

HOUSEHOLD GIRLS' WOMEN

OF RECIPES AND IDEAS - PAGE for MISSES FICTION TWO PAGES

The Marriage of Okiku - San by ONOTO WATANABE

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MISS KIKU TAGUCHI was not an ordinary young lady. Her father, a pompous, important individual, entertained a distinct contempt for her insignificant sex. His wife was a mere nonentity, a puppet, who vaguely repeated, parrotlike, the paradoxes voiced by her lord. Hence, when this same lord emphatically expressed his opinion concerning the proper education for a female—this within 12 hours after the birth of Okiku-san, Lady Taguchi assented, and promised things. The result was a girl of naturally independent and original disposition, trained by the contracted rules common for women in Japan half a century before.

Kiku knew by heart the great rules laid down by Confucius for her miserable sex. Aimlessly and dully she would repeat them from day to day, while her rapid faced mother, herself a product of the new Japan, mechanically kept time on the small box desk by which she was wont to squat.

Okiku possessed an uncle who had been educated abroad, and through this medium she had come to know of many attractive things. His opinions were as emphatic as his brother's, but they were entirely different. The emancipation of Japanese women was his pet hobby, and so bitter was his denunciation of the old time method of repression and education of the weaker sex that he and his brother met only to argue and oftentimes politely quarrel. Okiku's uncle, however, was a man of real power and great wealth, and while Okiku's father, who was in modest circumstances, might despise and disagree with his opinions, she respected the aforesaid power and also the considerable fortune to which his own daughter would certainly succeed. The uncle was old, had no children of his own, and would have none. A widower, he was devoted, so he claimed, to the memory of his wife, and growled contempt at the notion of marrying again merely in order to have a progeny to pray for his soul after death.

To him went Okiku, fretting under the home chains and feeling, rather than knowing, the electrical change of thought among her sex in Japan. She wanted an education—a real one, as she expressed it. To her bluff and sympathetic uncle, at least, she dared to breathe her little hidden secret hope—a desire to go abroad, to enter a foreign school and college. This her uncle promised her she should do, and the following day he paid a visit upon his brother. Once alone with him he went straight to the object of his call, barely giving the more outwardly courteous chance to run through the long gamut of civilities, usually the rule—even with brothers.

"Tom, your girl is stupid, lazy, sleepy!"

Tom's lips became a straight line. Perfectly well he knew that the foregoing statement was not true, but he believed in the old fashioned method of polite conversation, the humble admission of the inferiority of one's self and one's family.

He said in a tone that fiercely denied the words he uttered:

"It is miserably true. She is a stupid woman!"

"Let us put our heads together, then," suggested Gonji solemnly, "and see if we can not devise some means to rectify her unhappy imbecile condition."

"I listen to your enlightened words of wisdom," said Tom, grimly sarcastic and still fiercely polite.

"To the point then. What do you say to my niece going abroad—say, to America—for a term of years?"

In spite of himself, the father of Okiku leaped up in his seat.

"What!" he fairly shouted. "Have my daughter sent to the country of barbarians, where civilization is only in its infancy?"

"Quiet!" urged Gonji, pulling at a stubby little imperial he had carefully copied from a French diplomat. "Let us talk over the matter gently, reasonably."

"There is nothing to talk over," said Tom, controlling himself. "The matter is quite settled."

Gonji arose, shrugging his shoulders slightly—a trick also caught from the aforesaid diplomat.

"I regret you value my humble opinion so poorly."

"Not at all, brother. Tom's voice was anxious. I have distinct ideas, as you know, in regard to the bringing up of females. I believe in their suppression—their being kept in their proper sphere. Nothing is more offensive to me than a woman of modern education, a creature thinking for herself like a man—without regard for the best rules laid down for her sex, talking, walking, acting independently. Pah! It is nauseating to think of, even. Yet these women are the very product of this foreign education you suggest for my stupid but worthy daughter."

Gonji was drawing on his outer coat, a heavy tweed affair, which fitted somewhat grotesquely over his Japanese underdress.

"The necessity of providing myself with a proper heir. I had looked upon Okiku in that light, but she has been a disappointment to me. I wish to leave my estates to one who has been raised according to some of my own ideals."

"She is only a female," said Tom, huskily, "yet, believe me, though it is her father speaking, she is an admirable example of her despised sex. She is meek, submissive, filial, obedient—having all the qualities most admirable in a woman. What more could you possibly desire?"

"Well, I believe in a higher education for a woman. She will be at a disadvantage in society. Other members of her sex are being cultivated, their minds improved. I should not wish to be ashamed of her."

Tom was silent, biting his underlip to repress his rage.

"Let us make a truce," he finally said. "Suggest some alternative to a foreign education for Okiku and I will readily assent."

"Good. What do you say to a year in Tokyo? There is an excellent school there. All the members of the faculty are graduates of American colleges, and one of them is herself an American lady."

Tom flapped his fan open to conceal his enraged face. Then he closed it upon his palm and pointed dumbly to the mats they had vacated.

"Condescend to sit."

Gonji smiled a bit, as he again removed his coat and reseated himself comfortably. After both had taken several whiffs from their pipes, Tom began again:

"Brother, there is an excellent seminary in Kyoto—"

"I know all about it. Kept by an ancient dame of the old school. No, excuse me."

"In Kumamoto—"

"Tokyo—or America. There—I have said it."

He emptied his pipe, tapping it upon the hibachi.

"Well—well—er—at least you will consent to my imposing one condition?"

"By all means—if it is reasonable."

"Now education for a woman may be very well, if it is immediately followed by a proper marriage. That is the only antidote for the ill effects."

Gonji appeared to be ruminating.

"So be it then. I'll grant that. Marriage is certainly a worthy fate—even for a modern woman. Then it is settled."

Okiku's progress at the American school was little short of remarkable. She became the favorite pupil of the aforementioned American teacher, a spinster of 40 sweet summers. Here was a woman fit indeed to make all others of her sex pause and heed. As fearless and outspoken as a man—a superior man—she was a walking delegate for the suffrage of her sex. Her theories and opinions she had loudly voiced upon various small platforms in her own native land, and now in a country where the condition of her sex appealed to every indignation and outraged fiber within her, she fairly hurled her views at the amazed and in truth somewhat bewildered heads of her little oriental pupils. They watched, fascinated, her mouth shot forth rapturous denunciations of all the laws which hitherto they had regarded as quite sacred and necessary for their sex. Used through centuries of oppression to yielding to a mind (or rather body) stronger than their own, they now readily yielded to the persuasive doctrine preached by this "extraordinary foreign devil" teacher. She sent forth from the school one pugnacious little disciple after another, each to establish a new order of things in various households.

No pupil had listened to her words with such eager ears as Okiku-san. Fresh from her life of subjection, she leaped thirstily into the new order of thought. Her adored uncle had previously pointed out to her the exceptional merits of the foreign teacher, and she now shared his views in regard to the strong minded lady of the piercing blue eyes and high cheek bones.

Okiku was to do wonders for the women of Japan! One year in Tokyo, indeed! She was to have a career—a profession! She should found this club for this and that purpose, with her uncle's money to aid and abet. Her suffering sex would be so benefited that her name would be blessed in the land. Little Okiku dreamed such dreams as surely never before bewildered the head of any other little damsel of Japan. She saw herself an original Mrs. Catt. She gave not a thought—she would have scorned to—to that contemptible atom in human form known as "man," or "mere man," as the foreign teacher expressed it. If she did think of him at all, it was to recall with burning indignation all the wrongs of the past put upon her sex.

"But at last," said little Okiku-san, with fervor, echoing the words of Miss Simpson, "the proverbial worm is about to turn."



HE WHISPERED INTO HER LITTLE EAR

She had better obey the parental summons and herself plead her cause. Too bad, but really uncle was frightfully busy.

Okiku noted through her tears that uncle was also frightfully attired in a foreign suit, padded of shoulder and plaid of vest.

To the great Miss Simpson now went Okiku and poured out her cup of sorrows. The lady hugged her chin, wiped her glasses, and looked very thoughtful.

"My dear, by all means go home. What I have taught you can best be illustrated in the home. Believe me, the home is a woman's real platform."

This remarkable statement served only further to bewilder the heart-broken Okiku. She retired to her precious room, a pathetic replica of some far away Smith college room, and sobbed passionately with her head on the beautiful brass bed chosen by teacher for Okiku. It had been a source of great wonder and awe to both Okiku and her maid, but hardly of comfort, since the twain slept under, not on, the bed itself.

Dolefully she packed her fine modern clothes—the clothes meant to be worn on that certain trip to America. Linen in underwear, corsets, kid gloves, openwork stockings, skirts, and what not. As she traveled homeward, a great lump choking her poor little throat, she said savagely, with a mind picture of her father's face when he should see the contents of her trunks:

"Anyhow man is inferior to woman. Certainly I shall let all males so understand."

She had no sooner arrived home than they broached to her the subject of matrimony. A youth had been selected for Okiku's father had carefully selected the boy's father as an excellent one to be allied to. There had been some quiet negotiations between relatives of the two families, the boy's uncle acting as a go-between.

When they told Okiku she said nothing. She went up to her chamber and pulled the sliding doors behind her.

"I wish I were dead!" she said. "I could not endure to live with a man!"

Then she fell into a deep reverie, her chin pillowed on her folded hands. Presently she got up, opened a panel of her room and took out a lacquer box. Rummaging among its papers she found what she sought, and, this

spread before her, she studied it thoughtfully:

"A wife may be divorced for the following reasons:" read the script.

1. If she be disobedient to her parents at law.

Okiku looked thoughtful.

"Suppose they should beat me! That would be hard to bear," she said.

2. If she be childless.

"Children will come, alas!" sighed little Okiku wisely.

3. If she be untrue.

Okiku frowned.

4. If she be jealous.

"Not I!" said Okiku, scornfully.

5. If she steal.

"Impossible."

6. If she talk too much.

A dimple stole into either round cheek of little Kiku Taguchi.

"Well, I can talk!" said she.

A few days later she sat in a room in which were assembled the various members of the Taguchi and Hakemoto families. They sat in a semicircle, drinking tea and eating. Great quantities of sake were also consumed, and of this beverage Kiku herself was permitted to drink for the first time.

The sake brightened up her eyes and cheeks. Her ears tingled. She wanted to talk. Also she had an inclination to cry. She wished ardently all the time that she were dead. Suddenly there flashed into her tangled mind the comforting words of the divorce authority: "If she talk too much!"

Little Kiku's lips curled up. She astonished the assemblage by an unexpected, eerie little laugh. Next moment she sneezed.

Later she found herself sitting opposite to a person, who by his attire and manner she recognized as a tyrannical and odious man. She looked up and said quickly, so that she might not be interrupted by her officious father:

"It is better you should know the truth. I talk all the time!"

Now, when a pair of newly affianced people are thus for the first time brought together, a somewhat gentle conversation is expected to ensue. Sometimes where the twain have met before, sentimental passages occur;

After she had extricated herself, and breathlessly at that:

"Well, but—you have got to find out about me. I-tell me—"

"Am I to do it. Keep still—just for a moment. I am going to whisper something in your ear. Don't tell anybody, because these are terrible words for a Japanese to say, but Oh—some things of a modern myself, too, you know. Now pay heed!"

He whispered into her little ear. "Did you hear?"

She had turned actually pale. "That is an improper word!" said she in a faint, very frightened voice.

Jihel threw back his head. He laughed joyfully, like a mischievous boy, rejoicing in his tricks.

"Is it 'Love' an improper word! Oh, well, I'll explain to you some day what I mean."

"Explain to me now."

"No, no, because you are way behind the times, Okiku-san. Fancy a modern woman of Japan calling 'love' an improper word! Pff!"

She was much offended and forced free, sitting poignantly apart from him to the extent of three or four inches of distance.

Jihel reduced this considerably:

"Very well, I will tell you then. Now the foreigners—the westerners—you know—think they have a patent upon the word. They say, to us, it has no meaning, or if one, an improper one. But we know better, don't we, Kikusan. It's the feeling—the sentiment—the impulse in us. I adore you, reverently, ideally. That's what I wanted to tell you, Kikuno."

"When did you first?" she stammered breathlessly.

"At once—at the look at meeting. I had been preparing for it, you see—preparing for you, and I did. It was just as it should be."

"It was all quite wrong," she sobbed. "Such a—such a—marrage—is—against nature." The words of Miss Simpson came to her awkwardly.

Jihel was silent a moment, but regarded her, smiling confidently.

"By and by we shall know," he said softly.

The following day, seated, seated by the self same shoji, where she had waited for her husband, Okiku sat reading a letter.

My poor little Kiku-san: By all means be firm. Bear in mind all I have taught you. That you, my most hopeful and best beloved pupil, should be absolutely forced into an odious union, at the very height of your mental development, seems horrible to me. I can only strenuously urge you not to succumb. If you do so, believe me, you will sink into that helpless, hopeless crushed condition so patetically common to your country women.

If you, who have been made to see the glorious possibilities of our sex, should succumb to the lure of an obsolete position of Japanese women, slaves, not wives or true mates, to their lords—not husbands—then, indeed, I will say my work has failed.

Dear child! Keep up a brave spirit. Though I smile at the thought of your pathetic ruse to obtain your freedom, I also applaud it. By all means, if it will serve your purpose (remember the end justifies the means)—talk!

The sound of a splash was heard. "Okiku!" called a cheery voice. "More towels, please!"

She crushed the letter in her hand, then drew herself up stiffly.

"Call a servant, please!"

"A servant! I want my wife to wait upon me! Hither, hither! Get me a towel—and hurry, please!"

daughter in law's service in the ancient way:

"Never! Never! Never!" she cried, pacing up and down, and spasmodically clapping her hands together.

By and by her anger passed away. She stood, as if listening for some sound from the adjoining room. Up to the present he had met all her rebellious outbursts with embraces, rapt, but also to the unconscious Kiku, desirable. Now all was silence. What was he doing? Okiku hesitated a minute, then silently she stepped over to the shoji. Mostening her finger, she made a considerable hole in the fusuma. To this she applied her eye. Whatever she saw within apparently was not what she expected, for with a little petulant pick she opened the sliding doors and went into the other room. Nobody at all was there. She looked about her. The frown left her face. An anxious look came into her eyes. Suddenly she crossed the room, and opened wide the shoji on to the veranda.

It was growing dark outside. She leaned forward, peering about her. Then she sat still, waiting, gazing steadily more uneasy and agitated. When it was quite dark she still remained by the opened doors, and only when a maid came to the rooms bearing lighted candles, did she move from her position. Too proud to question the servants, she could not forbear speaking of what engaged her so utterly:

"My husband—took letters to the village. It is quite a walk, is it not? I trust a very good and safe road?"

"Yes, mistress. But the young master has dropped one of his letters, I fear. I picked it up on the threshold of your room."

"Indeed, well, give it to me."

When the servant was gone she turned the letter over in her hand and looked at the address. It was to her mother. Okiku's hands began to tremble. Slowly her little finger slipped under the flap of the envelope. It was very carefully closed and yielded at once to her pressure. She took the note out. A moment she hesitated, and then:

"No—no—I can't do it!"

She was putting it back hastily, when her eyes fell upon these words—they were written very clearly and in exceptionally large type:

"SHE TALKS ALL THE TIME!"

Her heart suddenly ceased beating. She felt as if about to faint, her hand sought her throat.

Her ruse then had succeeded after all! He was writing home to his parents, "she talks all the time!" So she was to be divorced!

Slowly, her fingers shaking, she straightened out the crumpled letter. Her eyes widened. She stared—a stilled sound, half breath, half moan, escaped her. The entire sheet was covered with the one sentence: "She talks all the time!"

Gods! How he wished to make his case clear to his parents! Oh—! She was about to tear the letter across, when a new terror assailed her. Perhaps he had already divorced her—left her here alone in the mountains!

She tried to comfort herself with the thought of her "dear teacher," to whom she would go at once; but Miss Simpson's face became fainter with every moment, until it seemed extinguished altogether from her mind. In its place appeared instead the round, boyish, cheerful countenance of Jihel.

Suddenly she thought: "I have driven him away."

There was nothing particularly handsome or attractive about her husband's face except his natural good humor and affectionate expression, but to the mind of her husband, in its place appeared surrounded with a pale, golden halo.

She flew across the room, blindly calling him by name:

"Jihel! Jihel!"

A number of maids came running in at her summons.

"My husband!" she cried shrilly. She appeared distraught.

Just then some one came from out the shadow on the veranda.

"Why, hello!" said he. "What is the trouble?"

"Madame was anxious," said a smiling maker from her mind. In its place appeared surrounded with a pale, golden halo. She flew across the room, blindly calling him by name:

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