laugh. Thad is my worg. What you thing?"

"That you are a philosopher," he told her, smiling, and added: "But what a cynic, too; I didn't expect to find it among Japanese women—cynicism."

The girl smiled a trifle bitterly.

"Oa!" she said, "you nod fin' thad 'mong Japanese—only me! I different from aeverybody else." She set the tray on the ground and sat down at his feet.

"How old are you?" Hilton asked her, curiously.

"Twenty-two," she told him.

"You look like a child."

It was two weeks later. With a restless fascination he could not understand, Hilton went every day to the little tea house on the hill. Always he sought out Okikusan, and would spend the entire day with her, totally oblivious to almost all else save the girl's beauty and charm.

And Hilton forgot his mission in Japan, forgot that Japanese women had always been merely the playthings of a moment; that he had tired of life—everything save the delightful, irresistible feelings that had awakened in him. What was it? Hilton was in love, and with a Japanese woman!

Years ago he had married one in Japanese fashion, and had left her. She had been a gentle, clinging little woman, with whom he had passed a dreamy, sleepy summer. What could he do with Kiku? She was unlike any Japanese woman he had ever known—unlike any woman he had met. She was the one woman in the world he had loved during all his long, checkered career—a life spent in idle pursuit of his own pleasures.

Hilton's friend, who had accompanied him on the voyage, was beginning to feel anxious about him, for, in spite of his admission of his own weakness for Japanese women, he was far more alive to and quick to scent real danger than Hilton, who followed his extravagant impulses only, while the cooler man kept a level head in the midst of his pleasures.

"My dear boy," he said to Hilton, "you've got the fever, I believe?"

Hilton laughed weakly.

"Nonsense!"

"You are in love with some Japaa-

ese girl!" his friend continued. "You want to look out for them, you know."

Hilton rose to his feet and began pacing the room in long, irregular strides.

"Don't you suppose I am old enough to be proof against such things?"

"Well, I don't know, Hilton, to tell you the truth. You see, Japanese women are different. You're only human, after all. I'd advise you to marry her—for awhile, of course, as you did the other one."

"I have an idea," Hilton said, with some hesitancy, "that I am too old for another affair of that kind. I thought of settling down—that is, I intended returning to America, and—er—marrying."

"What are you waiting for, then?"

He flung himself restlessly across a couch, staring moodily at the fusuma.

"What do you say to our leaving next week?"

"Good."

"Better keep away from the tea house in the meanwhile," his friend advised.

Hilton did not answer.

He found her in a field blazing with a vivid burning glory of natan and azalea-blossoms. She saw him coming toward her, and stooped down among the long grasses to hide from him. The man was intoxicated with his hunger for her, and caught her in his arms with all his pent-up love and passion.

"Kiku," he whispered, "I tried to stay away. I could not. Don't you understand?" He was holding her close to him now, and covering her face with a passion of kisses. "I love you! I love you! I love you!" he began, murmuring in her ear.

The girl's eyes were fixed full on his face. He caught the effish, searching full gaze, and for a moment released her. She stooped to pick up the scattered blossoms that had fallen.

The girl shivered, and her face grew suddenly white.

"Go 'way!" she cried, with almost an imploring note in her voice. "I don' wanter tell you. I thing it bes' nod. No, I nod tell you—aeverything. Besides, I nod lig you vaery much. Jus' liddle bit now. At first I hate—hate with all my heart! Now I ver' sawry—ver' sawry thad, thad I bin unkin'. Tha's account you unkin' too."

"I unkind!" he repeated, stupidly.

"I don't understand, Kiku-san?"

"No, you nod onderstan'," she said, in despair. "What kin I do? Oh, pitiful Kwannon! help me! I thing I tell you. I bin mos' vaery onhappy long time now, because aeverybody hate me. Account I loog lig American. You nod understand? No? My fadder"—she paused a moment—"he leave my modder. We vaery onhappy so thad she goin' to die. Then w'en she die I worg, worg hard at the factory, an' here. Nobody lig me account my fadder American, an' I thing account thad I goin' hate all Americans foraever, because my fadder vaery wiggid, because he mek my modder suffer! And me? I suffer, too."

A grayness had crept over Hilton's face. He felt suddenly weak and old.

"You still nod understand?" she asked. Her hands had fallen from his now, and he had staggered back a few paces.

"Not yet!" he said, faintly.

"Then I tell you," she said, firmly.

"I nod lig you because w'en you come here someone thad know my modder w'en she alive point at you and say: 'Thad you fadder!'"

The silence that was between them now was horrible. It suddenly assumed a savage mockery by the wild singing of a nightingale which flew over their heads and trilled aloud its song of gladness.

The man could not speak. He stood looking out in front of him with a pitiful look of horror, and only half comprehension on his face.

After awhile the girl continued:

"Firs' I thing I will tell you. Then I remember my modder and how onhappy she be, and how hard I worg all those years w'ile you have so much rich, an' then I hate you foraever and bury all sawry for you in my heart, an' I hate all mens from the west, foraever so fool of conceit. Tna's a liar thad I say I twenty-two years old. I thing now thad my time come to fool. I thing I revenge my modder. I thing I mek you suffer lig her. You nod understan'? Always she have pain here!" She clasped her hand over her heart, and then continued, wearily: "Tha's account you tich her to luf you. I nod understand that liddle word vaery much. Aeverybody say I nod have aeny heart. All hard daed. Tha's account I luf only my modder, an' she die. An' I also hate you thad you kill that modder."

Through the mists of pain and horror that had overcome him the memory of dead days were coming back to Hilton. He could not think of Kikusan now as his own child—his very own blood—he would not!

"You must be mistaken!" His voice sounded strange, even to his own ears.

"My child died—they told me so."

The girl laughed bitterly.

"Tha's bedder I daed. I going away. Aeverybody thinging I daed 'cept me. I know always. You thing I loog lig Japanese girl?"

She suddenly loosened her hair, and it fell down around her in thick, shining brown curls.

"Thad lig Japanese girl?—thad?—thad?—thad? Thad?"

She pushed back her sleeves and showed him the white purity of her arms.

Then she turned and left him, with the same still look of despair on his face and the pitiless sun beating on the golden fields.

Bees have been known to fly as far as seven miles in search of flowers.