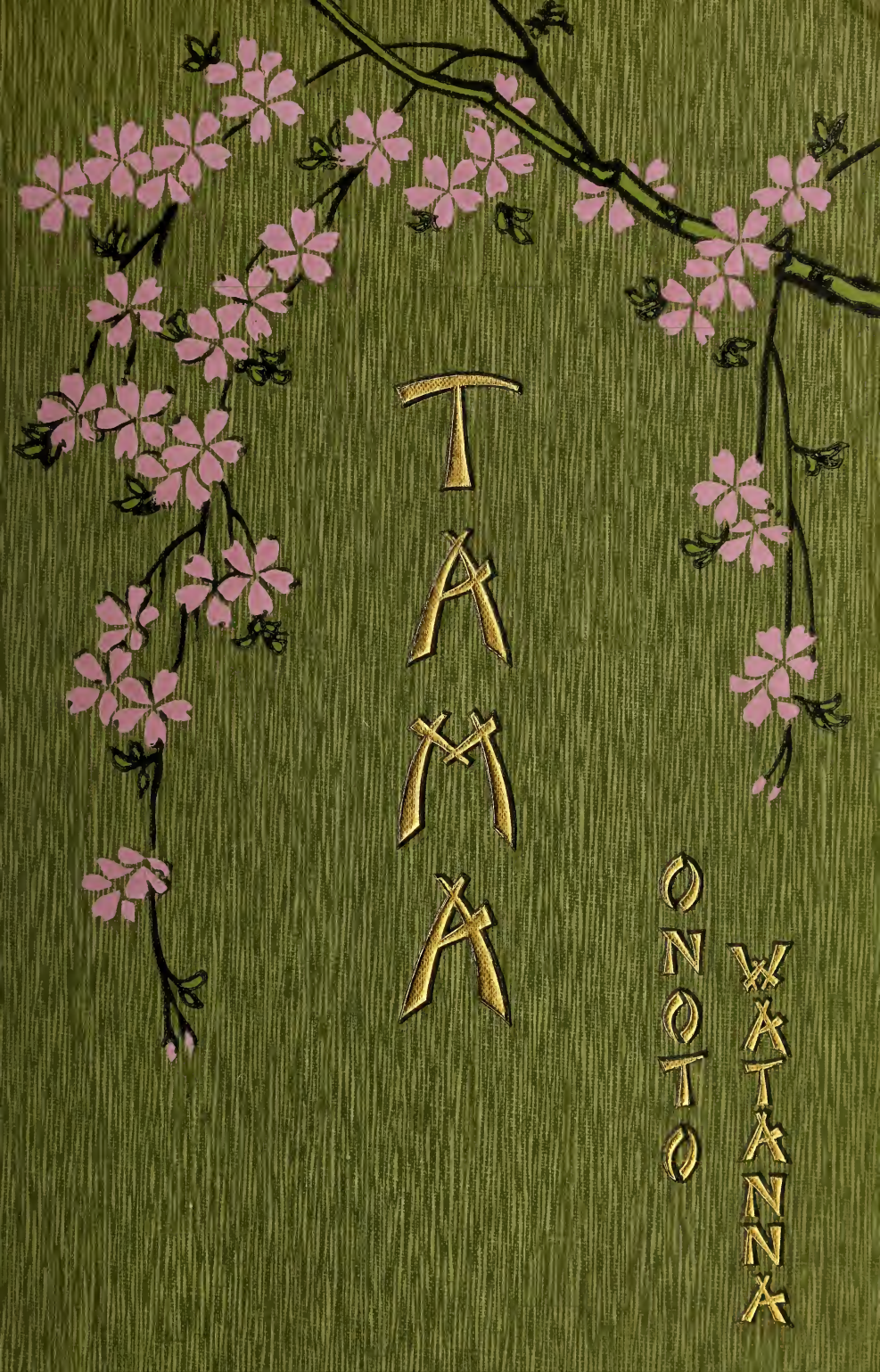
TAMA
ONOTO WATANNA

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THE FOX-WOMAN AMONG THE LOTUS

TAMA

BY

ONOTO WATANNA

ILLUSTRATED BY

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ILLUSTRATIONS

TAMA

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I

Fukui was in an unwonted state of excitement. For days the people had talked of but one event. Even the small boys, perilously astraddle the bamboo poles, the scullery wenches of the kitchen, the very mendicants of the street, the highest and lowest of the citizens of Fukui talked of the coming of the O-Tojin-san (Honorable Mr. Foreigner).

For at last the exalted Daimio of the province had acceded to the pleadings and eager demands of the students of the university, and, at

great expense and trouble, a foreign professor had been imported.

Signs of preparation were everywhere visible. Vigorous housecleaning was in evidence. The professional story-tellers, who took the place of newspapers in these days, reaped small fortunes in their halls. Some of them opened booths on the streets and regaled their auditors with strange accounts of America and its people.

Already the Tojin-san's house and household had been chosen for him, from the Daimio's high officer and the four samourai body-guard, who were to protect him from any possible Jo-i (foreign hater), down to his body-servant.

An enormous old historical Shiro (mansion), two hundred and seven years old, was assigned as his residence, and was now undergoing certain remarkable changes. For heavy

woollen carpets, with flowers and figured designs, were being nailed down over the ancient matting in the chief rooms. Strange articles of furniture, massive and heavy as iron, were pushed into the great chambers, under the supervising hand of a dapper, rosy-cheeked young samourai who was to serve as interpreter to the Tojin. His name was Genji Negato, and he had already lived among foreigners in the cities of Tokyo and Yokohama. He spoke the English language very well indeed, and his knowledge of the white man and his ways was extraordinary.

Now, as he ordered this or that article set in place, his full red lips curled smilingly under his little bristly mustache. He called the servants in one by one, lecturing each in turn in regard to his especial duties. Incidentally he regaled them with

tales of the habits and desires of the white man.

Food sufficient for six ordinary mortals must be prepared for his individual consumption. Raw meat and game, slightly scorched before fire, were essential. A never-failing spring of what the original American had aptly called "fire-water" must be constantly flowing at and between meals and day and night. Such was the thirst of the white man. Brooms must be in readiness to follow the trail of the dust and mud-laden boots of the professor, since he would not remove them even in the house. Finally, his supreme favor could be won by having at hand always the sweetest and prettiest maidens to entertain and caress him. And so on through a strange list.

If the students of the college where the Tojin-san was to teach were

elated at the prospect of his coming, their joy was hardly shared by his household. It was in a flutter of excited fear. Even the stolid, impassive-faced samourai guard discussed in undertones among themselves the degrading service to which they were reduced in these degenerate days. To guard the body of a mere Tojin! Well, such was the will of the Daimio of Echizen, and a samourai is the right hand of his Prince. His the task to obey even the caprice of his lord, or take his own life in preference to service too far beneath his honor.

In the humbler regions of the Shiro, however, the servants discussed the matter less pessimistically. Some rumor of the generosity and wealth of foreigners had floated across the vague tide of gossip. Anyhow, the preparations for his coming went blithely on here, and already odors of vigorous

advance cooking were being wafted from the kitchen regions, warming and savoring the great chambers, and awakening into noisy life the vast army of rats and bats which had long made their homes in the eaves and rafters of the old deserted mansion, now for the first time in years to be occupied by a tenant.

Everything was quite in readiness when the cook's wife's baby's nurse (for his entire family were, of course, also domiciled in the Shiro) missed a portion of her rice. She had turned about to give better attention to master baby-san, when, so she averred, a "white hand" reached out of nowhere and seized the remnants of her supper. She ran squealing with her tale to her mistress, who, in turn, rushed with it to her lord, the cook. He put aside his apron and sought Genji Negato, who solemnly called a council of war.

To the four samourai guard the entire household looked for a solution and ending of the impending trouble.

Measures should be taken at once, it was unanimously decided. It would be to their Prince's everlasting disgrace should the exalted foreign devil also become a victim of the dreaded Fox Woman of Atago Yama, for, undoubtedly, this mischievous and irrepressible sprite of the mountains was at her tricks again. In the names, therefore, of the august Tojin-san, nay, in the very name of the Imperial Daimio of Echizen, it was the duty of the honorable samourai to spare in no wise the witch should she be caught trespassing upon the estate of the Prince's guest and protégé.

They fell to telling weird tales of the latest doings of the fox-woman. A Tsuruga child had followed the witch-

girl into the mountains, believing her glittering hair to be the rays of the sun, and stretching out his tiny hands to touch and hold it. To propitiate the dread creature, the parents had set out daily food at the foot of the mountains, and thus, for a time at least, the hunger of the fox-woman had been satisfied, but the child had never been the same again, fretting and crying constantly for the "Sun Lady." As its peevishness continued, the parents revenged themselves upon its abductor, and ceased to set out the nightly repast, bravely facing down their fear of the witch's certain anger and retaliation.

Since then she had been forced to seek her sustenance elsewhere. A basket of fish disappeared overnight from a vendor's locked stand. A bag of rice was found on the mountain-side of the river, as if the thief, find-

ing it too heavy, had dropped it in her flight.

And now—could it be possible that the most distinguished (though augustly degraded) guest Fukui had known in years was to suffer by the depredations of the fox-woman?

Samourai Iroka voted in favor of killing the witch outright. But not by the means of his own personal sword, for he was unmarried and had no descendants to pray for his soul should it be forced to pass along on a journey.

Samourai Asado feared for the safety of his wife and family in the event of his honorable sword being stained by the blood of the witch-girl. Once a similar goblin had torn the head and arms from the body of a sleeping babe, in revenge for the mere pin-prick of a samourai sword.

Samourai Hirata suggested refer-

ring the matter to the Daimio himself; but was urged against this by the others, for was not the fox-woman the one black blot upon the escutcheon of their exalted Prince, seeing she was indeed, and alas! of his own blood?

Finally, Samourai Numura, an ancient, grizzled warrior of the most stolid common sense, gruffly insisted that the matter was the affair of the Tojin himself, and from him alone should they receive commands upon the matter. It was agreed, therefore, that they should wait for the coming of the Tojin-san. Out of his vaunted western wisdom certainly should he be able to suggest the solution of the problem.

And, in the Season of Greatest Cold, while the snow whirled in feathery flakes over all the Province of Echizen, and the winds blew in laughing,

whispering murmurs through the glistening camphor and pine trees, across the sacred bosom of Lake Biwa, and over the snow-crowned mountains between, the Tojin-san came to Fukui, the "Well of Blessing."

II

THE room was so large that even with the seven lighted andon and the three ancient takahiras glimmering dully where they hung from the raftered ceiling overhead, it was chiefly in shadow. Set at intervals against the sliding walls were a few large pieces of heavy black-walnut furniture, grotesque objects in the otherwise completely empty chamber. The room itself was cold, but a kotatsu in the centre of the room had been filled with live coals, and over this the Tojin-san crouched. He sat upon the floor, close to the fire-frame, his knees drawn up, his hands encircling them.

After a long and tortuous journey over land and water, by boat, by horse, by kurumma, and often on foot—a never-ending, long-winding, cold journey, the Tojin-san was at last at home! This was Fukui, where he had contracted to live for seven years of his life; this vast, empty, bleak mansion was his house.

He had started upon the journey with an alert and quickened pulse, and an ardent ambition to serve, to raise up, to love this strange people to whom he had pledged himself. A short sojourn was made in Tokio and Kioto—days of sheer delight in a charm so new it intoxicated. Then, leaving the open ports, under the escort sent by the Prince of Echizen, he had taken finally that plunge into the great unknown country itself, where only half a dozen foreigners had been before him.

The journey had been one of many weeks. Crossing waters in a fragile craft, which tossed and heaved with every tide, he had come to know the true meaning of the Japanese saying that "a sea voyage is an inch of hell."

For days his party had been snow-bound on a desolate mountain, far from even the smallest village or town, and, when finally they had issued forth, it was only to encounter new perils, in savage-souled ronins who hung about the vicinity of the Tojin-san's party, their narrow, wicked eyes intent upon his destruction. How many white men before him had started upon a similar journey, in other provinces of Japan, and met the then common fate—a stab in the back, or in the dark! And the punishments, the indemnities, the humiliations forced upon the government by the foreigners, but added to

the hatred and malice of the Jo-i (foreign haters).

But the Prince of Echizen was of the most enlightened school. No foreign teacher or guest within his province should suffer the smallest hurt! His edicts in the matter were so emphatic that they reached even the humblest of the citizens, and the Tojin-san, did he but know it, was practically immune from attack. Indeed, his pilgrimage was in the nature of one of triumph. Whatever their inner feelings toward the intruder, the people met him with smiles and expressions of welcome. Every little town and hamlet sent to him on its outskirts deputations of high officials. There had been feasts here and banquets there, and always and everywhere about him he saw the same brown face, the same glittering eye, the same elusive smile.

Now the last Daimio's officer was gone, the last officious minister of his Prince had chanted his singsong poem of welcome, and the Tojin-san was alone!

Even the individual members of his household had dispersed. They had come in one by one in solemn procession, led by the samourai guard, who, as they prostrated themselves, sucked in their breath fiercely, expelling it in long, sibilant hisses. The cook, his assistants, and wife and family formed a small procession of their own, one behind the other, executing a series of such comical bows and bobs that the stern lips of the Tojin-san had softened in spite of himself, particularly so, when the tiniest one, a toddling baby no more than two years old, had solemnly brought its diminutive shaven pate to the floor, and had almost capsized

WELCOME TO TOJIN-SAN

in a somersault in its efforts to emulate its elders' politeness.

Now the weary, half-closed eyes of the Tojin-san were seeing other faces, his mind travelling backward over other scenes, very far away. He saw a great, green campus, overshadowed by towering elms. Bright-eyed, white-skinned boys were singing huskily as they swept across the lawns into the tall stone buildings, which seemed to smile at them with maternal indulgence. The Tojin-san was seated at a desk, looking across at that sea of boyish faces. Strange how they had repulsed him; how he had even felt a bitterness that was almost hatred for them in that other time and place! And now! Now he caught himself thinking of them with a tenderness which almost stifled.

Then the jaded mind of the Tojin-san wandered out into another scene

of the past, and out of a longer, darker memory a woman's cold, unsmiling face mocked him.

"Marry you!" she had cried, and not even her native courtesy could suppress the note of horror in her voice. "Oh—h!" she had cried out, covering her eyes shudderingly, "if you could but—see—yourself!"

The Tojin-san had indeed seen himself that night. Glaring back at him in a tragic grimness his own fearful face had looked at him from the mirror. Not that he had not known the blight upon him; but he had been dull, stupid, slow to realize its full horror.

Time was when the Tojin-san was as other men, smooth-skinned, level-eyed, very good to look upon. But in a God and Man forsaken little town crushed between the mountains and the sea, a young and ardent doctor

of long ago had given himself up to a sublime heroism. Shoulder to shoulder with a few—one or two only beside himself—they had fought the plague of smallpox. From this fight the Tojin-san had emerged marked! With the optimism and blindness of youth, however, he had gone back to the woman he loved, and she had struck at him!

There is a Japanese proverb which says: "The tongue three inches long can kill a man six feet tall." The Tojin-san thought of this now. A woman's tongue, the mere brutal smiting of her words, had wrought a curious effect upon his entire life. From that time on he had avoided women as he had not a vile plague. He led the life of an ascetic, wrapped in his books and sciences, making few friends, avoiding others, with the sensitive fear upon him that the whole

world avoided and shrank also from him. And while still a young man—under forty—they had named him "Old Grind" at the university.

Then upon him suddenly had come a new upheaval, a pent-up, passionate longing to break away from the dull hopeless treadmill to which he seemed bound.

"Old Grind!" So age was to be clapped upon him while the vital fires of youth still throbbed in an agony in his blood. There was a new life, an exhilarating, more inspiring life to be led, out in that old-new world across the seas! It beckoned to those of adventurous souls and those who were weary of a drowsy, torpid existence, wherein hope of a new dawn had vanished beyond memory. The Tojin-san panted for this new life. He wanted to swing his arms in a wilder world, to breathe less vitiated

air, to feel himself *alive* again! He had made of himself, for half a lifetime, a mummy for the sake of a woman he had not even really loved. It was fantastic!

Out of this curious rebellion against Fate which had swept upon him like a tidal wave, the Tojin-san had broken his bonds.

He was in the strange wild land he had yearned for, strange faces peered at him askance, and strange gods mocked him from their temples with their sphinx-like impenetrability. And he crouched, shivering, over a kotatsu in a great, historical yashiki, cold and empty as a very mausoleum, and the strong man within him recognized and fought the weakness come upon him—the aching, longing, praying, for the mere sight of a white, familiar face!

So still was the night, even the

glide of a gaki (spirit) across the cracking snow without must have been heard. A breeze just trembled through the frost-incrusted bough of a camphor-tree, and it bristled and broke, the twigs snapping and bouncing down on the frozen ground beneath.

Something crept out of the shadows of the woods at the foot of the mountains, leaped like a fawn across the wide arm of the castle moat, and slid over the grounds between it and the shiro Matsuhaira. An army of crows which lodged in the attic of a dilapidated ruin of what had once been a go-down (treasure-house) suddenly began to flap their wings, calling to each other querulously and making short, futile, terrified flights. A rat fled from the go-down interior and scuttled across to the kitchen in the rear of the mansion, and the Tojin-

san raised a startled face, listening to a new sound.

It was as if one without were tapping or scratching ever so faintly upon the amado (winter walls). He did not move, but fastened his gaze upon the point whence he had fancied the sound proceeded. Now it came from another direction and tapped lightly, timidly again, as a child might have done.

The Tojin-san came to his feet with a bound. He flung wide the screens of his chamber, now on this side, now on that, and now those opening upon the grounds. Not a soul was visible. Nothing but the white, still snow, glittering like silver under the moon-rays. He looked up at the outjutting eaves, felt along them with his hand, though a curious instinct told him insistently that the touch upon his screens had been

intelligent and human. Slowly he drew them into place again, and, as he did so, a voice, low as a sigh, called to him across the bleak snow:

"To-o—jin-san! To-o-o-jin—san! To-o-o-jin—san! To-o-o—!"

Tojin-san! That was the name he had heard everywhere. The one they had given him. Some one was calling him, wanted him, needed him, perhaps!

It was a step only down to the gardens below. He took it at a leap, crossed the intervening lawn and plunged into the wooded grove beyond. On and on he followed the sound of the voice, still sighing across to him, now pleading, now wistful, now wild and now—mocking, with the tone of a teasing sprite which laughed through a veil of tears.

Suddenly he stopped, white-lipped. He had been within a step of the but

half-frozen moat. One more, and he would have plunged into it. A shuddering sense of horror, of shock, seized him, and held him there rooted to the spot, bewildered, stunned, his ears still strained listening to the drifting voice, which had vanished across the heights and lost itself in the white looming shadows of the mountains.

III

"YOUR excellency, though he live a million honorable years, could not estimate the augustly degraded chagrin experienced by my exalted Prince in my humble and servile person."

So spoke the Daimio's high officer, through the interpreter, Genji Negato.

The American held his shaking hands over the replenished kotatsu as the Daimio's officer, hastily summoned by the guard, set himself the distasteful task of explaining to him the existence of the fox-woman.

A fox-woman, so he explained solemnly, was a female human being into whose body the soul of a fox had entered. In Japanese mythology

the fox occupies an important position, and the fox-woman is a creature greatly to be feared. Her face and form, so said the Japanese, were of a marvellous whiteness and a beauty so dazzling that a mortal must cover his eyes to escape blindness. Her hair resembled the sunrays, so bright and glittering its color and effect. Gifted with this beauty of face and form, but devoid of soul, she had but one ruling and controlling ambition. She spent her days and nights lurking about the mountain passes, behind and within rocks and caves, luring men—aye, and women and children, too!—to destruction.

Something in the half-skeptical smile on the taciturn face of the Tojin-san stopped the officer's recital. His expression became troubled, revealing a sensitive pride unduly wounded. Plainly the foreign Sensei

looked upon his explanations in the light of a fairy-tale.

"Your excellency disbelieves our legend of the fox-woman?" he queried courteously.

"Legends," said the Tojin-san slowly, "belong to literature, and are tales to charm and beguile adults and deceive children. In the West we no longer heed them. We name them superstitions, and we've burned out our superstitions as we did our witches in the early days."

The Japanese sat up stiffly, and in the chilly room he waved his fan regularly to and fro.

"You deny the existence of spirits in the West?"

"At least we do not create them out of our fancy or thought," said the American gravely.

The officer said vehemently:

"They exist actively in Japan,

honorable sir. Though you ignore them, they will force themselves upon you—as to-night, excellency!"

The Tojin-san frowned slightly. Then, thoughtfully, he emptied his pipe on the old bronze hibachi.

"You wish me to believe that my visitor to-night was a—spirit?"

"She was worse," said the officer earnestly, "for she was invested with at least the form of a human being."

"How do you know she is not human?"

It was the Japanese's turn to frown. His narrow eyes drew sternly together. His voice was stubborn. He spoke as if determined to justify some indisputable course he had taken.

"She is unlike us in any way, exalted sir. No human being ever was created with such fiendish beauty. Her acts are those of the gaki, moreover. She is mischievous, impish,

wicked, delighting as much in torturing and frightening the poor as well as the rich, little children as well as their elders. The birds of the air come at her calling and follow her whithersoever she bids them. Degraded dogs and cats, forlorn beasts of the mountains and the forests are her body-guard, defying mere human beings to molest or take her. Her home is among the tombs of Sho Kon Sha. She is of the Temple Tokiwa, long forsaken of men and accursed by the gods."

The Tojin-san raised himself with a show of more interest.

"A temple housing your dreaded fox-woman!" he exclaimed, whimsically.

"Yes, alas so, excellency," admitted the Japanese miserably. "Her mother was Nii no Ama (noble nun of second rank) and kin to our august

Prince. She broke her vows to the Lord Buddha, desecrated and disgraced his temple. The gods visited their wrath upon her offspring. They gave it a body only—no soul, save that of the fox. She is beyond the pale, honored sir, and no clean being may look upon or touch her."

The Tojin-san, sitting up erectly now, was holding his lower lip thoughtfully between thumb and forefinger.

"Your fox-woman then is some sort of outcast, who has lived all her life avoided by her kind?"

"She had the company of her degraded parents," said the officer gruffly, "until she was the age of ten. Then a zealous band of former Danka (parishioners) assaulted the temple by fire and sword. The parents of the fox-woman met a deserved death, being literally torn to pieces before

the very altar of Great Shaka himself."

The Daimio's officer paused, his little black eyes glittering with a fanatical light. Then the exhilaration dropped from his voice.

"But the ways of the Lord Buddha are strange. How could the devoted Danka conceive that Shaka would turn his wrath upon them also, for thus scorching his altar with unclean blood. Since the Restoration, excellency, our city's history has been one of blood and poverty. Some assert the province is doomed. Others, more optimistic, that it is but passing through its new birth pains, and that, as of old, its history will be glorious."

The Tojin-san puffed at his relighted pipe in meditative silence. Then, very quietly, he asked:

"Do you lay the misfortunes of

your province upon this fox-woman, as you call her?"

"Aye!" said the officer almost fiercely. "The hand of Fate fell heaviest upon us after the assassination of the intruder. We have never recovered from the humiliations heaped upon us by—the countries of the West. The bombardment of beloved Kagoshima by the allied forces of the western nations followed almost instantly after the death by violence of—"

He stopped abruptly, and coughed in gruff alarm behind his now sheltering fan. He had been upon the verge of telling what had been forbidden.

The Tojin-san looked puzzled, baffled.

"I do not see the connection," he said.

"Yet—it is so," said the Japanese

vaguely, shifting his eyes from the averted faces of the samourai guard.

Said the American forcefully:

"It seems to me an amazing thing that to-day when you are frankly hoping to join the nations of enlightenment, you still give yourselves up to barbarous persecution because of what, after all, is nothing but a legend fit for children only. For my part, I intend to sweep from my house vigorously the absurd belief I find actually seated on my hearth-stone."

The Japanese said solemnly:

"There are several things in life it is impossible to do, exalted sir. We cannot throw a stone to the sun, or scatter a fog with a fan. We cannot build a bridge to the clouds. With this little hand I cannot dip up the ocean. We bow to the elevated wisdom of the West your excellency has come to teach us in

honorable chemistry and physics, but, though we humbly solicit pardon for thus stating, there is nothing your augustness can tell us of our own beliefs—and knowledge."

He made a slight, stiff sign to his attendants and they assisted him to arise. The American stood up also. He was smiling grimly.

"When the snows melt," he said, "I shall ask for guides of your excellency, and personally make a pilgrimage to the lair of this dreaded fox-woman of the mountains."

At that the Daimio's officer's face distinctly paled. His impassive features were anxious, troubled.

"What does your augustness seek to do?—regenerate one without a soul?"

"I wish merely to see her. She must be an interesting specimen—of her kind."

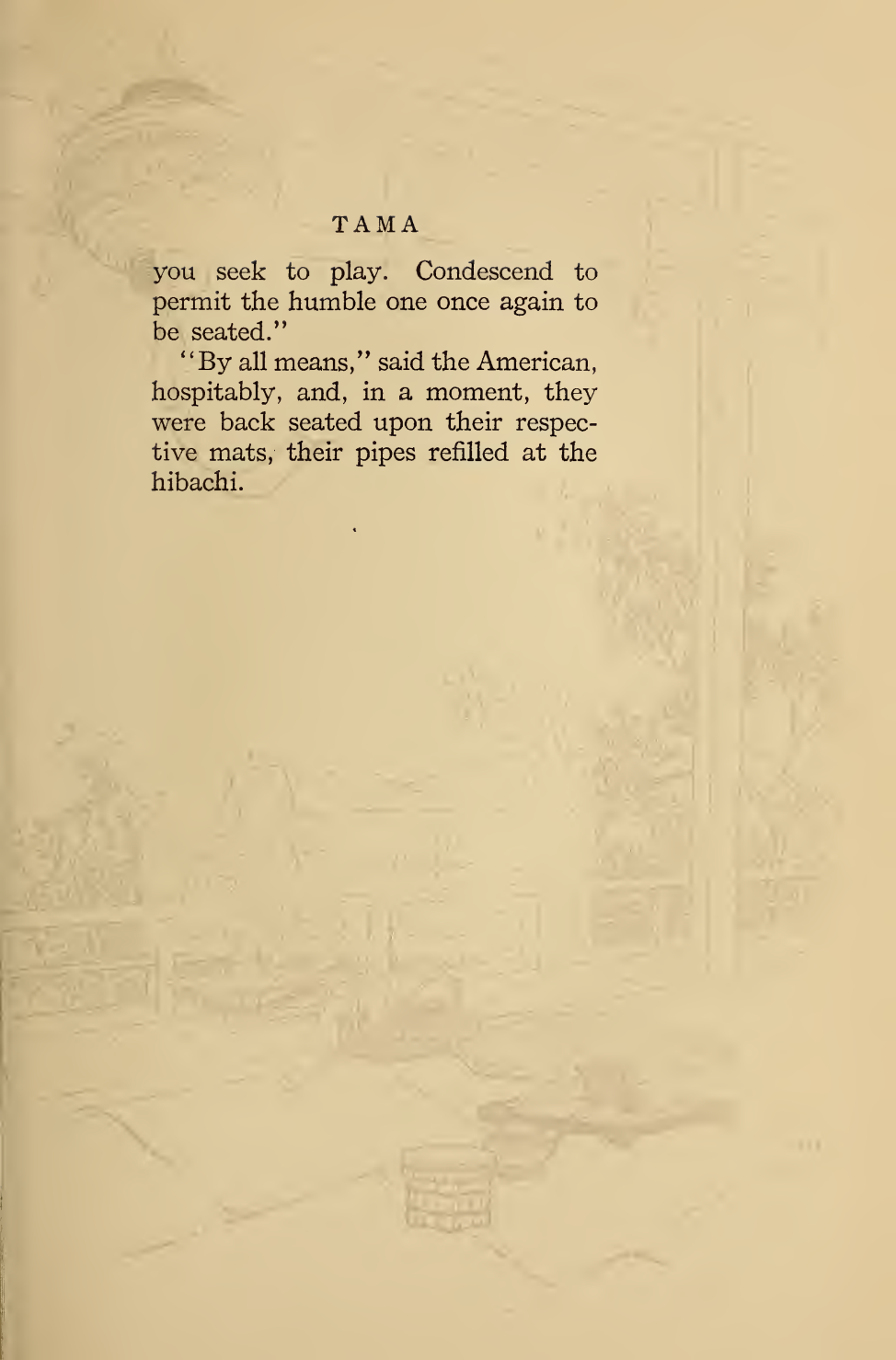
" 'Making an idol does not give it a soul,' " quoted the Daimio's officer, solemnly. "Honored sir, a snake has its charm to some, and the vampire is kin to the snake. In Japan we believe the fox-woman one form of vampire. Condescend, exalted sir, to beware."

The Tojin-san laughed shortly, contemptuously. He was a man of gigantic stature, and as he stood there towering above his gleaming-eyed visitor there was something about his attitude careless, indifferent, fearless, and beyond the understanding of the Oriental. With a morbid recollection of specific instructions from his Prince, the officer restrained his fingers, turned almost automatically toward the two short swords hanging at his side.

"It is my duty, excellent sir," he said with forced courtesy, "to convince you of the danger wherewith

you seek to play. Condescend to permit the humble one once again to be seated."

"By all means," said the American, hospitably, and, in a moment, they were back seated upon their respective mats, their pipes refilled at the hibachi.



IV

"You have stated, honored sir, that the Fox-Woman of Atago Yama is but a superstition worthy of a child, and you have laughed, Mr. sir, at the possibility of danger from proximity with the forsaken creature. Thus spoke and laughed another before your time in Fukui. We of Echizen do not forget the very recent fate of Gihei Matsuyama."

"And pray who was Gihei Matsuyama, and what was his fate?" asked the Tojin-san, good-humoredly.

The fanatical fire was back in the eyes of the officer. He had thrust forward his thin, yellow face and was regarding the Tojin-san with an al-

most venomous glance. His words, however, were pacific, and, as he talked, the American showed a greater interest with every moment.

"We sent seven of our youths to the universities of the West. They were chosen from the most intelligent and noblest of our families. Gihei Matsuyama was one of these, and in him we had particular interest, for he was of Fukui. After two years' sojourn in Europe he returned for service in Dai Nippon, and we gave him a position of honor and housed him in an honorable yashiki hard by Atago Yama.

"As a youth—as a child, he had known the story of the fox-woman. His honorable sire and other male kin had participated in the slaughter of the parents of the creature. Now with this new wisdom he had acquired in the West, as fresh as new-spread

varnish upon him, Gihei laughed to scorn the stories of her fiendish origin, and boasted he would dissipate them as the air does the steam. Making a bold and ingenuous wager that he would enslave the sprite, he set himself the task of tracking her. Unaided by even the counsel of the priests of neighboring temples, he blithely followed the trail of the witch over the river, through the woods and mountains and in and out of the cemeteries, until he had driven her to her final refuge—the Temple of Tokiwa, wherein no man had stepped since the accursed blood spilt before the eye of the eternal Lord."

Here the Daimio's high officer reverently bowed to the floor, ere he continued his narrative, his eyes gleaming more fiercely as he proceeded.

"As he hesitated upon the thresh-

old, divided between a desire to penetrate its mysteries, and an instinct which peremptorily bade him depart, she came forth from the temple doors dancing, as the nuns of old danced for the gods, with her wild, unbound hair outmatching the sun, and her hungry, vivid, smiling lips scarlet as the deadly poppy. He, having looked upon her face, became blinded to all else on earth. Infatuated and maddened, he sought to touch, to seize the creature, when she fled suddenly before him, mocking him with the silver laughter of the sea-siren and hiding her face in the glimmering veil of her hair.

"Thus they sped on, she ever before him, with her luring hair streaming like a gilded cloud in the wind, springing as lightly as a breeze from rock to rock, over brooks and slender streams that melted in be-

tween, up this cliff and down that dell and through this valley, on and on she led the infatuated seeker.

"Suddenly, while his dazzled eyes were fastened solely upon her, and he reached forth a hand to seize her, she darted like a nymph over some unseen chasm of the mountains. He stumbled in her tracks, reached out vainly to seize her, saw not the gulf at his feet, and plunged headlong down into the abyss."

The mask-like face of the Daimio's officer quivered. He wiped his face with a hand that shook visibly. Then, rejecting his breath in that hissing fashion so peculiar to the Japanese, he added fiercely:

"This, honorable sir, is the story of Gihei Matsuyama and the Fox-Woman of Atago Yama. It belongs not to the lips only of the children, as you name them, but is true, well-

authenticated history, which any one in Fukui can prove to you."

The Tojin-san was silenced. He had followed the officer's story with unabated interest. He had no word now in defense of this Japanese Lorelei. His voice was grave, stern:

"What did she do—when the boy disappeared?"

"There are different stories, honored sir. Some say she not even stopped in her flight. Others that she came of nights and hung over the edges of the chasm, shrouding her mouth in her hands and calling to her victim beneath as if she had the power to lure him back. But we have no certain version of this part of the tragedy. For the first part, we have the tale, four times repeated, from the body-servants of Gihei Matsuyama, who dutifully had followed their master upon his wild quest."

The Daimio's high officer arose and made several profound obeisances to the Tojin-san. His face had resumed its immobile melancholy. As he was backing formally toward the exit, bowing at every step, the American suddenly remembered his name. He took a step toward him, his hand impetuously outstretched:

"Pardon me, the boy you speak of was—near and dear to you, was he not?"

Slowly the officer raised his head. Not a quiver broke the stony impassivity of his face. His eyes met the Tojin's blankly:

"He was—my son!" he said.

V

The sense of discouragement and gloom which had seemed to take full hold upon the Tojin-san on his first night in Fukui was, after all, but temporary. He awoke the following morning, feeling refreshed and invigorated. The sun was pouring into his room, gilding even the farthest corner with a friendly touch. He jumped out of bed, donned a warm bath-robe and shoved his feet into fur slippers. Crossing the room in a few quick strides, he threw open one of the latticed sliding doors.

It was a clear, cold day, but the snow, enshrouding trees and ground, glistened with the warm sun upon it.

The army of crows on the roof of the go-down were chattering and fighting among themselves like magpies, and a monkey, swinging by one foot from a camphor bough, shook its fist playfully in his direction, screwing up its face in apparent derision.

From the direction of the narrow river, which threaded its ribbon-like way in the valley below, a rollicking voice was heard in song, and, presently, the owner of the voice climbed up the crest of the slope, skirted the sunken garden hard by the Tojin-san's windows and moved across the lawns toward the kitchen regions in the rear. She was a great, fat girl, whose enormous, muscular arms were balancing on either side huge pails of water. As she waddled along, wheezing and singing, she resembled, to the Tojin-san's humorous sense, a bag of jelly, her bosoms and thighs shak-

ing at every step, her fat soft cheeks keeping time in unison. Close upon her heels, and, himself carrying two smaller pails of water, the cook's diminutive heir toddled solemnly after her.

It was he who first perceived the Tojin-san at the opened door, and he promptly dropped his pails upon the serving-maid's heels, causing her to kick backward in squalling alarm as the cold water splashed about her bare legs and drenched her scanty skirts. Doubtless she would have punished her small charge, had she not at this juncture also perceived the Tojin. Her thick red lips fell instantly agape. She stared at him in a stunned wonder. Then her knees began to wabble, and she attempted to make an obeisance. With every kowtow she essayed, the waters from her pails bounced up

and merrily splashed her. The Tojin-san burst into hearty laughter, and after a moment maid and youngster joined in his mirth. They then scuttled off like a pair of panic-stricken rats, their shining, wet heels flashing like snowballs in the sun behind them.

This simple domestic incident put the Tojin-san into an excellent humor at once. As he looked after the comical pair, and then turned back to gaze, entranced, at the magnificent view on all sides of him, his garden exquisite even in its winter dress, he marvelled at his gloom of the previous night. Then his glance went upward, travelled across the pure blue sky, and rested upon the snowy bosoms of Atago Yama and Hakusan. Suddenly he thought of the fox-woman. There was something chill, forbidding, sinister in those great, beautiful

mountains of snow, looming out there in the sunny sky. He pictured this forsaken creature threading her bleak way under the towering frost-incrusted pines. The gloom of the previous night fell upon him again like a shadow. Shivering, he went indoors, snapping the closed latticed doors behind him.

A fine horse had been provided for the American teacher, and he rode abroad through the streets of Fukui, under an escort sent by the Prince of Echizen himself. Everywhere the friendly and curious citizens ran out to see the white-faced teacher, and bows and smiles were the general rule on all sides.

Occasionally, however, he met the scowling, threatening glance of some roving samourai, who, the interpreter explained, under the new order of things, was out of office and conse-

quently a ronin. It was one of the unfortunate effects of the Restoration that so many men of the sword, who had previously been supported by the people as retainers in the service of princely houses, now found themselves without aristocratic employment, and, too proud to turn to trade, or other equally debasing labor, they wandered about the provinces, voicing their discontent of the order of things, picking quarrels on the slightest provocation, and prophesying dread things for the empire when it should fall under the dominion and patronage of the nations of the West. The ronins were all Jo-i (foreign haters), and they alone the Tojin-san need fear. Happily the Prince of Echizen had furnished an adequate guard for his protection, and the students of the college, themselves samourai, or sons of samourai, were

all pledged to protect the Tojin-san from harm.

Presently they arrived at the school, an enormous building, once the citadel of the Castle, and here nine hundred students received the Tojin-san with a veritable ovation.

As he stood straightly before them, looking across at that sea of bright friendly faces, is it any wonder he recalled another scene in America, so similar, yet dissimilar, and that his heart went out yearningly to the youths facing him?

These intelligent, eager-faced boys were looking to him to guide and lead them. And, in turn, already they had pledged themselves to be his vital friends and allies. He felt emboldened, courageous, proud, elated. Not for a moment would he have retraced his steps to that other land he had regretted.

VI

In the Tojin-san's absence several aggravating accidents had happened in his house. While little Taro, the cook's youngest child, was sitting on the doorstep in the sun, nibbling on a sammari sembei (thunder cake), suddenly from behind an adjacent pine-tree the fox-woman had appeared, and before the frightened child could open its mouth to scream she had pounced upon him, nipped the cake cleanly from his hand and was off.

The child's nurse (who was none other than the fat wench of the morning), who adored her charge, and had already herself suffered at the hands of the mountain witch,

rushed out valiantly at the child's loud cry of alarm. Her fury getting the better of her fear, she started in pursuit of their tormentor.

The latter she discovered serenely seated upon the topmost bough of a bamboo-tree, where she was demolishing the rice cracknel at her leisure. From this perch she threw white pebbles, with which her sleeves seemed loaded, down upon the head of the irate Obun, and while the latter was execrating her and calling upon Ema (the Lord of Hell) to come to her assistance the fox-woman slid down the bamboo trunk so swiftly and so silently she was beside the terrified serving-maid before the latter knew. She felt her arms caught in a sudden squeezing grip. Sharp fingers sank into her thick, fat flesh, crept up along her arms to her shoulders, nipped at her breast, her neck, her

cheeks, her great muscular legs, and with a last vicious tweak at her nose, the fox-woman had again vanished.

The kitchen was in an uproar, the cook's wife in hysterics, and Obun herself reduced to such a state of stunned terror it was impossible to get her to stir from a corner of the kitchen whither she had fled like a whipped dog for refuge.

The Tojin-san, as master of the house, was besought to lend his honorable assistance and advice. He ordered that Obun be brought before him.

After some delay there was a sound as of scuffling and shoving in the hall, and presently the perspiring face of the cook was seen through the parted screens. He was pushing something which looked like a great soft ball along before him, and, in turn, ordering and pleading with the object in

question to stand upon its feet and help itself. He was assisted in his pushing endeavors by a small army of lesser menials of the kitchen, who took turns in pushing and shoving the unwilling Obun into the presence of her dread master, the Tojin-san. Presently she was at his feet, her face hidden on the floor.

"Come, come!" said he, suppressing his inclination to laugh. "Stand up, my good girl."

This was translated in sharp peremptory tones by his interpreter:

"Thou worm of a slattern! Rise to thy degraded and filthy feet. How dare thee bring agitation into the chamber of the Guai-koku-jin [outside countryman] guest and protégé of His Imperial Highness the terrible Prince of Echizen."

Whereupon Obun came tremblingly to her feet, and shaking from head

to foot, raised a pair of eyes that rolled with terror to the face of the Tojin-san. What she saw there must have reassured her. The rugged features of the giant foreigner were softened humorously. In the keen gray eyes bent upon her she saw nothing but kindness and understanding. Instantly she began to whimper, like a great baby unexpectedly comforted.

"You are in trouble, my good girl," said the Tojin, in his deep, kindly voice. "Pray tell me what ails you."

And the interpreter translated:

"Repeat to your terrible and inflexible master the incidents of the morning, and arouse not his dreadful wrath with vain exaggerations and lies."

She opened her lips to speak, encouraged by his smile, closed them again, and mutely uncovered first

her arms, then her neck, and finally her great soft breast.

The Tojin-san, his brows now drawn in a slight frown together, examined the girl's wounds, and with the quick eye of a surgeon instantly perceived their nature. She had been pinched sharply by little relentless fingers which had evidently flown with lightning swiftness from one portion of the hapless maid's body to the other, and finally with a last mischievous tweak had left their mark upon the round bit of putty which served Obun for a nose. The Tojin-san whistled under his breath. Obun had certainly been the victim of a most curious and spiteful antagonist.

He gave some brief directions for healing the wounds, and then turning gravely to his interpreter admonished his servants for their excitement and foolish fears.

Undoubtedly, Obun had got the worst of her fight with this fox-woman, as they chose to name her; but probably, had she not permitted herself to be overcome with fears, she might have left her own mark upon her assailant also. It was vain and foolish to regard this troublesome one who annoyed them so often in the light of a spirit or witch or ghost, as they believed her to be. There were no such things in the world.

The interpreter repeated these instructions with personal embellishments, and the little army of servitors with sidelong glances of wonder and awe at their master sucked in and expelled their breaths, and, with final servile bumping of heads to the floor, retreated kitchenward.

The Tojin-san remained for a moment apparently plunged in puzzled thought. Suddenly he turned toward

his interpreter, who was regarding him with popping eyes of interest. Indeed no move, no word, no action of the white man escaped the notice of Genji Negato, who found him an object of absorbing interest and wonder. His manner of eating, his manner of sleeping, his manner of thinking, talking—all things about him, were a source of wonder and entertainment to the young samourai, who was more than satisfied with this interesting position he had obtained.

"Genji," now said the Tojin-san abruptly, "you have seen something of the world. At all events you have lived in the open ports among people of other lands. You speak English excellently and must have read considerably. Tell me what is your opinion of this fox-woman?"

Genji Negato was all flattered smiles. He drew up his well-groomed

shoulders in a profound French shrug.

"It would give me supreme pleasure to agree with your excellency," he said ambiguously, and smiled apologetically.

"I see," said the Tojin-san, "you, too! Why?"

The stiff expression on the interpreter's face relaxed. In a blurt of confidence he said:

"I have felt the fox-woman's touch also, honored sir," and blushed like a boy at the admission.

The Tojin-san was smiling broadly.

"Ah! When?"

"The first night in your service, excellency — a month before your coming."

"Indeed. Tell me about it."

"I was changing duty with Samourai Hirata. As a large amount of provisions had been put in the store-

rooms it was necessary to mount guard at various points of the Shiro and the grounds. I was assigned by the Daimio's officer to the lodge gates, and there, to my humiliating condemnation be it said, I fell asleep. I carried with me a box containing my rations for the night, and this was strapped upon my back. I am addicted to sleeping on my honorable belly, which your excellency is aware is the proper position for all sleeping animals — to which kingdom I unworthily belong.

"While I slept, I dreamed I was climbing down a mountain-side when suddenly an avalanche of rock and earth swooped down upon my defenceless back, pinioning me to the ground with the excess of its weight. I sought to throw off the burden, shaking my shoulders from side to side, and as I cast back my hands,

the better to seize it, something caught them in a quick, elastic grip. I rolled over bodily, and, as I opened my eyes, perceived the fox-woman leaning over me. She had cut loose the straps of my luncheon-box and was drawing it from under my back when, with a cry of rage, I caught her by the shoulders and pulled her down upon me in a vise-like grip. The blood rushed to her unearthly white face, her piercing wild eyes blazed upon mine till my own eyeballs felt afflicted as if with fire. I felt her breath, sweet as the Spring, coming yet nearer and nearer to my face. I was like one inebriated by saké, with but one impulse, one desire, to feel the actual touch of her unhuman face against my own. As finally we touched cheek to cheek, honored excellency, my fingers released their grip. Just as they did

so a sharp pain stabbed me in the cheek. Before I could regain my wits the witch was gone."

He passed his hand nervously across his cheek.

"For weeks afterward my face was marked with the imprint of teeth sharp as a marmoset's, your excellency."

"And the luncheon?" queried the American, smiling in spite of himself.

"Gone, too," said the interpreter, aggrievedly.

The Tojin-san laughed.

"What a curiously greedy elf it is! All its expeditions among mere mortals seem to be solely for the purpose of food-getting."

Genji opened his little black eyes with an expression of surprise.

"But that is natural. Even a fox-woman needs sustenance."

"Come to think of it, a fox-woman has the body of a human?"

"Certainly."

"Then why not make proper provision, and thus protect yourselves from her pilfering?"

"Your excellency forgets that the fox-woman's origin is malign. No clean Japanese would undertake to nourish an evil spirit. The priests of our temples give us certain charms which protect us, to a certain extent, and we heed their advice, which is ever to avoid and forsake her."

VII

They had told the Tojin-san in Tokyo that he was to be the first white man to set foot upon Echizen soil since that historical period when the Jesuit fathers in the sixteenth century had come near to Christianizing the nation. The subsequent edicts which expelled all foreigners from the empire and made the study of Christianity a crime to be punished with fire, crucifixion or torture, had had their due effect. All this was long before the coming of the Tojin, however, and Japan had broken its hermit-like seclusion, and now was fearfully and curiously holding out a grudging hand to the West-

ern nations pressing her on all sides.

The foreigner was already a familiar figure in the open ports, but so far, in the interior at least, no white faces were to be seen. It was therefore with amazement that the Tojin-san first discovered signs that one of his race had lived recently in Fukui before him.

It was in the Season of Rain-water, the end of February, a dreary period, when the inexhaustible store of drizzling gray rain dribbled unceasingly from the skies. To break up the monotony and depression of the period he had undertaken, with three favorite students, a short pilgrimage up the Winged Foot River for the purpose of examining a cave at the base of the mountains wherein, they said, had once been a curious image. The country people had believed it to be

the image of Buddha's mother, with her babe in her arms, and pilgrimages were made from all parts of the country because of its supposed healing abilities.

As the Tojin-san examined the cave, with the interest and eagerness of the born scientist and archæologist, the youths explained to him the fate of the image in question. A learned Bonze of the Nichiren sect had recognized it as an image of the "Criminal Faith," and, in an excess of rage, had broken it into fragments.

Over the entrance of the cave a large board was nailed, and on this was emblazoned the same notice the Tojin had seen wherever he had travelled — in every city, town or hamlet, at every entrance to temple or palace, roadside or mountain-pass. He had often inquired what the notice was, but his questions had always

been politely evaded, and once he was somewhat curtly told it was simply one of the laws of old Japan, now rapidly becoming obsolete. Now he turned abruptly upon the young students, who were all deeply devoted to him, and imbued with the new spirit and thirst for knowledge sweeping like a fever over all the empire. They, at least, would answer him.

"Higo, just what is this notice? Translate it for me, will you not?" for the three youths accompanying him spoke the English language with fluency.

Higo replied with a slight flush of embarrassment:

"It simply refers to the Criminal God, your excellency."

"The Criminal God? You are very vague."

"Condescend to pardon the allusion, honored sensei," said the

boy, apologetically. "To-day, we are ready to repel all such unworthy references to your exalted nation's faith."

"Indeed," put in earnest-eyed Junzo, "we are not prepared to name any religion or god criminal. Our august Emperor has set us a divine example, since he has honorably thrown open the doors to any and all sects, however odious."

"And for my part," contributed Nunuki in his brusque and somewhat surly manner, "I agree with our ancient philosopher: 'Dogma is a box in which small minds are kept.' "

"Dogma is a form of superstition," said Junzo, "and superstition awakens the meaner, crueler passions. Do you not agree with me, honored sensei?"

But the latter, his brows drawn in puzzled wonderment, was examining

something which had been cut into the wood of the board on which the notice appeared.

"What—" he began, when in a singsong voice, after a slight shrug of his shoulders, Higo began translating the text:

"It reads thus, honored teacher: 'The evil sect called Christians is strictly prohibited. Suspicious persons should be reported to proper officers and rewards given,' but be not afraid," he added hastily, "for it is an old law, and even if still in force to-day your excellency is exempt."

"I am trying to decipher what is written under it—in English!" said the Tojin-san slowly. He took out and applied a magnifying glass to the board.

A swift, oblique look passed from one student to the other; but when

the American turned toward them for enlightenment, their faces were as impassive as their feudal ancestors.

"It appears to me," said he, thoughtfully, "as though some one had cut words into the woodwork, and that—there are marks as if an attempt had been made to blot out the words. Now let us see: 'On—this—Thomas Mor—18—' Why, it is recent—within the last ten years!"

He turned about in a state of intense excitement. Something in the averted faces of his companions increased his curiosity and suspicions. Ere he could frame another question, Nunuki spoke up abruptly:

"It is well you should know the truth, Mr. Teacher. A Guai-koku-jin [outside countryman] lived in Fukui before your time."

"Recently?" demanded the Tojin-san eagerly.

"Seven years since," said the boy shortly.

The Tojin-san drew a great breath. His eyes kindled. He looked wonderfully pleased.

"Then that is why some of you students speak English so creditably?"

"No, teacher. Many of us studied in Yokohama. Many have learned by the book alone. After the coming of your exalted Lord Perry, it became the chief ambition of all thoughtful men of the New Japan to learn the English language and its sciences."

Higo volunteered the above information, but the gruff Nunuki quickly followed him:

"Be not deceived, excellent sensei, in regard to the baku [fool] who was here before you. He was not like you, honored sir."

"No? What was he, then?"

"He was—damyuraisu," blurted the boy angrily.

The Tojin-san burst into laughter. It was a colloquial word well known in the open ports, and was applied to the foreign sailor of whatever nationality. It was the Japanization of the sailor's favorite expression: "Damn your eyes."

Suddenly his face went grave, remembering how the sailors of the white nations had misrepresented their nations! How, in a constant condition of drunkenness, they rioted around the open ports. The gravity in his face was reflected in that of the students.

"It is a subject," said Junzo gently, "ignored by common consent in Fukui, because it is painful to our Daimio. He was the fellow's patron and protector till the time when the honorable beast betrayed him. Pray

thee, honored sensei," he added almost pleadingly, "do not seek to know further in the matter."

"At least tell me what became of him."

"Your excellency's honored feet are surely tired. Your honorable insides must be entirely empty. Food is good in that event. Let us call the kurumma."

They were moving along the road toward the waiting vehicles, which were to carry them back to the little boat that had brought them down the river. It was indeed chilly and dreary, and their rubber-coats and hats of straw were dripping. The Tojin-san, his arm linked in that of the gentle Junzo, cast a look back at the dimly shadowed mountains, and, as he did so, the boy dreamily remarked:

"The Fox-Woman of Atago Yama will find wet passage back to Sho Kon

Sha this night. It is said the streams and rivers are all billowing over, and not even a sprite may spring across them."

"Have no fear," said Nunuki gruffly, looking back over his shoulder. "The fox-woman will find wings suitable to her degraded feet. She'll not lack the shelter so illy deserved."

The words were so brutal, the tone of the boy so full of animus and hatred that the Tojin-san stopped abruptly. He laid a firm, kindly hand on either lad's shoulder.

"Who was it spoke this afternoon of superstitions engendered by a fanatical dogma?"

For a moment neither of the students answered, then growlingly Nunuki snarled:

"It is hard to spit against the wind. Facts cannot be altered."

"By facts—you mean the fox-woman?"

"Her origin, learned sir. It is impossible for the offspring of so vile a union to be otherwise than unclean, as says the law."

The Tojin-san said solemnly, his hand emphasizing with its pressure on their shoulders his words:

"I know nothing of her origin, but to quote a favorite proverb of your own Japan, remember: 'The lotus springs from the mud!' "

The Japanese were silenced, deeply moved.

VIII

It became common knowledge in Fukui that the fox-woman had taken up her residence on the Matsudaira estate. The palace grounds covered nearly twenty acres, and were surrounded like a veritable wall on all sides of the estate by smaller buildings, which had once housed the retainers of the Daimio, but which had not been occupied for years and were in a dishevelled and forlorn condition of ruin and decay. Two of these dwellings had been put in order, and these were occupied by the samourai guard, the aged gateman who guarded the road leading to the mansion and the family of the Tojin-

san's interpreter, who, himself, however, had an apartment in the Shiro.

It was, therefore, quite possible for the fox-woman to find lodging in almost any of the remaining structures, and she could, if she desired, move from one to the other, and when unduly pressed, return to her old refuge of the woods and foothills of the mountains that bounded them on two sides of the estate.

More than one of the household had thought they had seen and recognized her. On a still, hazy night, when the golden moon barely showed an inquiring face in promise of the summer nights to come, Genji Negato had shown her to the samourai guard. Just a white, fleeting face glimmering out like that of some hunted thing between the slender, towering trunks of a grove of bamboo. A moment only under the

streak of moonbeam, and then it had vanished like a mist at twilight.

Was it a dream, they asked themselves, or indeed a manifestation of the just anger of the Buddha for sins committed in a former state. Were they henceforth to be harassed, goblin-haunted?

And in the dawn, before the sun had barely shown its first glimmer of light across the eastern sky—in the misty, dewy, clammy dawn—the maid Obun had again come face to face with her.

Obun was bent upon her usual task of the morning, the bringing of water from the pond to the house. Her eyes were swollen with sleep, she yawned cavernously, and as she stooped to dip the first of the pails into the water, something stirred the other side the pond, and she looked across to gaze, with fascinated eyes,

at the fox-woman, whose long, sunlit hair dripped in and out among the lotus and the water-lilies, as if she bathed it in their perfumed purity. Through this dripping veil of hair her face gleamed whitely. Her lips fell apart as though she listened, her eyes were startled, wild, and looked not at but through and beyond the dumb-struck serving-maid as though she saw her not at all. Slowly, stealthily, the fox-woman came to her feet, still with that weird, seeking, listening look upon her face, and thus with backward, shivering glances, she retreated to the bamboo grove.

To his own amused dismay, the Tojin-san found himself constantly on the watch for her. He had never seen the witch, but he had heard and felt her. She crept upon him in the evenings when he strolled about his garden, and she seemed to follow his

footsteps with the stealthiness of a wildcat, disappearing as fleetly as the wind at his mere turning.

He was aware of her constant nearness if he merely stepped out of his house. Once when something brushed his cheek he was startled to find himself believing at once that it was she who had touched him. He plunged into the brush at his side, and, in the dark, thrust back the branches of the low-growing trees and bushes only to find himself up to his knees in water where he had stepped unawares into an overgrown rookery and fish-pond. As he floundered helplessly about he heard her softly laughing in a weird, mocking voice, which nevertheless seemed to overrun with tears.

Holding his breath unconsciously he found himself straining his ears to listen to the sound, which indeed was

so faint a whisper of a laugh he could have believed he dreamed it.

Sometimes as he drove abroad through the country she called to him from behind sheltering hillocks, and sometimes it seemed her voice floated down to him from some height—some giant tree-top, heavy laden with foliage; for it was the time of "Little Plenty" (May) and all the land was green and warm.

He found himself listening for her call—stopping, waiting for it, and returning with a sense of bitter disappointment when he heard it not. The servants gossiped, the samourai whispered among themselves. They said the fox-woman had put a spell upon him. Genji Negato repeated this to him, and was rewarded by a look of startled contempt and anger.

"Spell!" The man of science repelled the very thought; but he began

to avoid the mountain-sides of his estate, and turned in preference to the river-road, whither she could not follow unless she revealed herself.

Late that month, with no advance warning of its coming, whatever, a typhoon swept venomously across the province, leaving in its wake a shattering storm that shook and beat upon the aged Shiro for a day and night; and, in the night, one encountered the shadow of the fox-woman in the great deserted halls of the Matsuhaira mansion.

A wildly shrieking housemaid, calling "Hotogoroshi!" (murder) at the top of her voice, gave the alarm, and from all parts of the palace the menials scuttled like frightened rats, taking refuge in the great kitchen in the rear.

Even Genji Negato, with blanched face and shaking knees, followed the

last agitated obi into this dubious shelter. Here fortifying himself with heavier, if not trustier, implements than his swords he recovered his wits sufficiently to attempt to rally the panic-stricken army of servitors. Each in turn was ordered, urged, besought to go to the Tojin-san's apartment. It was dastardly, so he averred, to leave the foreigner alone to face the unknown peril menacing him. For plain it was to be seen that she who had hitherto confined her malign activities to the large outdoors, had stepped at last across the threshold of the doomed palace. Undoubtedly, the typhoon which had crushed half the city so cruelly had been summoned by the witch in token of her power over them. Something horrible, sinister, was about to happen. Who could tell exactly what; but the signs were evil, evil!

He forgot the difference in his state and rank to these creatures of the kitchen, and found himself confiding to them his worst fears.

The Tojin-san slept from north to south, the position proper for a corpse alone! Genji Negato had pleaded with him to change, but the foreigner had laughed and insisted it was the true, scientific position, from pole to pole, in harmony with the electric currents of the atmosphere.

The night before all four of the samourai guard had heard the plaintive howling of a dog; an owl was seen black athwart the moon; a tailless cat fled under the Uki (goblin-tree). The samourai had dutifully reported all these happenings to the Tojin-san, and now, when the blow seemed about to fall upon him, this stalwart guard, provided by their

prince, were sleeping comfortably in their yashiki on the very edge of the estate. It was the workings of the gods!

Goto, the cook, found his fluttering tongue.

"This very morning," said he, "I trod thrice upon an egg-shell."

"I miserably entangled my obi when dressing," said another.

"And I, alas! bit my tongue when eating. My mistress said it was a sign some one begrudged me my food. Who indeed but this spiteful fiend of the mountains?"

"Twice this week," wailed the cook's wife, "little Taro broke his chopsticks when eating."

She fell to sobbing violently into her sleeve.

"Condescend to hush!" said Genji Negato. "Remaining silent is good." The interpreter's yellow face had

turned ashen, his hair appeared to stand almost on end, as he listened with suspended breathing.

Outside the wild rain beat against the wind-swept trees, and dashed peltingly against the ancient Shiro. Jagged flashes of lightning zigzagged across the skies showing clearly through the walls, though the amado were in place. It was not, however, to the sound of the tempest that the interpreter was giving ear. Somewhere within the Shiro itself new sounds were heard. It was as if a wind passed along the great halls and corridors and close upon its soft-footed flight there dashed something heavy, pursuing.

Suddenly the main sliding screen or door, which led into the halls, fell inward with a crash. Over it something bounded like a ball of fiery light, passed through the kitchen

swift as a lightning flash and shot out into the storm, letting in a gust of rain and wind and thunder through the shaking doors.

A moment later only, and panting like an animal in the chase, the great Tojin burst into the chamber. He stopped short, staring as if confounded at the group shuddering against the farthermost wall. Slowly his gray face relaxed its tension. He tried to speak normally, but in spite of himself his voice shook, though his words were terse, commanding.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," he said. "Translate that, if you please, to the servants," he sternly ordered his interpreter.

The latter's teeth were chattering. He could barely speak.

"Your excellency — you yourself have seen—"

"I saw nothing," said the Tojin-

san, doggedly, "save the figure of a —woman!"

"A woman!" cried the interpreter, almost in tears at the evident stubbornness of this fool-white-man. "Ah, most high-up sir, would you have condescended pursuit of a mere female creature?"

The Tojin-san looked care-worn, haggard, as if he struggled within himself. His deep, stern voice quivered in spite of himself.

"She was pressed against my wall, and fled fleetly as a wild thing when I threw the doors open. The halls were unlighted. I could barely see her. My eyes were dazzled at the sudden darkness. I may have been mistaken. And yet — and yet — it seemed to me—her hair was—*gold!*"

IX

"I AM determined to satisfy my—call it curiosity if you will—in regard to this fox-woman," the Tojin-san told the three students who were his almost constant companions outside the school.

"I can get no help whatever from my servants and less from the guard. Genji Negato is worse than a woman, and the Daimio's officer has point blank refused to give me a guide to direct me to her home on Atago Yama."

He paused and looked at the embarrassed faces of the students. They were devoted to him he knew, eager to serve and please him; yet even

they, sons of the new, sane Japan, feared the fox-woman. He was determined to win them over.

"So I want your help, Junzo, and yours, and yours, Nunuki and Higo. You can help me if you will."

"In what way?" demanded Nunuki cautiously.

"In any way you wish. Devise some scheme to trap this creature of the mountains."

"Can we trap the north wind when it raves over the wilderness? Can we trap even the gentlest zephyr when it dances across sunlit paths?" asked Junzo, wistfully.

"But the fox-woman is neither the rough north wind, nor the playful zephyr of the south. She has a physical body, which even you will admit. The wildest thing of the wildest forest can be caught," and he added, half under his breath, "and tamed."

Higo was considering, his young patrician face very thoughtful and intent; but Junzo with a burst of boyish pity put his hand timidly, affectionately into that of the Tojin's.

"Ah, dear sensei," he said, "you are tortured, obsessed by this wretched witch. She has put her evil spell upon you."

"Nonsense," said his teacher, almost roughly, releasing his hand. "This is not helping me, Junzo."

"But you have never heard the story of Chuguro. It happened in Yedo, many years ago, your excellency. He was in the service of a Hatamoto named Suzuki, and seemed like any other contented and healthy ashigaru. Then came a time when his comrades missed him in the night, and they would not again see him till just before the dawn, when he would creep back to his quarters

looking very strange and white and exhausted. He became weaker and weaker from day to day, and at last was unable to leave his couch at all, though he pleaded and begged to be carried to the foot of a little bridge not far from the main gateway. But his friends were obdurate. They called in a great Chinese surgeon, who made an examination of the dying man and declared his veins had been literally drained dry of blood! All declared it was the fox-woman; but the Chinese doctor said: 'It was a frog, which took to the soldier's eyes the form of a woman.'" The boy paused, eying his teacher wistfully. "It is only a legend you will say, sensei, but I beseech thee, honored sir, to avoid contact with even a stray fly, a spider, any crawling thing that may beat its way into your yashiki. Who knows what form this dread-

ful fox-woman may take to lure you."

Higo broke in impatiently:

"If indeed our sensei is tortured, why waste words on idle tales of the past? It is our duty to conceive some sensible scheme by which to rid his excellency of the torture."

He began to talk swiftly and eagerly to his friends in Japanese, and gradually their resisting and doubting faces changed. With boy-like zeal they discussed the adventure proposed by Higo. Then the latter turned abruptly back to the Tojin-san.

"You will permit us free access to your grounds at all and any hours?"

"Most certainly. I will so instruct the gateman."

"And, if necessary, we may call upon the guard for assistance?"

The Tojin-san slightly smiled.

"Come now, surely you don't anticipate so hard a task?"

"We cannot tell. Even the guard may prove insufficient, but with Shaka's aid we may succeed!"

A look of alarm came to the Tojin-san's face.

"I wish no harm whatever to befall her. If you can surprise her upon one of her nightly peregrinations in our neighborhood, and induce her gently but firmly to accompany you, it will be gratifying. Once brought face to face with other people—for I am convinced she is the same as we are—I hope to be able to lay this bugaboo of a fox-woman."

"As for that, impossible to say," said Higo vaguely. "Now sinking, now floating, thus is life says the poet. If disaster befall us in the undertaking it will be as decreed of the gods. All things are beforehand ordained."

"You anticipate hazard in the adventure?"

"We would not attempt it otherwise," proudly asserted Nunuki, his hand unconsciously caressing his sword-hilt, for these boy-samourai all wore the sword. Higo indeed was of a princely house, and kin to Echizen himself.

As the American looked at them, nerving themselves thus bravely for an encounter which to them at least was a deadly one, he suddenly thought of that frail, fleeing shadow which had gone before him in the gloom of the unlighted halls, and, unconsciously, he smiled. Why, boys as they were, any one of them could surely have crushed her between the palms of his sinewy young hands. If there were a real risk to run, he knew he would be the first to thrust himself in their way. But no! The under-

taking was worth while, necessary, indeed, if only for the purpose of demonstrating the foolishness and cruelty of superstition. Even the melancholy tones of his favorite pupil, chanting almost monotonously the Buddhist text:

"Brief is the time of pleasure, and quickly turns to pain, and whatsoever is born must necessarily die," failed to move him.

Young heroic fatalists! His heart went out to them overwhelmingly.

X

They had dug a trench hard by the castle moat. Over this they spread a net made of stout hempen rope, the edges of which were threaded in and out with elastic of great strength. This was stretched out and pinned, not too firmly, till it encircled and covered the pit. Then the sod and leaves and flower petals were carefully, though thinly, replaced, and the trap was ready for the Fox-Woman of Atago Yama.

Over all the Matsuhaira Shiro a tense, silent excitement pervaded. Though the students had worked in secret, swiftly and silently on a dusky, rainy night, when their prey

would not be likely to be abroad, nevertheless no smallest menial on the place but knew that measures had been taken to entrap the fox-woman. They shivered deliciously over the dreadful prospect, for dire things had been promised them by the too garrulous Genji Negato, should any slightest inkling of the plans leak out from the Shiro itself.

Even the Tojin-san, who had been kept in complete ignorance of the actual methods they had taken to entrap her, was affected by that nameless feeling of uneasiness and unquiet, of repressed excitement and strained fear, which animated every other individual of his household.

Throughout the evening he paced his great chamber in a moody, wretched silence. The sense of aloneness, of homesickness that sometimes came upon him in this land, seemed

somehow this night to be deeper, more depressing. For days, indeed, he had been affected by a feeling of impending gloom and disaster. He had been restless, dissatisfied, nervous—unconsciously listening and waiting for something he seemed to expect was about to happen. Now he found himself analyzing this sick sense of depression which had pervaded his whole being these latter days, and seemed to reach its culmination on this silent night.

Was it something in the look or tone of a student who recalled one of his own people, or was it the letters that had come to him from across the seas that made him realize they had cared for him more in that other country than he had realized? No—he faced the situation. This was not what had awakened the fever within him.

It was something deeper, something very beautiful and mystic. It was the golden hair of this Japanese Lorelei which had ensnared his longing! He could not banish its glitter, its "sun" as they called it here, its wild appeal from his mind. What was this creature of the mountains then, whom the gentlest of people had outcast? And what was this spell they said she had cast upon him? The words seized upon his fancy, writhed his lips into a tortured smile. He, whom a mere woman had scorned, under the spell of a witch—a wild creature of these Japanese mountains whose face he had never even seen! It was preposterous—fantastic! And yet!

The blood forsook his face, his lips. For days, for weeks, aye, for months he had thought of little else. Through half the luminous nights he had

watched and waited for her—had sought her desperately, hungrily. Day and night he had been waiting for her—waiting and listening, always listening, for that appealing voice of mockery and anguish that called to him insistently—to him alone! What mad fancies were these that had woven themselves like a subtle spider's web into his clear, sane mind? It was the country, the people! He was in a land of gods and spirits!

The night was very still and humid. The rain was gone, but its wet touch still clung in the air and was moist upon the grass and trees. The shoji of the chamber had been removed entirely on the garden side, so that he practically was out-of-doors in an open pavilion or verandah. He could see the moon-tipped branches of the trees under whose shade myriad fireflies flickered in and out, rivalling

the distant stars above them in brilliancy.

A cherry grove, from which blew fairy flakes, like confetti at a carnival, was at the extremity of the garden, and ever and anon a shower of these dancing-petals blew into his apartment, giving it an almost festive air. Great drifts of them lay in the corners of the room, like snow, and upon his couch, his tables, chairs and other furnishings, marking them with a white touch. In the shadow of a bamboo grove an uguisu thrilled forth its liquid song, and the wind-bells on the eaves tinkled musically back and forth in a faint breeze, as if in unison with the song of the wood-bird.

From across the mountains came the gentle booming of the temple bells, telling the hour of the night, and, as if they were a signal listened for, the fox-woman crept out of the

dense bamboo grove and felt her way among the shadows till she came to the brink of the castle moat. Along its edge she wended her fleet, cautious way, till she came to a narrow wing, and over this she stepped silently. In the vague light of the moon, she seemed indeed a wraith, in her clinging gown of white, enshrouded in the wild veil of her hair. On and on she moved, as though she travelled over known and familiar paths.

Suddenly, piercingly, in the still moonlight sounded the cry of the fox-woman, and, as suddenly, a silence fell, still as death itself. It was as if every living thing had paused to listen to that appealing cry of agony and terror.

Silence! No one stirring. No one breathing.

Then, as if brought violently into

life, the Tojin-san bounded to his feet, and in the light of the swinging takahiras, for a moment his great form loomed up menacingly. From all parts of the estate now came the sound of movement, and he saw the samourai guard, their gleaming swords drawn fully and flashing eerily in the moonlight, charge down blindly in the direction of the cry. Within the woods came the sound of battle, the rumble of men's savage, triumphant voices — a wild stirring and crying, and then again — the silence!

Presently from out the brush they came, bearing their burden—stalwart men of war, all with their hands upon her. Out along the whitewashed paths, across the green-clipped lawns and through the garden of fragrant, blowing flowers they carried the fox-woman into the cherry-petalled cham-

ber of the Tojin-san. There they set her down, still entangled, like a wild beast of the woods, in the net they had made to snare her.

Unmoving she lay, as one indeed in whom life was extinct; but when the Tojin-san moved with an impulse of passionate yearning toward her, the boy Junzo, who loved him, sprang in his path.

"Touch her not, beloved sensei! She is accursed, unclean!"

He put the boy roughly, savagely aside, and in a moment was kneeling above her. It was the task of a minute to cut free the bonds that bound her. Still she did not move. With hands that trembled in spite of themselves, gently, softly, he put back from her face the glittering veil of her hair, and as he did so his heart came up in his throat in a great, suffocating bound — for the face he

"TOUCH HER NOT, BELOVED SENSEI! SHE IS ACCURSED, UNCLEAN!"

uncovered was that of a white woman!

So perfect, so exquisite the small, sensitive face, he could only gaze upon it spell-bound. The great purple eyes, wide open, and shadowed with their long, gilded lashes; the thin little nose; the lips red as a new blown rose, and as sweet!—and crowning it all, the golden glory of her hair.

In this land where only the brown face and densely black hair and eyes had been known for centuries, was it strange that this creature of the mountains seemed as of another world—a sprite indeed. This persecuted, hunted creature, whom they had trapped with ropes, as the hunter does the wild animals of the forests; this fragile, trembling, quivering little child—of his own skin and blood—*this* was the fox-woman!

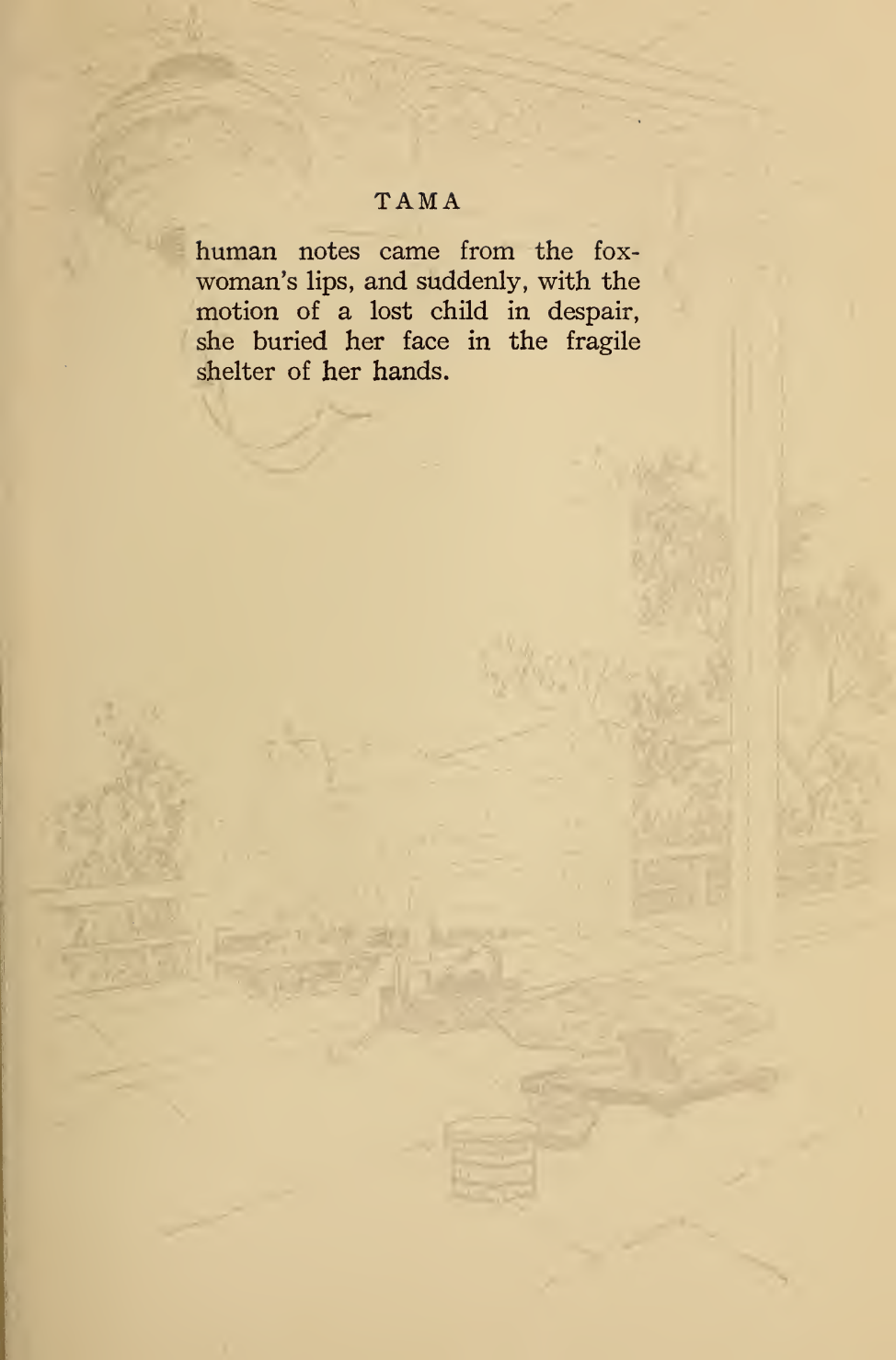
She spoke not at all, though her wide-open eyes never moved from the Tojin's face. Something in their glassy stare, their curious look as of a mist before them, brought an exclamation to his lips. He bent nearer to her, looked deeply, keenly into those unflickering eyes, and an imprecation swept his lips.

"And blind! My God!" he cried.

As if his voice had moved her spirit into a sudden life, the fox-woman stirred soundlessly as a cat would have done. Suddenly she leaped blindly in the face of the Tojin. He stood unmoving, a great stolid wall against which she might hurl her puny strength in vain.

Presently, gasping, exhausted, she drew backward, her fluttering hands crushed upon her heart as if to stop its frantic beating. A sound that had the vaguest, most piteous of

human notes came from the fox-woman's lips, and suddenly, with the motion of a lost child in despair, she buried her face in the fragile shelter of her hands.



XI

She was the daughter of the damyuraisu (foreign sailor) and of the Nii-no-ama (Noble Nun of second rank). Bit by bit he drew forth her history from the students, who remained with him throughout the night. There was little enough they could tell him, beyond the fact of her parentage. Her father had betrayed his friend and benefactor, an Echizen prince; her mother had broken her vows to the Lord Buddha. And the creature herself! Now the Tojin-san could see for himself that the tales told about her were by no means chimerical.

She was free to go, for he had cut

the ropes that bound her. Though blind, she could have found any exit of the chamber unaided. She made not the slightest move to go. Crouched back there against the farthest wall she stayed, with her wild flushed face peering out from between her parted hair, the eyes wide open, unblinking, scarcely moving. If she understood what they spoke, she made no sign; yet her face had a strained, listening look—as though she heard strange sounds that both baffled and troubled her.

The dawn crept into the chamber, murky and sunless, and found them still there on guard as it were, with the distance of almost the entire room between them and the fox-woman, but watching her with unabated emotion. It was the Tojin-san who at last approached her. She sensed his coming and shrank back farther, if

that were possible against the wall. Now he stood directly before her, studying her in a profound silence.

Slowly, cautiously she raised herself to her knees, and then to her feet. Now she stood fairly facing him, her back against the wall. A thin, searching little hand felt blindly before her, touched him. With a quick, animated movement her fingers now flew from his hand, up along his arm and shoulder, paused upon his pitted cheek, moved to his lips and rested there, soft as a feather, fragrant as a flower.

Never in all the days of his life had he looked upon such a face as hers. Every quivering, sensitive feature seemed alive with the quickened, subtle sense of the blind. Even the little feeling fingers, how mortally alive they were, as they swept with their light, electrical touch across him!

When he put his great, firm hands upon her shoulders, he felt the shock, the startling tremble that agitated her. She stood poised for flight, uncertain, fearful, with the wild defiance of her nature only in part checked; but as his deep, compassionate voice addressed her, she became gradually passive and very still.

"You may not understand my words," he said, "but you will their meaning. I want to help you. I am your friend."

Her eyes became curiously blue, and the misty look faded like a shadow from their depths. Across the tremulous, scarlet lips a smile crept like the dawn. She moved a step nearer to him, and as he regarded her, fascinated, thrilled, the student, Junzo, broke the spell of silence. He had thrust himself forward with an impetuous, imploring motion.

"Sensei!—honored sir, teacher—!"

She turned her head craftily in the direction of the new voice, then slowly back to the Tojin-san. There was a low, accusing note in her voice:

"To-o-jin-san! Thou too!" she said.

XII

The Palace Matsuhaira, wherein the courteous Prince of Echizen had housed the foreign teacher, had lost all but two of its tenants. The odorous kitchens where but lately the army of servants had happily and noisily labored were now quite empty. So were the vast, cool halls, and the great, bare chambers. Like an army of rats, one and all, they had deserted the place, leaving the Tojin-san alone, save for that unseen one, who alternatively teased and entreated him.

Even the faithful students, who had brought about her capture, had ceased to visit the Shiro, having vainly implored the Tojin-san to

abandon the place. With a grim and stubborn patience, he kept doggedly to the course he had set himself.

All over the house he found traces of her. Now she had slept in this chamber, now in that. Here she had prepared her diminutive, stolen meal of fruit, honey, and rice.

He was aware of her constant nearness, and had he so desired, at almost any moment, he could have again seen her; but he was taking a more subtle means this time to entrap her. She must come forth of her own free will; then he would know he had her confidence, that she knew him for a friend. He found himself talking to her, sometimes sternly, in the chiding, coaxing tone one uses to a child. He would move from screen to screen as he talked, until he knew behind which one she

pressed; but he made no effort to force her from her hiding-place.

Never a word would she speak in response until he was seated far removed from the sheltering screens, then she would begin reiterating the one appealing, accusing sentence:

"Tojin-san, thou too! thou too!"

It was as if she knew no other words of her father's language. He pondered their meaning. What was it she asked of him? Of what accused and reproached him? Did she hold him responsible for the manner of her capture—its cruelty? He told her in slow, forceful words that he had known nothing of this, and waited in anxiety for some word or sound from her to indicate that at least she understood. She only laughed, that soft, mocking, tremulous little laugh with its inner sound of tears.

The burning, humid days of June

slipped by on drowsy wing. School was closed for the season, and the foreign sensei was at liberty to travel if he wished upon his vacation. The samourai body-guard were anxious to attend him upon any expedition that would take them away from the Shiro. Genji Negato was available, outside the place. Every cringing, fearful, cowardly servant, who still drew wages from the Daimio's high officer, was anxious again to serve him. They made up deputations and committees, which fearfully approached the mansion, and threw their messages in little balls that pelted against the paper summer walls of the shoji and pierced their way into the Tojin-san's apartment. And still not once did he venture forth.

Every sliding door and screen he had himself put in place. He did not

venture outside the house, even to step into the grounds. And a strange restless rumor began to float about the little town below, which told of the spell which chained the white man.

Meanwhile within the mansion itself, the Tojin-san was winning a strange victory. Timidly, like a fascinated wild bird, now approaching, now retreating, nearer and yet nearer, had come the fox-woman. There came a day when, though he did not turn to look at her, fearing instantly to lose her, she stood at last revealed. Only a few paces from him, there of her own free will, timorous, trembling, but unafraid.

Her name was Tama (Jewel). She told it to him voluntarily, her hand upon her breast. He had not even asked her, nor did he by the slightest motion reveal the eager emotion her

words aroused when he found they were spoken in his own tongue. Haltingly, uncertainly, like a child for the first time feeling for its words, she essayed to speak.

"I am Tama," softly she said, and then, as if enchanted by her ability to speak actual words to one who might hear and understand, she lapsed into excited, trembling speech, wholly unintelligible to the Tojin-san, for it was a medley of both her father and her mother tongue, neither of which she could properly speak.

Suddenly she stopped abruptly, as if affrighted by her own bravado, and her fears again besetting her panically she retreated behind the screens. For the rest of that day, as least, he saw nothing further of her. But he was well pleased with matters as they were. It was worth

waiting for this, he told himself. As he paced his chamber, he made no effort to curb the exhilarating excitement that pervaded his whole being.

XIII

Two days later she again came forth from her hiding-place. He had been aware of her hovering nearness all through the morning, but made no effort to induce her to come to him. One may entrap a wild bird; one cannot make it sing. He knew the course he was taking with her was right; he was exuberantly, boyishly happy at its evident success.

Shyly, trustingly, of her own free will, again she had come to him. On the sensitive questioning face there was scarcely a trace of the wild, impish defiance that had seemed on that first day its only expression. She even smiled tentatively, pleading-

ly, as though she sought in this wise to win his approval. He spoke to her quietly, as though her presence there were but natural:

"Won't you be seated?" he said.

She hesitated a moment, sat a moment, rose to her knees uncertainly, and gradually subsided to the mat. Her face was down-drooped, the little white hands folded meekly in her lap.

"You are not Japanese," said the Tojin-san, gently. It was a simple, clear statement. If she understood anything of his language, it would be plain to her what he meant. A marvellous flush spread over her eager little face. The humid, misty eyes were clear as blue-bells now. A sound like an excited sob, half laugh, escaped her.

"Nipponese?" she said. "No—me? I am—To-o-jin-san!"

Her hands went out to him in a sudden impulsive motion. She moved on her knees nearer to him.

"Ah," she cried, "speag those words of my father! Thas—beautiful!"

He was deeply moved, and took the little hands closely in his own. They were soft and small, clinging and confiding as a child's. How they trembled and fluttered at first; then rested still, as if with a joyous new confidence.

He could not bear to look at her beseeching face. In all the days of her life he knew he was the first she had not held at bay. She knew mankind only as creatures of prey. Was this the mocking sprite of the mountains, who even when entangled in the ropes of the hunter had fought so desperately, so savagely? What could he say to her, what words of

assurance that would penetrate her full understanding? As he pondered the matter, he saw the startled change that swept suddenly across her face. The hands in his own grew tense, rigid, clung to his own in a passionate frenzy of fear.

"You are afraid of something? What is it?"

The old hunted, listening look was upon her face again. She was shivering, trembling violently. Her voice came in a whispering gasp:

"I hear—those sound!" she said, her head uplifted.

Only a lazy breeze was stirring, and moving the wind-bells to and fro. Suddenly he saw the silhouetted shadow on the shoji wall. It moved silently, cautiously. Then the screens were slid soundlessly open, and the student Junzo appeared. For a moment he remained staring down upon

them, his young face becoming gray and stern.

"Sensei! Then it is true!" he burst out, and the look of despair on his face deepened.

The Tojin-san arose to his full gigantic height. His hand fell like a heavy weight upon the shoulder of the youth. His voice was rough, commanding.

"Look at this child, Takemoto Junzo. What is there you see in her to fear—to hate?"

"Ah, you, beloved sensei," cried the boy passionately, "are bewitched, enchanted. Do I not see with my honorable eyes the change that has befallen you? It is spoken of all over Fukui that you are in the toils of this siren. I could not longer bear it, and, against my honorable parent's stern command, I came here to see for myself. Alas, it is too true! You are bewitched, obsessed!"

The Tojin-san curbed his temper. His voice, though stern, was calm, as though he sought to humor the boy.

"What is the change you observe in me then?"

"Your eyes are weak and soft like the dove's. There is a melting, tender look unfit for man upon your face. Your voice is gentle, like unto a woman's. It is as if—as if—the enamored weakness of a love possessed you!"

"A love!" repeated the Tojin-san, as though the very word were new to him. Suddenly a look of anguish came into his face, giving it a poignant, withering expression.

The fox-woman had crept softly across the room. Now she leaned upon the farthest shoji, her head lifted in a dreaming trance.

"Leave this accursed place with

me to-day," urged the boy entreatingly. "My honorable father will gladly receive you as our honored guest. Throw off the burden of this foul witch of the mountains. She can only soil your excellency, and Fukui is prepared to mete out to her at last her proper fate."

"I am a white man," said the Tojin-san slowly, in a deadly voice, and never had his student seen such an expression upon his face before. "As such I protect, not abandon, the women of my race. It will not be well for Fukui if harm comes to either me, your guest and teacher, or to her, whom I choose to befriend."

"Sayonara, then, excellent sensei," said the boy brokenly, "I have done my best."

As he pushed back the doors, the fox-woman glided soundlessly across his path. The boy found himself

looking directly into that shining face that had distracted all who had gazed upon it. Breathing heavily, almost as if he sobbed, he drew backward from her, his young face drawn and shaken. She spoke not at all, though she touched him with a timid, questioning hand. Something in the expression of the upturned face, in the tears that stood like dew in the wide, sightless eyes, aroused a new strangling emotion in the Japanese youth—reached at last his innermost sense of chivalry. He threw up his arm, with a sudden motion almost as of defense. Then, without a word or look backward, he jumped into the garden below, and fled along its paths.

XIV

THE days stole by with light tread. Without the Shiro Matsuhaira events of great national import were taking place. Fukui was disrupted, torn by the new tide of events that was to alter its destiny, for the Yaku doshi (evil years) were again upon them.

No longer were the provinces to be ruled by individual princes, for one and all had come under the dominion of the Emperor.

People were packing their household goods in haste and wending their ambitious ways toward the greater cities. In a single month Fukui lost half its population, and those left behind seemed to move about the

affairs of life as if in a dream, from which presently they would awake.

Thus the political upheaval served for a time, at least, to distract the people's mind from the Tojin and the fox-woman. It was but a temporary distraction. A whispering, sinister voice was at work. It ran in and out the houses of Fukui, and breathed its suggestive message to the disaffected, impoverished ones, and pointed out the cause of the calamity that had befallen them; for so sudden and drastic a change of government was bound to react disastrously upon the people at first, no matter how fortunate its ultimate end. The people of Fukui, like those of other feudal strongholds, were at present feeling only the first blighting, threatening touch of coming poverty.

For hundreds of years the samourai and their families had been dependent

aristocrats, who shared the rich fortunes of their lords. Now they found themselves suddenly thrust out of service; in the same position as the despised merchant or farmer, forced to seek employment no matter how repugnant or menial. Many of them chose what they considered the noblest and most heroic solution of the problem—suppuku! The entire destruction of themselves and families. Many sought the larger cities intent on obtaining lucrative positions under the new government; many families were reduced to the direst poverty, and became dependents upon their own servants and tradespeople.

Fukui had known the noblest of princes, and it was with a feeling of despairing confidence that the people awaited his return from Tokio. He was high in the councils of the Imperial Government. He could and

would — he must do much to save his beloved province from disaster. So they waited patiently, helplessly. Hope is at best but the comforter of despair, and as the days passed drearily by a new feeling took its place.

A sullen, rebellious hatred for the white nations who had brought this new state of affairs about—a murderous, resentful impulse of revenge. It was the same feeling that had animated the misguided patriots of Satsuma, when they fought the allied fleet at Kagoshima, but it was uglier, meaner, for its force was directed upon two individuals, who, to the Fukui mind, represented the detested nations of the West. One of these, so Fukui firmly believed, was directly responsible for the disaster. She, the accursed outcast, who had descended from the mountains and taken up her

abode in their very midst; who had laid her spell upon the great Tojin-san, who had been their friend!

Many a samourai's itching hand crept stealthily to the forbidden sword, for, by the new law, they were not permitted to wear the sword, as he measured his misfortunes through the blighting nearness of the fox-woman. Many a distracted mother crooned a promise to her sleeping babe that the dread gagama (goblin) of Atago Yama that had menaced them for so long was at last to be extinguished.

And meanwhile, in the Shiro Matsuhaira, another kind of dream was unfolding its rose-lined wings.

XV

"To what are you listening, Tama?"

He had come upon her pressed closely against a latticed screen, whose opening looked out upon the river leading to the city below.

She started at his coming, and turned toward him, her back against the screen.

"I listen to the noise of thad river," she said, and there was a conciliating, pleading note in her voice.

"You cannot hear the river from here. It is very shallow—barely stirs. There is something else you are listening to?"

"It is the uguisu," she said quickly,

as though she sought to disarm his fears. "It no longer sings, Tojin-san. I listen for hees voice again."

"It never sang, my child, save at night. What is it that troubles you? You seem always to be listening, waiting—so fearfully—so anxiously. You are afraid of something. Tell me what it is?'

His deep, lowered voice was as caressing and tender as a mother's. She faltered, turned from him. Her voice overran with vague sighs.

"I hear even those mos' sof' of honorable whisper. I hear some noise of —trobble! I am afraid — for you — kind Tojin-san."

"For me! I am amply protected here in Fukui. I have a body-guard of samourai, besides Genji Negato, who will come back quickly enough when he has mastered his foolish fears."

"The samourai gone," she said, simply.

He was silent a moment, realizing there was nothing to be gained by attempting to deceive her. How, when or where she learned of these matters he never knew; but she knew perhaps more than he did of what was happening in Fukui.

"Even if it is so," he finally said, "and the samourai too are gone, you have nothing to fear. Less than a week ago a courier brought word to me from Tokio. I am expecting friends in Fukui very shortly now."

"Frien?" she repeated wistfully. "Like unto you, kind Tojin-san?"

"Yes—white men, and Japanese, too, for that matter. I have good friends in Tokio. They are coming here to see you, my child."

"Alas!" she said, shrinking slightly from him, "Why do they come?"

"I asked them to come," he said, very gravely. "I feel I am right, and that by a simple operation we will be able to make you see, as other people do, my child."

The word appeared to trouble her.

"I see already, Tojin-san," she said.

"What do you see, Tama?" he asked her huskily.

The words came floodingly, tumultuously to her lips. The misty eyes were blue as the sea and as beautiful.

"I see thee, Tojin-san. Thou art beautiful ad my sight, lig' unto the gods."

A look of suffering left its mark upon the face of the Tojin. He gazed at the kindling face of the girl before him, and the old strangling, yearning emotion swept over him.

"Give me more sight—if it is your honorable wish," she said, "bud

already I see—I know!" She pressed her fingers impetuously to her eyes.

"I see the light—the dark. It is a worl' of shadows on my eyes, and shadows are lig' unto our dream—mos' beautiful of all!"

His voice was firm, almost solemn.

"You have been wandering around in a black wilderness all of your life; you do not know what it is, my poor little one, to see the sun! But, with God's good help, I am going to lead you out of the wilderness—into the light!"

"You are the light!" she said, throbbingly, and slipped to her knees, putting her face against his hand.

Something bounded against the wall and came whistling through the shoji. It grazed the cheek of the kneeling fox-woman, and imbedded itself against the woodwork of the opposite wall. She put up her hand

with a quick, startled movement, but though she turned a questioning, fearful face upon the great Tojin, she could not see how deathly white he had become. He bent suddenly above her.

"Make me a promise. Repeat after me, that no matter what might befall us, you will remain with me—you will not desert me!"

With her face pressed against his hand, her eyes fervently closed, she repeated the words as a veritable prayer.

XVI

In the sunken garden directly beneath his rooms he saw that sinister thing below, waiting in a throbbing silence. It seemed as if his gardens were alive with them. Who had summoned them? For what were they waiting?

From his elevation above them he spoke, his clear voice booming out above their heads.

"Genji Negato, I desire your services."

From somewhere in the shadows the voice of the interpreter came back at him like a cold slap in the face.

"When the evil spirit of Atago Yama shall have left the abode of the

exalted Tojin-san, Genji Negato will humbly return for service."

The Tojin-san's incisive, perfectly controlled voice continued coldly:

"By command of the Prince of Echizen you are in my service. In his name, I order you to control your foolish fears, or take the consequences of your Prince's displeasure."

A strange voice, rumbling, sneering, responded to this statement. Like a flash, upon the retort, came the Tojin's ringing order to the interpreter:

"Translate the words just spoken, if you please."

"He says, your excellency, that the Prince of Echizen has been summarily called to Tokio. If the new law is indeed enforced he may not return."

For a moment the far-seeing mind

of the Tojin staggered before this appalling news, which, if true, meant the possibility of his being suddenly cast adrift and left to protect himself from the Jo-i menace, against which Echizen himself had taken such precautions in his behalf. While his mind revolved all the possible perils of his position, a new voice sprang ringingly out of the shadows of his garden—a boy's clear, unfaltering voice with its reassuring note of loyalty and affection.

"Beloved sensei, we, your students, offer ourselves in place of your guard."

"What may babes know of a sword's honor?" snarled the samourai, who had already spoken. "Upon what strength may the foreign devil lean for his new support?" he demanded with cutting sarcasm.

The burly laugh that followed was suddenly stopped, as the student

Higo flung himself defiantly before them all.

"I, Higo, kin of your absent Prince, will answer you. There are nine hundred students, samourai themselves, and sons of a thousand samourai before them. All of these are loyal to our teacher. They will protect and fight for him, if necessary."

Now the answering voice snarled merely in explanation.

"Who spoke of harm to your sensei? It is not him we seek. We have come for the Fox-Woman of Atago Yama, who blights our fortunes, who brings sickness, poverty, and disaster upon our ancestors and our children, and whose doom has been spoken by Fukui. You have trapped her, young sirs of the college, like any other female beast of the woods. Let older, more experienced hands finish your honorable work.

There are those of us whose hands performed a like service upon the debased parents of the gagama, and whose palms itch now to mingle her blood with her sire's. Let but the Tojin-san eject this siren of the mountains, and we will be satisfied."

"It cannot be done," frantically cried the boy Junzo. "I myself have touched the wretched, helpless one, and, as the gods in heaven hear me, she is but—human, as ourselves!"

A roar of derision greeted the boy's passionate outcry, and there was a concerted movement toward where the Tojin-san stood towering above them, his arms crossed, his keen, stern eyes regarding them piercingly.

Some one pushed forward the interpreter, and the craven, agitated fellow now faced his master. He made several ineffectual efforts to speak, gulped at the lump which rose per-

sistently in his throat. Before him loomed the grim, sardonic face of this west-countryman he had always inwardly feared and respected; behind him the rabble of dissatisfied ronin.

Gasping, trembling, he repeated to the Tojin the verdict of the mob. They called upon him to deliver into their hands the fox-woman. Failing to do that, they would storm the Shiro and take her by force. Whiningly, pleadingly, he begged his master to hurl from his house the wretched spirit he was harboring.

To this demand the Tojin-san returned slowly, as though he carefully chose his words, that if one hair upon the head of the one he protected were touched, the whole Fukui should feel a vengeance such as never had befallen it before. He, the Tojin-san —a citizen of a mightier country than this—was the guest of one of their

princes. Not alone his friends at home, but those here—the very Emperor himself, who had pledged himself publicly to uphold the new enlightened laws, borrowed from the West—would avenge insult and wrong done to him—the Tojin.

His answer, translated by Negato, raised a turmoil of angry discussion, and that one who seemed to be the leader of the company, sprang headlong forward, as if to show the way to those who hesitated. He climbed half-way up the steps to where the Tojin stood, and quick as a cat drew forward his swords.

Every eye was turned upon the Tojin-san. He was standing tautly erect, his heavy, pugnacious chin thrust out. As the sword of the samourai touched him he drew slightly backward, then with a swift, merciless bound sprang headlong upon his as-

sailant, his great white fists flashing more vividly than the steel had done. Backward went the samourai, his swords flying out of either hand. Without a cry, he fell upon the grass path beneath.

And the Tojin-san was back in his place, facing them, waiting for them, calm, still unmoved, but very terrible and mighty to look upon.

In the deadly silence that followed, the student Nunuki passed the castle gates, followed by his valiant, stalwart little army of fellow-students. They moved in a line steadily onward, spread out on all sides and completely surrounded the house of the Tojin.

Ere the samourai could realize it they found themselves encircled by an army four times their own in number. Their leader lay before them, unmoving; and above them

towered the grim, terrible figure of this west-countryman, who represented in his gigantic person all the power and strength they had come to know and superstitiously believe belonged to the West.

One by one, they moved toward the gates, broke into smaller groups, passing the long line of student warriors without a word or sign of war.

Presently the Tojin moved a step lower down into the garden. He stood a moment, staring frowningly at the still form lying at his feet. Then slowly, unwillingly he stooped, and turned it over. A deep breath escaped him. For a moment things swam dazedly before him, for the white, agonized face upturned was that of the Daimio's high officer, the Samourai Gihei Matsuyama!

XVII

As a mother seeks a lost child, so the Tojin-san frantically scoured every nook and corner of the Shiro Matsuhaira for the fox-woman.

In the interval in which he had faced that threatening, blood-hungry mob, she had gone! He was torn with sick forebodings of the fate that might have befallen her. That she had gone of her own free will, he could not believe—no, not after the promise she had made him!

And so, with his wound untended, his brain swimming in vertigo, he staggered from room to room, until the morning dawned dim and gray,

and the sun crept over the horizon with its bright, hard eye.

Wild and haggard-eyed, shaking as though he were afflicted with ague, he came finally back to his own chamber. Here his students awaited him, eager to show him their good-will, to congratulate him and gossip over the certain punishment that would overtake those who had molested him. But he heard no word that they spoke, and presently they seemed to realize that something was wrong with the great Tojin, and they drew apart, whispering, and regarding him with awed glances.

The maid, Obun, snivelling and shaking with fear, crept into the vast, deserted kitchen and fell to putting it in order. In another wing of the house the voice of the lately craven Genji Negato was heard, and out along the road, loaded down with

their belongings, trailed the little caravan of menials, creeping humbly back to their old employment.

Oh, these were dark, impoverished days for Fukui! Who could refuse remunerative employment such as this? The honorably enlightened students of the university had vanquished the disgruntled, fighting ones; Samourai Matsuyama, their leader, was desperately sick, shorn of his power, and deserted even by his friends.

And the fox-woman was gone! No one knew how or when she had gone. They told, in whispers, of her ghostly vanishing, and some said the bottomless lake of Matsuhaira, with its white, chilly lotus, held a secret all its own. But "The Lotus tells no tales," as the proverb has it, and how should they know, and why should they care whether the fiendish gagama,

who had haunted their master for so long, floated beneath the smiling water-flowers or not?

They gathered together, these gabbling, faithless servants, and discussed ways and means to propitiate the Tojin-san. Following the lead of Genji Negato, finally, they took their courage into their hands and came to his apartment. Barely had they entered the room, however, ere they fled again.

One look only at the distorted face was enough. Like a pack of startled sheep they turned tail and fled from his presence, leaving him once more alone, pacing and repacing, with staggering, irregular steps, the floor, crunching his great hands together as if in some mortal agony.

What weakness was this that robbed him of his manhood! What anguish that pierced to his very

marrow? Was this what the son of the Daimio's high officer had endured when he had followed the fox-woman out into the mountains? Persistently, dazedly he thought of Gihei Matsuyama, and he asked himself repeatedly why—why? Suddenly it was clear—he knew why. He had killed the Daimio's high officer! With his own mighty hands he had killed the father of Gihei Matsuyama!

A Chinese doctor, brought by the students Junzo and Higo, examined him at a safe distance, and he said the foreign sensei was afflicted with a malady of the brain.

Outside in the summer gardens, serious-eyed, grave-faced boys looked at each other with startled glances, and in the city people were telling in the streets of the dreadful punishments certain to be meted out to those who had molested the guest of

their absent Prince; for word had, at last, come from Tokio that he had started on his way back to Fukui.

The day with its sun and fragrance passed away unseen to the great, blank-minded Tojin. But when the night came, with a whispering breeze about the ancient Matsuhaira, he raised a listening head.

As on that first night in Fukui, plainly, distinctly he heard the fluttering, human knocking upon his shoji. Holding his breath, treading on tiptoe, he found his way to the doors, drew them apart and looked out into the dusky woods beyond. How his ears tingled now, straining for that old caressing call:

"T-o-o—jin-san! Too-jin-san!"

Gently, softly, wooingly, he answered the fox-woman, breathing her name into the still air about him:

"Tama! Tama!"

And, as on that other night, again he dropped down into the garden. Over the green-clipped lawn he went, across the wing of the moat, into the bamboo grove, and on and on into the beckoning, luring woods of Atago Yama.

XVIII

To awaken on an afternoon in summer upon a bed of moss and fragrant leaves; to rest tired, aching eyes upon a clear, pale sky, which smiled divinely through interlacing boughs of towering pines and hemlocks; to hear the whistling calls of the wood-birds; the murmuring, sobbing laughter of some fairy brooklet close at hand; to feel the touch of a fugitive gentle breeze upon one's brow—this was the fate of the Tojin-san!

For how long he could not have told he lay unmoving, staring dreamily at the sky above him, a sense of contentment, of rest, of comfort —

such as one might feel after a long, exhausting race, permeating his whole being.

Then suddenly upon his consciousness there stole another sense—the dim, exquisite feeling of a loved presence close at hand, and he raised himself slowly, weakly upon his elbow. It was like music in his ears, that faint, caressing voice he had listened for for so many days:

"To-o-jin-san! Goran nasai!" (august glance deign).

She was kneeling by his side, her questioning, wistful face hovering above his own; her soft, timid little fingers touching his brow, his eyes, his lips.

He felt himself falling backward again, as if in some delicious swoon, from which there could be no awakening. Then like the dimly remembered scenes of a vague dream, he seemed

to recall a time wherein he had wandered through some unending woods, seeking, seeking! Now the dream had ended in this—this that was part of the dream itself!

She stirred ever so slightly, and as if he feared she might vanish by her mere stirring, he reached up the great, once mighty arms, and sought to envelop her within them.

Her hair had the odor of the pine woods; upon her lips there was the breath of some sweet incense. She remained passive within his grasp, but presently her voice, with its tremulous tone of tears, broke the spell between them—reached him with the gentle appeal of a child distressed.

"Honorable water good for thirsty throat," she said.

Now he released her, and she drew back to find the little cup beside her.

He let her raise his head and bring the cup to his lips, and with his eyes still hungrily upon her he drank the water.

He was content merely to gaze at her, though it troubled him that she no longer smiled. She said in a very stricken voice:

"August food also good for Tojin-san. Bud, alas! I god nudding bud rice! Thas good enough for Tama—bud nod for you, Tojin-san."

Even in his weakness he laughed joyously at the mere notion of food fit for her being unfit for him, and at the sound of his low laughter her face lighted up wonderfully.

"You gittin' better!" she exclaimed joyously. "Now I bring you thad rice. Too bad—bud thas all I got! I go ad grade temple at top those hill. Priest too fat run quick to catch at me." She laughed with an element of her old mischievous defiance.

As he did not speak, too intent upon gazing at and marvelling on the fairness of her face, her expression changed to one of melting anxiety.

"I am lig' unto those foolish karasu [crow], who mek chatter all thad time. Condescend forgive me, Tojin-san. I nod speag agin mebbe for—for twenty hour—yaes?"

No one had ever kissed her hands before. The sound, the touch aroused her wonder, her apprehension. She drew her hands instinctively from his, and for a moment held them up before her, almost as if she looked at them. Then with an impetuous, laughing little sob she thrust them back upon him:

"Do agin ad my hands, Tojin-san! I lig' those," she said.

It was not alone the pallor of bodily illness, but of some mental pain that

swept over his face, as he set the little hands back into her lap, reverently, gently.

Later, when strengthened with the simple meal she made for him, she told him how the night before she had come upon him in the Atago Yama woods. It was but two days since the terrible events at the Shiro had driven them both forth into this enchanted wilderness. He had been ill but a night; yet it seemed to him many days.

No, she had not heard him calling her, nor had she called him. This, too, was part of the dream; but something louder than any human cry had reached her in her hiding-place in the mountains, the intuitive, certain sense of the blind. She had retraced her steps down the mountain-side, and had gone cautiously seeking in the woods for him; and

the gods had guided her aright. Ah! to his very feet.

She humbly begged him to pardon her for leaving him; but she had thought this was the only way she could save him from those who hated her. Now—now she wished to repeat the prayer and promise she had made him down in the old Shiro. Never again would she desert him. She would always abide by his side. She humbly entreated that he would permit her to remain with him, even if she must follow him throughout the world as a slave, the meekest and lowliest of servants.

He did not reply, so obsessed was he still with the vision of her loveliness. Throughout the golden afternoon he lay there watching her every little movement, her slightest change of expression; thrilling under the touch of her hands, the sound of her

voice; obeying her slightest request; permitting her to serve him as if he were a babe and she his mother.

Gradually the murmuring of the crickets in the grass, the soft chirping of the birds, even the babbling of the brook, the sighing of the gentle breezes seemed to soften their tone to one concerted murmuring lullaby. A veil crept gently over the sky, shutting out the sun and its light.

She put a pillow of pine needles beneath his head, and she covered him over with a downy, silken mantle that smelled of temple incense and was gorgeous beyond words with the golden embroidery of some sacred order.

And presently as he drowsed deliciously under the warm fragrant silk, he felt her stirring at his feet,

and her tired little voice came whispering to him as if from very far away:

"Sayonara, Tojin-san! Imadzuka!" (Now we rest).

XIX

One does not always count the gilded days of summer in the mountains. It might have been a month, a week, or a few days in which the Tojin-san and the fox-woman wandered over Atago Yama. But the season of Little Heat passed into that of the Great Heat, and they did not know it.

The mountains were cool; there was a green wonder world about them. Soft shadows flickered across the sun-burned paths; intangible breezes fanned them with their scented breaths. They trod a carpeted paradise that was all beauty, all harmony. They felt like the

birds which blew over them, or came shyly, timorously at her calling to share her morsel of rice and berries.

Even had he desired to do so, the Tojin could not have found his way back to the city. Seven-eighths of the province is mountain land, and she had led him over paths she alone knew, and indeed had made—narrow, hidden little paths that traced their unending way in and out the densest portion of the wooded mountains.

They passed no humblest lodge, no smallest temple even, though he knew that there were many in the mountains, and the music of their bells reached them at times like the tingling call of a familiar voice very far away.

She knew every secret corner of the mountains. The purest springs, hidden pools and lakelets, caves of un-

believable wonder and beauty, she showed now to the Tojin-san.

Clouds of sacred pigeons followed her as if they knew her. They were of her own Temple Tokiwa, she told him, and were part of her heritage from the ancestors of her mother who had founded the temple. She knew them all—every single bird, so she told him proudly; knew, too, why they were wandering thus far from home. They were seeking her, their guardian, who had been gone for so many, many days.

For the first time she recoiled from him when he suggested that they utilize the birds for food. Up till then they had depended entirely upon the seemingly inexhaustible stores of rice she seemed to have hidden in a hundred different places in the mountains, and upon the fish trapped in the streams, the fruit and

wild vegetables which were plentiful enough. She had never dreamed of the pigeons as an addition to their diet, and her expression was quite tragic and piteous.

"They are of the temple," reverently she said. "The gods love them, and I—I may not eat the forbidden meat."

"Forbidden meat?"

She looked at him timidly with a new expression in her face. It was as if a flame had crept into her eyes and set its touch upon her lips. She had crossed her hands upon her bosom.

"I, too, am Ni-no ama, like unto my mother," she softly said. "For both our sin I got mek thad atonement unto Buddha!"

He regarded her in a spellbound silence. There was something about her words, her actions, withal their

simplicity, that held a sacredness. She, against whom the hostile hands of an entire Buddhist community had been raised, a priestess of the Buddha! It was impossible, preposterous! She had been but a child when her parents were killed. What could they have taught her thus early?

She seemed to realize from his silence his doubts, and suddenly she stepped back, raising her hands high above her head, bringing the tips of the fingers together. A moment she stood with her face upraised, her eyes closed.

"For you, oh Tojin-san, I will danze! It is as my mother have tich me the danze for the gods. Haiken suru!" (Adoringly look).

From side to side she swayed, her small, exquisite hands moving in the languorous motions of the dance.

Never in even the greatest temples of Kioto or Nikko had he seen a priestess perform as she was doing. He thought of the glittering robes of the hundred nuns chanting their splendid ritual before some gorgeous altar, of their impassive, stony faces, their ebony hair, their narrow, inscrutable eyes. But she, with her unbound hair of gold, her bosom and face of snow!

Yes, they were right, they of Fukui! She was an incarnation of the Sun Goddess, tripping like the Spring upon the earth, and inspiring in the hearts and eyes of all who saw her sensations of adoration, and of those who dared not look, of fear—fear and hatred!

She had stolen the face and vestments of the goddess, so they had said; but her soul was that of a fox!

There burst upon him suddenly a

realization of the impassable gulf between them, and with the knowledge came an overwhelming sense of revolution, the mad, irresistible passion of the primitive man who knows only his desires.

But a moment later she was at his feet, her pure, trusting face smiling appealingly up at him.

XX

Now came the Season of White Dew. The days were unbelievably beautiful. The first russet touch of the autumn barely cast its shadow upon the green about them, the yellow tints of leaf and flower mellowed into a dull crimson glory.

But the nights turned chill, and in the early mornings there was the heavy print of the frosted dew upon the ground.

Unconsciously they quickened their lagging footsteps, and turned into shorter paths that would bring them sooner to Sho Kon Sha, the cemetery of "Soul Beckoning Rest," which was to be the end of their journey. This

was her home, so she said—the gardens of the temples of her ancestors. Only a few hill-lengths from the cemetery was the Temple Tokiwa, deserted, almost in ruins, but—her home!

There her parents had lived—and died! Here she had been happy in her solitary childhood, hidden and sheltered by fearful but loving parents. Here her mother had taught her to dance for the gods and entreat them with her prayers; here her father had told her of another God, another heaven. After her parents were gone, the aged temple had been her only sure place of refuge, a sanctuary wherein even the stoutest of hunters dared not penetrate; for the wrathful gods still stared with their dreadful eyes upon the affronted altar, and at the very portals the demons Ni-o, guarding the sacred

gates, might no longer be propitiated.

Now confidently, happily, with the pride of a child thither she was leading the Tojin, eager to show him this beautiful shelter she wished to share with him forever. But, ah! how sweet had been the mountain paths this summer, and why need they hasten? The restless, vindictive little city was very far away, and the fox-woman trod upon territory all her own, hers by right of every instinct, and by the very law of the land, did she but know it, which made her proper heir to her ancestors' property.

Now they were very near to the temple, and soon she would spread forth her arms and say to the Tojin:

"Behold, dear exalted one, here is my honorable home. Condescend to step upon its floor."

And in her mind she fancied the

face of the Tojin would shine with a great light of happiness.

Now he said to her dreamily, as he followed her through a shadowy by-path which crept into a sunlit forest of dripping willow-trees:

"Some day I shall awake. It cannot be true that I am here with you alone in these wild mountains, wandering along in this aimless bliss!"

Because she put back her hand, and he took it perforce in his own, he continued in his low, wooing voice:

"And when I wake, little Tama, I will know the truth of what you once said to me: that our dreams are the most beautiful of all."

She stopped and turned back to him, with the tall foliage and grass almost burying her in its thickness:

"You god no udder dream more beautiful?" she questioned wistfully.

"No other," he answered softly. "Have you?"

"No. This is mos' bes' dream of all—jost be 'lone wiz you ad those mountains! Thas bes' dream in all the whole worl', Tojin-san!"

In the silence that fell between them, and as he still clasped her hands, a momentary shadow flitted across her face, and she stood wide-eyed, as though she saw a vision.

"Alas!" she said in such a mournful tone: "Dreams like unto thad mist. Now here so sweet, so—so beyond our touch. Next hour gone —gone perhaps foraever! Nod even the gods know where they gone!"

He scarcely knew his own voice, so full of a deep encompassing tenderness and yearning was it:

"Our dream is to be different from

others," he said solemnly. "It will never end. Not for a lifetime, little Tama!"

"It surely goin' last foraever ad this worl'?" she asked with sceptical wistfulness.

"If you wish it," said he huskily.

When the sun was dipping down in the west, and but half its red face showed above the shadowy hills of Hakusan, the fox-woman felt the fears seize her in their throttling grip again.

She stood like one under some spell, her back against the trunk of a giant oak, her hair like a veritable aureole above her.

Down in a little ravine, but a few feet from where she stood, the Tojin-san was gathering dried sticks to build their evening fire. She could hear him as he moved from point to

point. Sometimes he whistled softly to himself, sometimes hummed vague snatches of song.

Farther away—at a distance beyond her sight, even if she could have seen—she knew, with that intuitive certainty of the blind, that others were passing over their tracks.

Her hand sought her heart, and clung to it, as if to stop its beating. Fear lent sudden wings to her feet, as with a little gasping cry she fled downward to the hollow where the Tojin labored. She was beside him before he had heard or seen her, and now in surprise he looked at her white little face of anguish.

"Tama!"

"You speag right," she said, and could not smile with her white lips so tremulous, "thas only—beautiful dream. Thad mist gone—away!"

"Dream! No, it's a beautiful real-

ity. We are here, together, and nothing in the world shall ever tear us apart again."

"Nothing in the worl'," she repeated.

Suddenly she covered her eyes, as if the light pained them. From behind her little sheltering hands came her voice, still with that note of pleading terror:

"They come—tear you 'way from me now, Tojin-san! All the way—how many miles I kinnod say—I see them! In my heart I know! Ad my ears I hear! Those feet—ah, cannot you hear them also, kind Tojin-san? Listen!"

She put up her hands, and they stood in a silence, straining for the sound that only she could hear, or believed she did.

He knew she was right. Her instinctive sense was keener than mere

sight. Simply, with a tender strength that could not be resisted, he took her little hand in his.

"Come, Tama. We must reach Sho Kon Sha to-night."

"Yaes," she murmured, and now there was a note of plaintive weariness in her voice. "I thought she said the gods were good, an' that perhaps they goin' forgit us here in those mountains."

She sighed and moved along step by step beside him.

"Now I know," she said, "I god new visitor ad my heart!"

"What is it, little Tama?"

"Fear," she said, "—for you!"

"What blessed nonsense!"

"You are Tojin, like unto my father," she said, in a voice of anguish, "and oh, all those days my life how I kin forgit what happen unto my father!"

"That was many years ago," he said. "It is a New Japan we live in to-day, and I have friends—even in Fukui!"

XXI

A NEW impulse drew them now more closely together. Side by side, pressed closely to each other, they travelled swiftly toward Sho Kon Sha. They dared not wait to eat, to sleep, to rest but a moment, and the night found them still moving onward.

They spoke scarcely at all to each other; but she rested like a child in the curve of his arm, her head against his breast. Once she sighed, ever so faintly—a little breath of weariness that escaped her almost unconsciously.

Instantly he stopped, lifted her face in his hands, and, in the dark woods, anxiously examined it.

"You are crying, Tama."

"No-o," she said.

"But your face is wet."

"It is the dew upon my face," she said.

Again they moved onward. About them towered the giant trees, silhouetted against the starlit skies. Sometimes as the ascent became more steep, they clung to outjutting shrubs and bushes, and once when he fancied her footsteps slightly dragged, he lifted her bodily in his arms and carried her for a space. But she begged to be permitted to walk. There was still a great distance to go. He must not be hampered by her burden. She wished to help—not hinder him.

The night grew more still, and a penetrating chill descended about them. He drew off his coat, to put about her; but she showed him where

she had strapped to her back, with the string of her obi, the quilt. He had thought it part of her sash, and was all compunction that he had permitted her to carry even so slight a load. She laughed in her little tremulous way, and challenged him to untie the knot. In the dark his big, clumsy fingers picked at it in vain. Again she laughed, caressingly, with a teasing tenderness, and she drew the little bundle round in front. It fell at her feet in a soft, silken heap.

He was for wrapping it several times around her; but she insisted she would not proceed even the fraction of a step unless he shared the quilt with her. And so, his arm again about her, under the down-padded temple quilt, they moved along in the chilly darkness, defying with the new warmth of their hearts and bodies the cold of the autumn night.

Thus all night long they travelled, their feet moving mechanically, but never unwillingly, pausing not at all to look backward over the paths they had followed, but pressing steadily onward toward their goal. And the first pale streak of dawn found them climbing up the last height, within the very sight of Sho Kon Sha.

XXII

As the laggard sun crept stealthily out of the east, a vision of extraordinary loveliness burst upon them. There, within but the length of a single hill and field from them, the ragged peaks of the old Temple Tokiwa raised a lordly head above the sun-flecked pines.

Stripped of its wealth, but not its beauty, showing the ravages of fire and assault upon its burnished walls, deserted, falling to the decay of neglected age, it was more compellingly majestic than any of the famous structures the Tojin-san had seen.

The approach was over terraces made of countless stone steps, many

of them now loose and entirely overgrown with grass and weeds.

The pagoda was of seven stories, its crimson eaves still fringed with shattered wind-bells.

A swarm of pigeons flew about its eaves and roof, and came to meet them in a voluble, almost intelligent cloud. She ran to meet them, holding out her arms and calling and chirping to them. Dipping into her long sleeves, she brought up handfuls of the rice she had not forgotten to bring with her, and threw it generously among them. They pecked at her hand, seeking scoldingly for the food, and sprang upon her shoulders, her head, her hands. Presently, chidingly, she drove them off, shaking her sleeves at them and waving them back.

Now she drew the Tojin into the temple, pushing back its rusty doors with a careful hand.

TAMA AT THE TEMPLE TOKIWA

He was struck with the empty majesty of the interior. It had been stripped of all its treasures, save the great stone images, which still sat inscrutably upon their thrones.

The altar was devoid of vestments; no twinkling lights or swinging censers burned their incense for the delectation of the gods; yet the penetrating odor of sandalwood and the dim fragrance of umegaku and the pine seemed to cling about the very air.

By the great main altar, the hideous old god Bunzura glared at them from beneath his sleepy eyelids, resting fatuously upon his haunches. Before him was the bar where once thousands of slips of paper containing written prayers, were tied. Now it was entirely stripped and glittered up in the face of the god in a mocking irony.

Tama moved softly by the image, pausing only to put her hand upon its knee, caressing it gently, as if with a conciliating, loving pat. It was evident she did not stand in awe of the gods. She had been born among them; knew them as part of her own silent family, exiled like herself upon the mountains.

She even put her cheek against the head of a peculiarly sinister-looking image, who was attended by three smaller gods. The Tojin-san recognized the group. They were in every Buddhist temple. Ema, the Lord of Hell, with his assistant torturers, one of which wielded a sword, one a pen, and one a priest's staff.

Now she made her first prostration, bowing lowly, and slipping devoutly to her knees. She was in a little alcove wherein no image whatever was to be seen.

As he stood wondering why she should choose this empty corner for her prayers, he perceived upon the wall a curious print or scroll. It was a faded paper chromo, apparently many years old, the picture upon it almost obliterated, the ends of the paper showing charred marks where it must have once started to burn.

A curious sensation stirred within the Tojin, such a feeling as one might only know when in a land of gods one sees for the first time an emblem or a token of one's own true God; for the tattered, shabby scroll upon the wall was a picture of the Christ!

She seemed to sense his emotion and excitement, and, still kneeling, raised a pair of smiling eyes:

"It is my father's God," she said. "To him, mos' of all, I speag me my petitions."

"Why to him?" he asked, deeply moved.

"Because," she answered simply, "he, too, lig' me, knew trobble. Thas why I speag to him my heart — account I *know* he—listen!"

XXIII

The Tojin-san took what measures he could for their future protection. An exploration throughout the seven-storied pagoda brought to light some old weapons — a rifle and a sword, once evidently her father's. They were out of date, and in bad condition, but better than nothing, he decided.

As she had shown him a small exit in the rear, of which the outside of the pagoda gave no inkling, he decided to barricade the main entrance. This he did, after a gigantic effort, by piling several of the images before it until they effectually blocked the entrance. As their faces were turned

outward he surmised their weird effect upon the marauders when, after forcing the doors, they should find themselves fronted with so formidable a guard as these.

No one, so she said, had stepped across the threshold since that frightful day when, in their fanatical hatred, the danka had murdered her parents.

She had always been kept hidden in one of the upper stories of the pagoda, and at this time no one had seen her save her parents.

On that day she had fled to the very roof in her first impulse of mortal terror; but even from there, with her ears covered by her hands, she had heard the cries of her father and her mother, and the wild, brutal, triumphant shouting of those who had killed them.

A strange sense of quiet came suddenly upon her. She crept stealthily,

but fearlessly, back down the seven stories of the pagoda, and opened the great doors that gave ingress to the temple. There for the first time the people of Fukui saw her, standing like a flame upon the altar of the great Shaka, whither she had leaped from the door in a single bound.

Her hair was more glittering than the altar itself; her eyes, her skin were of a color no man in Fukui had ever seen before. She seemed to their dazzled eyes a vengeful spirit, whom the Lord Buddha had uplifted. They stood as if petrified, staring at her as she swayed before them on the very lap of the god. Then, with a concerted cry of superstitious fear and horror, they slunk from the temple, leaving her alone—with her dead!

As the Tojin looked about the great chamber, he felt himself almost un-

consciously rehearsing that grim scene of the past. He knew why her hand had been set against the whole world, why she had terrified and defied her tormentors. Even now, as she repeated the tale to him her face was white and fixed.

"Now you know," she said, "why I am call the fox-woman! Perhaps thas true 'bout me. Mebbe I am gagama!"

"You are not," he said, "even in spite of them."

She was silent, staring out before her in some abstracted trance. Suddenly she sighed:

"I nod lig' udder people! Thas bedder nod come near unto me. I mek the trobble, and sometimes—the death for those who seek me! Down in Fukui perhaps already they have tol' you of thad — Gihei Matsuyama?"

"They told me," he said, "but I do not believe them."

"Thas true," she said, and there was a plaintive note of weariness in her voice. "He cum lig' unto a storm that fall down from those sky wiz no warning. When I am come from my door, he there to await me. He speag my name sof'—kind—lig' you, Tojin-san! No one aever speag unto me lig' thad before. No! They bud cry to me those name and curse and throw the stone upon me! Bud he! he speag lig' you augustness.

"Ad firs' my heart stan' still—it 'fraid. I thing of my father—my mother, and I am 'fraid he come kill me also. Then again he speag my name sof' and kind, an' I say ad my heart: 'Thas god come veesit me!' An' so—an' so—for him I mek the sacred danze. But when I am through, I know I mek meestake—thas nod

god ad all! Thas jost man from Fukui!

"Then my heart laugh wizin me, and my feet carry me quick across those mountain. I loog nod bag, though I hear his voice, for I am thad 'fraid agin. I know nod why, Tojin-san."

Her voice faltered. She went a timid step nearer to him, touched his hand questioningly with her own.

"The blind see wiz one thousand inner eye, bud, ah, alas! they see nod also for another. How could I know thad the foolish one would nod loog upon his steps?"

She shuddered and covered her face with her little shaking hands.

"How many days I waiting ad thad pool — jos' waiting, Tojin-san, wiz the hope that mebbe some day he goin' come bag out those water."

"You must never think of it again,"

he said. "You were entirely blameless."

"Sometime I thing," she went on wistfully, "thad mebbe those Fukui people right, an me?—I am truly a fox-woman. For see what trobble, what—death I mek for those who see me. Even for you, kind Tojin-san, alas! I mus' bring you those pain!"

"No—that is not so," he said.

"I know nod when or how firs' I have hear of your comin'. They talk of nothing else at Fukui, an' I am always listen, though they see me nod. Something tell me, when you come all those worl' goin' change for me! Thas' why I wait, wait, all thad winter for your comin'."

A smile, wistful, yet joyous, crept over her lips.

"You din know," she said, "thad firs' day in Fukui, thad I too am ad

your house to welcome you. Bud me? I am nod wizin thad house. I am out in thad snow. I kinnod speag unto you lig' those others. I may nod even touch you honorable hand. Bud all same I know you are Tojin—lig' unto my father! Oh, how glad—how joy I am! Though my feet, my hand, my nose, my honorable ears perish wiz those cold, still I am wait for you. When all those honorable exalted ones gone—then—then I, too, call you name! To-o-jin-san!"

She made a little shivering motion.

"Bud sup-pose I bring you also thad—thad death?"

"There is nothing to fear," he said steadily, "and if there were, I am strong enough to face any peril with you at my side!"

"Oh, my mind travel bag on thad past! I hear again my father's voice —my mother's cry! I am toaching

their beloved body. I am tek them in thad black night unto the Sho Kon Sha, and wiz these liddle hands, all alone, I am put them in their—grave! Tojin-san! Ah-h!"

She hid her face against his arm.

"If they should do to you the same!" she said.

"For myself I have no fear," he said.

"Why nod leave me now?" she urged. "Go bag alone down those mountain. No one speag hard to you who so moch mek respect. Wiz me there is moch trobble, an' mebbe worse!"

"Without you," he said, "there is more trouble, and a deep pain—an aching void that could never again be filled. With you here alone, cut off from all the world, holding your little hands in my own, looking into your face, why, even facing death, I am

content—happier than I had ever dreamed it possible to be."

"Thas beautiful word you speag," she said. "Bud if the gods—"

She folded her hands across her breast and closed her eyes in prayer.

"Temmei itashikata kore maku!" she whispered lowly. (From the decree of heaven there is no escape.)

XXIV

THE rapping on the temple doors was not loud or menacing, but it was insistent, questioning. The Tojin-san drew the fox-woman to the winding staircase which led up the seven stories to the tower above.

Once before Tama had been sent up yonder. Then she had gone willingly, even frantically. Now she made no movement up the stairs. Instead, she turned her back upon them, and faced the Tojin fairly. Upon her face a smile shone luminously as a star. Simply, steadily, she laid her hands in those of the man.

For a moment he held them in his own, his eyes fixed yearningly upon

her face, and even while the knocks resounded louder upon the door the clouds cleared from his mind.

Looking into those uplifted, adoring eyes he forgot all else. A sound that was half a sob, half a passionate cry escaped him. He reached out irresistibly and took her into his arms. For the first time his lips hungrily, passionately found her own, and clung in a kiss that over all the years of a lifetime neither he nor she might ever forget. They saw nothing, heard nothing, felt only that close, encompassing embrace that made them one indeed.

Then upon their dream at last broke the lowly calling, almost whispering voice of the one without. They drew apart, though their eyes and hands still clung unconsciously together.

"Sensei. Sensei! Sensei!"

It was the voice of the student, Junzo!

With a low cry, the Tojin was at the doors, wrenching and tearing the great images away with the strength of a veritable giant. At last the doors were reached, and these in turn thrust aside.

There, with their anxious, faithful young faces pale with apprehension in regard to his fate, were his three loyal boys, Junzo, Higo, and Nunuki. They fell literally upon him with tears and shouts of joy. They devoured him with their youthful embraces. Higo clung to one hand, Junzo to the other; and at the back of him Nunuki hovered, seeking to examine the wound upon his neck where the sword of the Daimio's high officer had pierced. It was healed, so well had the fox-woman cared for it.

Now, step by step, slowly, uncer-

tainly, she crept toward them, white-faced, wild-eyed, every nerve in her thrilling, and reaching out blindly for the arms that had held her, the lips that had clung to her own. But she stopped with her tragic little face clasped on either side with her hands as the joyous voices of the students reached her. They were telling the Tojin of the coming of his friends to Fukui; of the return of the Echizen Prince; of the punishments to be meted out to those who had attacked him; the rewards for those who had defended.

"Even we," said Higo, with boyish pride, "are to have our due reward, for we have honorably been chosen as the body-guard of the Be-koku-jin (American), who has come to Fukui to minister to the unfortunate one, and to take her, if your excellency is willing, to the capital."

"The unfortunate one?" repeated the Tojin dully. "To whom do you refer?"

The boys stared at him in round-eyed amazement.

The fox-woman of course! Who else? That unfortunate one to whom the whole heart of Fukui had melted like the snows of her native mountains in the Spring. It was the work of the Tojin himself that had accomplished the miracle; for he had pointed out to them all the absurdity, the wrong of the ancient superstition, which had been kept alive chiefly throughout the years by the hatred of those who were ignorant or fanatic.

Now the Prince himself was convinced a wrong had been committed, and Fukui was taking its cue from him. The friend of the Tojin coming at such a time had also had its effect

upon the people; and now the remorseful ones were prepared to atone for the past if that were possible. It was the suggestion of the Be-koku-jin, however, that the girl should be taken out of Fukui.

Her history had created a sensation among her father's race in Tokio, and there they were eager, anxious to receive her among them. But it was for the Tojin alone to say. The change of heart in Fukui was complete. There was nothing further to fear.

"Even I," said Nunuki with Spartan-like courage, "am prepared to look upon her. We have learned from the tongue of our own Prince and from the Be-koku-jin that many females of your race have her skin and hair and eye-color. Is it not so, honored teacher?"

But the Tojin-san was silent. His

face had turned strangely gray; his arms hung limply by his side. He was staring out before him fixedly as though he saw a vision.

XXV

"Bud speag to me as before! Touch me wiz those hands—those lips! Adoringly look upon me! My honorable heart and body are cold. Condescend to warm them!"

She had followed him down a declivity, unmindful of the students who pressed with their grave, wondering young faces closely about her.

She could not understand why now no longer she might travel beside him, his sheltering arm supporting her; why she might not even take his hand, or rest her wet cheek against his sleeve. In the three days they had been upon the journey back to

Fukui, he had seemed to avoid her, almost as if he feared her.

Once he tried to explain, stupidly, and with a forced coldness.

Things were very different now. When alone, they were like lost children and the silent woods and mountains had put strange dreams and fancies into their heads, so that they had wandered along in a blind, gilded delirium. Now they had awakened. They must go back to the city, where they would be like other people, and where, shortly, their ways must separate. It was for her good. She would understand some day.

She must forget the mountain days, or think of them only as a dream that had vanished, as she herself had predicted it would, like the mist.

She was very stupid, very stubborn, pathetically dense. She did not wish their paths to separate—she would

not have it so. No, though they tore her from him by force. She would return to him. Did he not recall the words he had spoken when he declared the dream would never end unless she wished it. She did not wish it. She never would. Patiently, persistently she entreated him, until he was beside himself and felt his strength of mind weakening, and in desperation turned to his students for help. He bade them explain to her more clearly than he could do the new life she was soon to lead—of the change in fortunes that had come to her.

Manfully, but in the bungling, uncertain language of boys they tried to obey him. The unfortunate one, as unconsciously they called her, was soon to see, promised the gentle Junzo. There was to be an honorable operation upon her eyes. These

western wizards of science, said the Japanese student, had given sight to hundreds in their own land. The Tojin, himself once a doctor, had diagnosed her trouble as an invisible cataract of a congenital nature, not uncommon nor difficult of removal. He had sent for a great and eminent surgeon who was sojourning in the capital. He had come all the way to Fukui, at the bidding of the Tojin. He was a miracle-worker, whose fame encircled the globe, said the boy with a kindling eye.

A hundred friends awaited her in Tokio, so Higo courteously informed her. They were eager and anxious to receive her—Japanese as well as foreigners. To them Tama was to be sent; for Fukui had been unkind to her, and she would be happier away from it. She would understand by-and-by, they promised her.

She listened patiently, but densely, as if what they told her but half reached her understanding. That she was to be sent away into some distant country—very far from the Temple Tokiwa and Atago Yama — an immeasurable distance away from the Tojin-san—this alone she comprehended.

Her mother had taught her that the life of a Buddhist nun must be one long act of expiation for sins and faults committed in some former state. She tried dazedly to conceive of the terrible crimes of which she must have once been guilty that now she was to be punished so dreadfully; and she reached out blindly for the only comfort possible for her in the world now—the voice, the touch of the Tojin-san. who had held her in his arms!

They travelled by the public roads

of the mountain that she had so carefully avoided. They passed the nights as guests of the priests of the mountain temples, who read the letters of the Prince of Echizen, which the students proudly exhibited, and with courteous and profound obeisances welcomed the travellers, even regarding the fox-woman with eyes that were more speculative than resentful. Perhaps they alone of Echizen had best understood this little creature who had lived among them, yet beyond their pale, for so long; for though they had not sought her, neither had they persecuted her, as they could readily have done. Indeed for years she had practically subsisted upon the food she surreptitiously obtained from the temples—some of which was unostentatiously placed as if prepared for her.

The journey back to Fukui was

long and tortuous. Summer was gone completely. The days were cold; wind and rain came about them and drove them constantly into refuges of one sort and another; but after many days they came at last to the foot-hills of the mountains, passed through these into the pine woods, through bamboo groves and camphor groves, till they came to the Winged Foot River, which brought them to their destination.

XXVI

The last courteous and obsequious emissary of the Prince of Echizen had bowed himself out of the apartment of the Tojin-san, having sonorously delivered the speeches of regret of their master.

The room was piled with the rich gifts sent by the now soon departing Prince, who was to take office directly under his imperial master. Now he was sojourning in Echizen merely for the purpose of setting his affairs in order, and to do what lay in his power to set his former vassals in the new path they were to follow. Because he was the soul of chivalry and of justice, he was righting the wrong

and slight paid to the foreigner he had himself invited to his province.

The Tojin was inexpressibly weary. One deputation after another of the citizens of Fukui had been arriving all day. They had commenced coming before daybreak, for the earlier a Japanese makes a call the greater he expresses his respect.

Delegations from the college presented petitions asking him to continue in Fukui, despite the change of government, and promising to make his stay there as happy and prosperous as lay within their power. He listened to them all a bit grimly, making no effort to emulate their politeness. Through the new interpreter who had entered his service, he merely signified that he would take the matter under consideration. It could not be decided at once.

At last he found himself alone with the Be-koku-jin, as they called his American friend, who was in fact what the Japanese youth had said, an eminent surgeon, with whom the Tojin had once been associated.

He was a small, but very dignified and important individual, whose most noticeable features were his bright eyes, which twinkled incongruously beneath a pair of fierce and uncompromising eyebrows. In his well-fitting English clothes he was as out of place in the Tojin's great chamber as was the awkward furniture the deluded Genji Negato had chosen for his master.

Now he wandered about the room examining this and that article, and fingering the gifts brought by the Japanese with anticipatory fingers. His eyes, however, turned constantly toward his friend, who, now that they

were for the first time alone together, had nothing to say.

The American surgeon was blessed with more than an ordinary intelligence, and he had learned a great deal from the students. A man seemingly absolutely wrapped up in his work, he had for years secretly cherished what he had become to believe was positively a vice. He was in fact as sentimental as a girl. When supposedly he was deeply engrossed in the study of some scientific work, locked in his study with stern orders without that on no account was he to be disturbed, he was in fact reading some love-story —or some romance of adventure usually enjoyed by very youthful persons.

Now he felt himself, as it were, part of a moving captivating drama cut out of life itself. No written page

had ever absorbed him quite like this love-story of the fox-woman and his friend the Tojin-san.

There was something appallingly tragic in that little listening, waiting figure crouching there in the hall against the Tojin's door! The Bekoku-jin knew very well indeed what it was this forlorn little creature of the mountains wanted; he knew, too, why it was that the Tojin believed he could not give it to her.

He had come to Fukui chiefly because he had been unable to resist the lure of the story of the fox-woman as the Tojin-san had written it to him. Now here he had stumbled upon a more entrancing story still.

He looked at his friend with his bright, clear eyes, and it occurred to him that there was something wonderfully attractive about the man's face, grim and stony as was its

expression, marked and marred as were the features. The mouth was that of the revolutionist, grim, unyielding, almost bitter; but the eyes were those of the poet, full of vague dreams and tenderness. The Bekoku-jin, assuming his most professional and uninterested manner, drew up a chair before his friend, and settled his plump little body comfortably into its depths.

"What are your plans?" he asked abruptly.

The other did not look up.

"That depends on you," he said quietly.

"Your refusal or acceptance of the position here depends on me?"

"Absolutely."

"What do you mean?"

The Tojin-san leaned forward in his chair. His eyes were no longer dull, there was a flame behind them.

"If you are successful—I remain here, in Fukui."

"Ah. Er—you mean as regards the operation?"

"Yes."

The Be-koku-jin regarded the tips of his fingers, which he had brought precisely together, reflectively. He purposely avoided the other's almost pleading glance. He cleared his throat gruffly, and frowned as he crossed and recrossed his legs.

"Why stay in any event?" he demanded shortly, and put up his hand before the other could answer. "Your attitude is sentimental moonshine. You have nothing to fear—even if the operation is successful. I don't agree with—er—what you have upon your mind."

"That is because you do not understand," said the Tojin wearily. "She is indeed what these people have

imagined her—a creature almost of another world. She has lived only in her exquisite imagination, and because she is so beautiful and good and pure, to her all things too are fair. I was the first to treat her humanly. She has made me something in her mind's eye that it is preposterous even to think of. To her I—*I*—think of it!—am a thing of beauty—a flawless, perfect god!"

He glared in a fierce sort of anguish at his friend, then stood up suddenly and began pacing the floor in long irregular strides, to bring up suddenly again before the other.

"I do not wish her to see me—at all! It will not be necessary. I ask you to take her for me to Tokio. There my sister will meet you, and take her with her to America." He smiled for the first time. "At least I can do that for her. I claimed the

right to care for her, and refused even the smallest help from Echizen and others. I have means—other than my work; and what I have will be hers. I want no one else to do for her," he added jealously. "I can give her everything she needs or may want."

The Be-koku-jin was still studying his finger-tips, and there was a curious expression upon his face. Suddenly he looked up directly at the Tojin-san.

"Why have the operation?"

The Tojin-san had turned very pale, but his voice was steady and strong.

"I have been through all that, my friend—have wrestled, tortured my very soul threshing it out. That's the solution of a coward. I am a man!"

Said the other:

"I decline to perform the operation."

The Tojin-san stared at him as if he could not believe his ears. Then he brought his hand so heavily down upon the other's shoulder that the smaller man jumped under the touch.

"You prefer to leave it to my bungling hands? Is that what you came to Fukui to tell me?"

"As I said," said the other, wincing still under the Tojin's hand, "in any event you exaggerate the effect upon her. Just as you say—you are a man!"

He stood up abruptly.

"You will do it?" demanded the Tojin hoarsely.

"Yes," said the other, blinking angrily; "I suppose I must."

He glared for a moment at his friend and then for the first time permitted himself to show some emotion in his voice and expression:

"We'll fight it out between us.

Sight or no sight, I know you will be the same to her!"

"It is not alone my physical deformity," said the Tojin, steadily, "but the fact that I am old enough to be her father. I have no longer the splendid courage of youth to take her in spite of my misfortune. 'Old Grind,' that was what they called me, even in America!"

"Stuff!" grunted the other. " 'Old Bones' was the affectionate term applied to me. At this rate you'll put us in our dotage. A man under forty is in his best youth. I never felt younger in my life!" he snorted indignantly.

"But she is only a child," said the Tojin softly, "—a child in years—and in heart!"

"If you could see her," said the other, with intense earnestness, "as I have had occasion to since last night,

you would say differently. Child! why, man, she is a suffering, neglected, forsaken little woman! Open your door to her. Don't let her think it as stony as your heart!"

XXVII

"TAMA!" He opened the sliding doors at last. She did not stand, even when he spoke to her, but with a mute, wordless sob moved a pace nearer to him on her knees, and put her head submissively at his feet.

He stooped above her, his face working, his hands trembling. Gently he lifted her to her feet, only to release her instantly.

"Stand there," he said, "while I speak to you. You must do whatever the Be-koku-jin wishes of you. He tells me you have resisted his attempts to help you. If I tell you it is my wish, my very dear wish, you will go with him, will you not?"

She had put out her hands in the old blind way, and would have found him had he not stepped back soundlessly as she approached him. She sighed in her distress, sighed and sobbed, like a tortured child. As he looked at her he felt his resolve far from weakening, becoming even more fixed. He would not have her this way, blind in mind and in sight. She must know the truth.

"The Be-koku-jin will help you, Tama. Soon you are going to see, and then things will appear very differently to you. What you believe now to be beautiful may prove to be otherwise. For example," he continued steadily, "you believe me other than I am in fact. My face is horrible. It may even frighten you, as it did another woman once!"

A hush fell between them. Her eyes, very wide and dark, were fixed

upon his face, almost as though they were endowed with sight.

"Though all keep dark foraever ad my eyes, still I would know your face—ad—my heart!" she said.

"If you could really see—" he murmured hoarsely, almost implor-ingly.

"Tojin-san!" she said, "though all the worl' come before my eyes, I would know you only! I would follow you—yaes to thad worl's end —if you bud would permit me."

He made a motion toward her, and with that smile still upon her face she went blindly to meet him; but as quickly he had drawn back again, and a moment later turned desperately toward the doors. She heard him slide them open, felt the cold draught of air enter; then they closed again, and she heard only the sound of his steps as he passed along the paths.

She stood unmoving, listening until even the faintest sound of him was gone. Then suddenly she ran forward, feeling her way with her hands till she came to his chair. Upon her knees she sank, sighing, sobbing, and buried her face upon her arms in the lap of the chair. Here the Be-koku-jin found her, sleeping her first sleep in many, many days, exhausted, but with a strange look of peace upon her face at last!

XXVIII

The whole of the city of Fukui had turned forth into its streets. Jostling, pushing, shoving each other aside they elbowed their way to the front. Children were raised to the shoulders of parents, boys climbed upon roofs and poles and trees to see the spectacle.

The runners could hardly make a passageway through the throngs; but there was no disorder, nor the slightest trace of antagonism, as the norimono passed slowly down the streets. A respectful silence—a silence that had in it an element of torturing remorse more than curiosity—fell upon the throng.

The bamboo hangings had been drawn back from the norimon, for it was the desire of the Tojin that all of Fukui might see the fox-woman themselves, see and judge what manner of creature was this they had outcast and persecuted through all her short life.

Beside the Be-koku-jin, who had performed the miracle upon her eyes, she sat, her face white as snow, her wide, dazzled eyes gazing bewilderedly about her, as if she were but half conscious of what she saw, but half comprehended its meaning. They had confined most of her golden hair in some shimmering gray veil that floated about her like a cloud, but little moist curls clung about her brow and blew from beneath the veil in tender, kissing tendrils about her cheeks.

At her feet, with her fascinated, infatuated eyes pinned upon her

face, crouched the maid Obun, who was pledged to her service by the Tojin-san.

The carriage was full of flowers that those friendly inclined had sent her, and the white hands of the fox-woman now aimlessly held a sheaf of poems and of love-letters penned her by ardent and impetuous youths, who found their warm hearts and imaginations suddenly fired by her appealing history and beauty.

She spoke not at all, neither to answer the occasional word of re-assurance from the Be-koku-jin, nor the sometimes sobbing utterances of Obun, who seemed to find in her triumphal progress through the city an occasion for tears.

It grew darker, the air chillier. It was the Season of Cold Dew, when even the last gasping, fading beauty of the autumn ceased to appeal.

As the cortège reached the city's limits the crowds following gradually drew back, and as it passed out into the great road whereon they were to travel on the long journey, the last of the followers departed.

Besides the Be-koku-jin and the maid Obun there were three students, proudly acting as body-guard. Several dozen bearers and servants also accompanied the party. No halt was made until the last rays of the setting sun had disappeared entirely from the sky. Then the runners rested, and the Be-koku-jin alighting walked with his head bent, his hands behind him, as if plunged in some troubled thought. The students drew together in a whispering group and watched the famous surgeon, or threw furtive glances in the direction of the fox-woman, whom none of them, as

yet, had found the courage to look upon unmoved.

She was sitting upright in her norimon. The veil had blown back partly from her head, and her hair shone like the moon above her. Obun entreated her to rest, and when she received no response, herself drew the hangings about them, and prepared the carriage for the night. As if she had been a child, she laid the fox-woman down among the quilts, and then herself crept under the covers, falling into a heavy sleep which lasted without a break the long night through as jerking, swinging, tossing on high upon the shoulders of the kurumaya they travelled on and on toward Tokio.

XXIX

In the Shiro Matsuhaira the Tojin sat alone. They had taken away the untasted meal upon the trays; his pipe lay unlit upon the hibachi; upon a table hard by his American mail and papers lay untouched, unopened. He sat staring at something he held in his hands. It was no larger than his hand, worn, ragged, and soiled—a little sandal of straw! This was all he had left of her. She had passed out of his life as completely as the mist vanishes into the clouds.

What were her thoughts now, he wondered dully—now that she knew! He had seen her but once, after the operation. She had come like a

shadowy little spirit into his chamber; and she had said nothing at all; had merely looked at him out of her wide, hungry eyes. As silently as she had come, so she had gone! Passively, obediently she had gone with the Be-koku-jin. This was what he had wished, had required of her. Then why this aching, harrowing sense of anguish?

He closed his eyes, and gave himself up to the last luxury left him—the casting of his mind adrift upon a sea of memories, wherein he might recall her as she had been, see her again pressed against his side, breathe the dear fragrance of her hair, hear the music of her voice.

Outside the wind was whistling and moaning through the leafless gardens, and a rain began to fall, pelting against his shutters, dripping in melancholy splashes from the eaves. How

barren, how God-forsaken seemed this Yashiki of feudal days! He recalled his first night in this same chamber. How cold it had been, how penetratingly desolate!

Now the winter was coming again. Soon the white snow would wrap its icy shroud about the Palace Matsuhaira, and there would be a silence—a silence less bearable than the grave—out there on those mountains of snow.

But the people of Fukui would come to him daily with their problems, their ambitions, and questions; and they would look to him as a guide and supporter along the new glittering road they wished to tread; for the fever of the New Japan was animating the entire nation, and Fukui had caught the epidemic. And they would bestow honors and favors upon the Tojin-san, fame and riches, too; for

at the period of the rebirth of a nation its teachers become its prophets —its leaders! Yes, there was such a career to his hand as he could never have attained in that other land, whither they were taking the fox-woman now. It was this, had said the Be-koku-jin, which must be his solace, his comfort.

He stood up unsteadily, his hand resting upon the table. Some one had knocked upon his door. He smiled, in the old grim, bitter way.

He could not be tricked by his imagination again. She was very far away by now, miles from Fukui, for it was past midnight, and her cortège would take an unbroken course toward the great highway which eventually would lead them to the metropolis.

But the knocking was repeated, softly, gently, a sound such as a little

timid bird in the wet night might have made in beating its wings upon the wall.

He heard the soft moving of the doors, and still he did not stir.

Now she stood between them, her eyes fully upon him, drawing, compelling his gaze. Upon her vivid, passionate little face there was, at last, that look of peace and rest that comes to one upon a journey's end.

The water dripped from her haori, and clung in glittering drops upon her hair, her lashes.

He could not even speak her name. He could only gaze at her entranced, as at that other time when he had come to consciousness within the woods, and had found her face hovering like a spirit's above his own.

She said as if answering the question he could not speak:

"Yaes—it is I—To-o-jin-san!"

With a motion, inexpressibly sweet, she put out her little hands, just as she had done ere she could see, and a beseeching, quivering little smile was on her lips.

"In the honorable wet dark—all those way—I have come bag to you, kind Tojin-san!"

His voice shook so that he did not recognize it as his own.

"You found your way—"

"Wiz these my eyes closed," she said, "ad udder end those whole worl'—tha's same thing Tojin-san—I find way bag unto you!"

"Why?" he demanded with a rough passion that yet tore and intoxicated him.

She reached out her arms to him yearningly, pleadingly.

"Tek me ad you arms again!" she said. "Toach me on my lips wiz yours. I will tell you—then!"

His last reserve was gone; he had no wish to hold it. Subtly, irresistibly, she had drawn him to her; now he had taken her back into his arms!

He felt her little fingers, as of old, passing across his face until they found his lips, and there she placed her own.

THE END