

THE WICKEDNESS OF MATSU

By Onoto Watanna

YUKI folded her hands and piously drooped her head. She was converted. Behind her, Matsu smiled beneath her affected frown, and the minister coughed slightly.

"You, Yuki," he said, with fatherly graciousness, "shall accompany us. I feel we shall have cause to be proud of you. And you—" He turned to Matsu, and cleared his throat. Her eyes were meekly drooped also now, and her hands folded, though, unlike Yuki, she had not fallen on her knees. As the minister paused, her lips moved, and she said, with the queerest intonation:

"Me?"

"You are hardly yet prepared," he said, gently.

The eyelids flashed up. There was a prayer in the depths of the dark eyes.

"A-a, *ple-ease*, excellency, me also," she said, dragging her words pleadingly.

The minister's composure vanished. He tried to look severe, and kept his gaze resolutely averted from the little upraised face; then his eyes encountered one beseeching little hand outstretched, and he fluttered.

Yuki finished her prayers and rose to her feet, turning a reproachful look on her friend. To the minister she said: "Matsu nod understan' to be good." This very apologetically, and with a resigned shake of her head.

"Me?" said Matsu, with superb passion. "Am good—mos' gooder'n all."

"Then why you nod pray?" demanded Yuki, "an' also why you nod baptize? An' also why you nod b'long

ad thad church of Jesu Christ an' Sav'or?"

"Hah!" said Matsu, with vehemence, "tha's account I *too* good!" She caught her breath guiltily and stood confessed.

"I nod mean thad," she said, pitifully, but it was no use. Yuki was glad Matsu had betrayed herself. She went off slyly smiling, and left the minister and Matsu in the Mission house alone. It was dark inside, and the gloom of the place made the girl shiver. She looked out wistfully to where the half-opened door let in a stray gleam of the fading sunlight. The minister pushed the door wide, and they passed out together and walked side by side toward the crest of the little hill on which the Mission house stood. It was not the first time they had together watched the sun set.

The United Missionary Society had quite recently requested the return to America of the minister, and had also authorized him to bring back with him to America two of his subject-converts. Now both Yuki and Matsu had been adopted by the Missionary Society since they were little children, and had grown up in it. Yuki, meek, submissive, sweet, pretty and passive, was the pride of the entire Mission, but Matsu was as far from the Cross as the day they had taken her in, a hungry, forlorn, fighting little morsel of humanity, clad in rags and dirt, whom one of the workers had found in the streets. No one had ever taken the trouble to find out who she was or to whom she belonged. It was the custom of the Mission house to take in such waifs, and moreover, it was an

easier matter to educate these children and bring them up in the Christian faith than it was to make converts among those who had ingrained into them, and were satisfied with, their own older religion. But Matsu was, unfortunately, untrainable, and, although a product of the Mission school, reflected discredit on that worthy institution, and it was the custom of the workers there to keep her out of sight on the occasion of visits from sundry foreigners who sought to investigate the work of the Mission. Had it not been for the minister, who had been moved from Osaka to Kyoto a year before, Matsu would have been turned adrift, for she had arrived at the age of fifteen, and it was the judgment of the missionaries that, since she could not be brought to conform to their belief, she should not be permitted to remain in the school, where her radical ideas and opinions were anything but conducive to discipline.

But the minister had acquired a peculiar fondness for the little maid. She exercised a strange influence over him, and while he sternly disapproved of her naughtinesses and recognized to the full the evil effect on the other children likely to result from her association with them, he was in the habit of shielding and even concealing her failings from his associates. Moreover, he never attempted to argue with her, or even to teach her, and in this way really had more influence over her than if he had done so. She would go to him and confide to him her little troubles, her thoughts, her queer fancies.

The minister knew his fondness for Matsu was in a measure perilous, for though no one else had perceived anything out of the ordinary in his friendship for her, the girl herself was cunningly well aware of it, and elfishly worked upon his weakness. Now her heart was set on going to America, and she was using all her wiles and smiles and witcheries with that end in view. It was really a serious crisis the minister was facing now. Much as he would have liked to take Matsu

with them, he was yet seriously affected by the idea of what the result would be if she, with all her wilfulness and mockery and defiance, was sent as a type of the convert from the Mission school.

As they walked along slowly together he debated within himself.

"No," he said, suddenly stopping. "It is out of the question, Matsu."

"Please, excellency!"

"No. Don't beg like that, Matsu," he said, nervously. "It's no use. You must understand, you ought to, how—how absurd it would be, how it would hurt me, in fact. You wouldn't want me to get into trouble, would you, Matsu?" he asked, softly.

She shook her head, and then suddenly caught at his sleeve, her eyes shining with a quick inspiration.

"Bud—sup-pose I *gitting* converted?" She put it to him seductively.

He gasped.

"Ah, that would be different, then, little girl," he answered, quickly, and looked stealthily at the alluring little hand, that had somehow found its way into his. He wondered at its power of expression. Her eyes danced now.

"I am convert!" she declared, promptly.

"*You*—now?" He began laughing, and she, encouraged, joined with him joyously.

"Yacs; see me? I am convert, so—so," and she dropped on her knees and began imitating Yuki's pose to a nicety. Her lips moved, she clasped her hands, she raised her eyes to heaven.

The minister went pale. This was too much.

"Don't do that," he said, sharply, and lifted her to her feet almost roughly. Then he began speaking quickly, jerkily.

"It's no use. You do not—you *could* not—understand the real spirit of the religion. You would disgrace not only me, but the Mission work here. They will ask you all sorts of questions. They are only too glad to find a flaw in one's work and pull it to pieces over there. You would be an excellent card for them, and would

play into their hands. Why, you don't understand all it means. You can't go, Matsu. You mustn't."

"God-A'mighty!" the girl said, tragically; "whad I done?"

He stared at her hopelessly.

"Where did you learn that?"

"Thad 'God-A'mighty?'"

He nodded.

"You!" She laughed triumphantly now.

"I did not use it in that way," he said, flushing a dark red. But she nodded vehemently.

"*Jus' like thad*—when you angry."

"Angry?"

"Yes, with thad priest wot criticising you nize worg. 'Member? I hearing you like this," and she mocked him with exaggeration.

He frowned uncomfortably.

"Tha's bad?" she questioned, demurely, peeping at him with her head cocked on one side.

"It isn't good," he said, shortly.

"So?" She was thoughtful a moment, and then: "Sa-ay, you nod sending me at America account I nod good? Well, also why you sending therefore you, you-ownself?"

He stirred miserably under her accusing, quizzing eyes.

"Oh, you're right," he said, disheartenedly, for he was out of sorts.

"I don't amount to much, Matsu, and the fact is, I don't want to go; but I'm under marching orders, you see."

"Marching orders? Say, why *you* don' putting *me* under them same marching orders?"

She came round to the front of him and peered up into his face. Her head reached to his chin, and he was conscious that her hair was perfumed with a faint, subtle odor that was delightful.

Someone came swiftly up to them, and he heard the high, nasal voice of Miss Johnson from the Mission school.

"Oh, Mr. Brandon, you are wanted. There's a meeting at eight, and they want you a little in advance—" She stopped short and stood staring at Matsu in speechless, suspicious horror.

"Matsu! where did you get that dress? and why are you dressed like that?"

The girl laughed defiantly, even as she retreated.

The gown was extravagantly beautiful and of the richest quality of silk. She smoothed it daintily and caressingly.

"I geisha girl now," she declared, "an' I kin danze—so!" She executed a few steps.

Miss Johnson turned on the minister.

"I knew it would come to this," she wailed, "after all these years. We might have expected it. She has been at her tricks again—deceiving us! It will hurt the other girls, our dear, pure-minded Christian girls."

"I nod tricking you," broke in Matsu, savagely. "Tha's nod wiggled danzing. Tha's mos' nize of all. You thing I go worg ad thad factory gitting my hands all so dirty and sore? No; I *nod*!" she declared, passionately.

"You could have followed some worthy trade. You could have even taken up the mission work, if it hadn't been for your wicked nature. And it was only last night Yuki told us that you had declared yourself converted."

Matsu shrugged her shoulders fiercely. "I bagsliding!" she said.

The minister spoke to her gently. "You would better come back with us for the present," he said.

"You taking me at that America?"

"That is—impossible."

She turned quickly and ran down the hillside.

The preparations for the departure of the party went on slowly. Another girl and Yuki had been chosen to accompany the minister, and the unselfish workers at the Mission willingly made ready for them a comfortable little wardrobe that would stand them in good stead in America. The minister was ill at ease, and absent-minded. Since the day when she had run away from them nothing had been seen of Matsu. The teachers

had unanimously agreed that she was really past redemption. No effort was made to find out her whereabouts; and, in fact, they one and all declared that it was, after all, just what they might have expected of her. They had had somewhat similar experience with all the half-caste children—they were unstable, unreliable, incapable of restraint. But the minister said little. He had acquired a habit of going down into the city after his work was finished and frequenting the different tea-gardens and dancing places. There was no sign of Matsu, and he worried so much over her loss that he grew thin and haggard from sleeplessness.

It was a couple of nights before their departure that, as he was entering his house, he felt someone pull his coat tail, and, turning quickly, he encountered the sharp, defiant eyes of Matsu. He was so relieved and overjoyed at seeing her that he almost shouted. She clung to his hand as he drew her indoors.

"Well, Matsu?" was what he said, after a moment, and then, as she seemed loath to speak, he prompted her: "Where have you been?"

"Me? Oh, jus' liddle bit visit."

"Where?"

"Where? Let me see——"

"Tell me the truth, Matsu."

She laughed hysterically.

"I bin danzing," she said, drearily.

"And you don't like it? Prefer the peaceful life here?"

She caught her breath with a sob.

"I like go at America," she said.

"Why?"

She still tightly clasped his hand with both her small ones.

"Ah, to be with you," she breathed.

After that they stood in silence, and the minister closed his eyes. Her confession had startled his blood deliriously. No one in all his life had

ever cared for him in that way before. The girl regarded him wistfully.

"You got already 'nuder wife?" she inquired, anxiously; "mebbe two, three, 'leven, one hundred wives?"

He shook his head, smiling faintly at her imagination, which was always so vivid.

"Why you nod marry with *me*, then?" she asked, and went closer to him.

He put his two hands on her shoulders, and held her off.

"Listen, Matsu, and look at me, too. See, I am years older than you are—past forty, in fact, and you a little girl of fifteen. Then, too, you are pretty, very pretty, Matsu, while I—well, you see, dear, I am a very plain, homely man—ugly, perhaps."

She denied this vehemently.

"You mos' beautifulest gen'lemans in all the whole worl'."

He laughed joyously.

"Well, you're the only person who ever thought that, Matsu. In fact, I don't suppose anybody ever thought long enough about me to bother over that question. Then, too, I am poor, quite poor, with barely enough for independence, while *you*—remember that Jap fellow that used to haunt the Mission house, and you? What became of *him*, Matsu? *He* had money to burn, and, well, you know he came to me and wanted you for his wife; in fact, said he was willing to become a convert if I'd let him have you."

"Why he don' burn his ole money?" she asked, scornfully. "Me? I don' want."

They were silent for a moment after that, then the minister drew her a little closer to him. "You're too good for me, little girl," he said, looking down into her eyes. "There's nothing to *me*, in fact, except——"

"Except?" she repeated.

"That I love you, Matsu-san," he said, softly.

