

THE WIFE OF SHIMADZU

By Onoto Watanna

THE Japanese consul smiled at the dyspeptic pathos manifest in the countenance of the little figure that had presented itself within his inner office. On the appealing features there were traced unmistakable lines of peculiar pain. Occasionally their momentary rigidity was disturbed by acute spasms.

"Why, Narabara, what has put you to these honorable torments?" he asked.

The sufferer laid one hand on his little throbbing abdomen. "Excellency," he moaned, "these very much august damn cooking too august for my insignificant stomach. It gives me too many honorable pains." This with a grimace of the utmost anguish.

The consul had been rather long in the land of the august Americans—long enough to catch with grave Oriental diligence something of their humor. That, perhaps, was the reason he laughed, although the faces of his assistants, who had been a shorter time in the country, remained impassive and unamused at the sorrows of Narabara. Nothing of the consul's humor seemed to reach Narabara. Silently he awaited its conclusion. It was a common thing among these barbarians, and the consul—out of politeness, doubtless—did as they all did; for Narabara recalled that, whenever he addressed an American on the subject, straightway that honorable savage began to laugh.

Finally the amusement of the consul spent itself.

"I thought," he said, "that the honorable Narabara came to the land of the laughs to become one of the na-

tives. I thought he desired to become an American. Did he not tell me that many Irish, themselves foreigners, came here and straightway became Americans, and that he, too, a foreigner, was desirous of doing that also? Did he not ask me to find for him a typically American place of abode, where he might learn to eat of the dishes of this country, and did I not send him thither?"

"Godder dam!" responded Narabara, who failed to appreciate the consul's humor.

"Come, tell me how you fared," said the consul, pushing forward a chair hospitably and seating himself.

"Ah, excellency," said Narabara, sadly, "I went bravely to the honorable task. In the morning I arose and assassinated my unworthy stomach with a breakfast of a suspicious mush and the most honorable pig fried and mixed with hen egg. My inwards did make honorable rebellion at the tainting gnaw of pig flesh, but I tried to bear it. Then they brought suspicious cakes fried in grease over the living fire and things called biscuit, with all of which I struggled. Once they had honorable rice, but not cooked after our own divine manner; on the contrary, disfigured with raisins! In spite of my sufferings I persevered until their august Sunday, when they brought to the table a great, half-raw, malodorous flesh named 'roast beef.' It was a nightmare of Yeddo! Sunday after Sunday came, and with it this stomach-revolting piece of flesh, which I was forced to eat, out of honorable politeness to the house. My soul longs and my stomach hun-

gers for the *shiruko*, *sushi* and the *kamaboko* of my fathers. My honorable insides are beset with the devils of pain. I come now to you as the representative of my people and the worthy friend of my father."

He doubled forward in his chair with an appealing bow.

The consul considered a moment.

"You are in sore straits," he said.

"Direly afflicted," answered Narabara.

"What can I do for you?"

Narabara sighed.

"Possibly," he said, "there may be in this city of raw beef some of our countrymen, who, having tried the honorable dishes of these barbarians——"

"Many, many such," said the consul, thoughtfully.

"Perhaps there are those who have given up the foolish fight and have made a place where we honorable exiles might partake of *charvan*, the *namasu* and the *konomono*. Is there no such Japanese restaurant here?"

The consul turned to a type-written list on the wall.

"There is a Japanese restaurant at No. 10A West Forty-third street, kept by the worthy Shimadzu, where all those things are served," he told Narabara. "I myself have eaten there. Go, then, to-night, to the house of Shimadzu."

That night found Narabara seated in a corner of the restaurant of Shimadzu. The pains of his stomach seemed to have taken wings, for his face beamed blissfully.

Without, the house had presented every aspect of the conventional high-stooped residence of the type surrounding it. There was nothing, beyond the bamboo hangings at the windows, to differentiate it from its fellows, and these might pass in outside speculation as a manifestation of the taste of that species of millionaire prone to building European houses meant to be set in grounds on the crowded plot of a New York side street. There was not even a sign upon the house-front to denote its character. It was

known only to the initiated and the élite of Manhattan Japanese society. Within, however, everything was Japanese.

When Narabara had ascended the little flight of stairs leading up from the street and had pushed open the unlatched door, he had come as near to gaping about as the polite Japanese may come. The partitions that had once separated the rooms of the residence had been removed, to make of the entire floor one immense chamber. Instead of bare, modern walls, sliding *shoji* (paper screens) marked the limits of the apartment. The whole interior was planned as the principal apartment of a Japanese house. Set against the walls were large jars and vases containing fresh flowers and excellent imitation sprays of cherry and plum-blossoms. Attendants in native costume hurried hither and thither.

Narabara stood for a moment transfixed. Then he sighed—a long-drawn breath it was, that of a traveler returning home. Next he observed the bowing figure before him.

"Welcome," said the figure, sonorously, "to the augustly insignificant and unworthy house of Shimadzu, most honorably condescending and august Narabara."

With a slight inclination of the head Narabara acknowledged the other's salute.

"You were expected," continued the figure; "my master, Shimadzu, bade me escort you to an upper chamber, where your garment is in waiting."

After Narabara had changed his cumbersome American clothes for the soft, silken *hakama* which the attendant servilely offered, he was led to the principal apartment below. He was met at the door by the smiling consul, who led him to a table in a shaded corner of the room, introducing him to a number of men and women.

"Ladies and gentlemen," cried the consul, "let me present to you Narabara Shawtaro, an artist, who, after a gallant struggle with the dishes of his adopted land, has come again to his own."

Narabara, after the buzz of salutations had died down, dared to glance stealthily under his eyes at these honorable ladies who were thus eating in public. He discovered, to his surprise, that while all the men at the table were Japanese, but one of the women bore even the slightest resemblance to his countrywomen, and even she had the rosy coloring of the West. Then he remembered that the consul had married an American. He glanced again at the girl beside him, and felt a strange glow of satisfaction in assuring himself that, despite her complexion, she was undoubtedly Japanese. At the other tables he saw that the diners were all Japanese, and he finally came to the conclusion that this little collection of friends at this particular table was a special party given by the consul.

"So you don't like American cooking?" said a voice beside him, and Narabara woke from his dream of delight.

Narabara soon found himself discussing *charvan* and American cooking with his companion. She spoke of Japanese cooking as one an enthusiast on things Japanese and a dweller in Nippon. When he was thoroughly at his ease, she allowed him to see that she was familiar with his flower paintings.

"Yours is not an ordinary brush. You do not copy nature as a photographer, but your brush seems to catch rather at the essence of the flower and depict its poetic significance," she told him.

Had she expressed this sentiment in English, Narabara would have muttered his polite, "Certainly, certainly," signifying that he did not understand; but she spoke in Japanese. The artist glowed. When the meal was over Narabara thought her the most intelligent woman he had ever met. He had just begun to think her the most beautiful Japanese woman he had ever seen, when she said:

"Perhaps you have puzzled over my nationality. I am only half Japanese. My mother was of Nippon and my father in the English consular service."

After a moment she added, as if to relieve the somewhat embarrassing silence:

"I am sure you are going to like this place. I often come here myself, not only because of the food, but because of other things. Sometimes they have—ah, now you shall see for yourself."

At a sign from Shimadzu the remnants of the feast—for, in spite of the Japanese prevalence of fish in all forms, it had been designed as a banquet—were swept away. The lights, save a few in the rear of the room, were extinguished, leaving the apartment in partial gloom. The chatter and laughter of the guests died away as these apparent preparations for something to come were made. Then, into the softened darkness, there came—pulsating, vibrating—the weird drone and squeak of the *samisen* rising and mingling in a movement that suggested the passing away, the gliding of all things. A *shoji* in the rear, somewhat distant from the diners, slid back, disclosing a Japanese expanse of land and water, with a mountain rising in the background, the regretful rays of a dying sun bathing it in a golden light. The scene remained but a moment, and then vanished to make room for another as strangely beautiful. When the lights came again, Narabara found his companion sitting with her hands to her eyes.

"I thought I was in the city of my birth," she said.

From that night forth Narabara was to be found every evening at the house of Shimadzu. Sometimes he came alone, often with friends; but he always sat in the same place and the identical corner where he had met the Eurasian. His constant occupation of the place attracted no notice, for each of the patrons of Shimadzu had his own seat and his own table, where he was regularly to be found. And no one thought of taking the place or the table of an old patron. So the artist's spot came to be known as "Narabara's corner."

Narabara had been a regular at-

tendant at the house of Shimadzu for some months when, one evening, on ladies' night, he entered the place with the young half-barbarian, whose name, she had told him, was Otama Wallace. They went straightway to his accustomed corner. Narabara wanted to be alone with her that evening. Perhaps the girl guessed what was in his mind, and she could not blame him for taking advantage of her mood in bringing her where the Japanese atmosphere affected her always so deeply.

Their meal was begun in a silence that was eloquent. Narabara had hardly found his voice when Shimadzu was seen coming toward them. He smiled blandly on them.

"Excellency," he said, "pardon this unworthy forwardness of an insignificant man, but who is yet happy."

"Yes?" they smiled, appreciatively.

Shimadzu, encouraged, continued:

"I am happy as a nightingale, and blessed am I in my insignificance."

The girl made answer:

"O Shimadzu, maker of the finest *kamaboko*, tell us the cause of thy honorable joy."

"It is," said Shimadzu, "because I am about to make an honorable alliance with Madame Kiku, who at present resides in San Francisco. She will come soon to preside over my insignificant establishment in an august manner."

When he had received their congratulations he went from table to table, announcing his projected marriage with a beaming face. After he was gone, Narabara looked shyly at the half-foreign face of his friend. He could see, from her shining eyes and flushed cheeks, that the announcement of Shimadzu had pleased and excited her. She had all a woman's interest in a romance.

"The best part of your nature," said Narabara, "is Japanese."

"It is so," she answered; "the best part of me is Japanese; but—" she hesitated a moment—"still I am *not* Japanese."

"I love you," said Narabara, his

courage taking sudden fire; "if you will marry me you will be wholly Japanese."

The girl looked at him reflectively.

"Just now," he continued, with a pleading quality in his voice, "you said the better part of you was Japanese. Why not marry me, then? I am not uncivilized, though I cannot eat American dishes. Our marriage shall be the union of art with—with—" he glanced at her brilliant coloring—"with the spirit of poetry."

"Oh, Narabara!" she cried, leaning toward him impulsively, "you don't know what you are asking. It is true that I am more Japanese than anything else, though I have lived the best part of my life here; but, after all, I am only a half-caste. In Japan I would be scorned; even here I am regarded as a curiosity."

"But you have not answered me," said Narabara. "You do not refuse me?"

"No, I do not. Ask me in a month's time. I cannot answer you to-night, for I feel that, while my better part is Japanese, I must do my Saxon half justice. To-night—this place—you—Japan herself is on my nerves. Ask me in a month, when I can see things more clearly."

Long after the girl had gone to her home in a carriage, Narabara sat in his accustomed corner brooding over coming events, with the aid of *sake* and the weird music of the place.

The time passed rapidly for Narabara. He had been much engaged with his art work, for Narabara had become the fad in certain circles, and many orders had come to him. A number of times he had attempted to see Miss Wallace, but without success. He had penetrated as far as the reception-room of the thoroughly Saxon apartment-house of his mistress. She would dine with him at the house of Shimadzu at the end of the period she had mentioned, and would then come to a decision, was the word brought to him by the man.

Then the wife of Shimadzu had arrived. Narabara had cause to re-

member vividly her first appearance in his favorite house of entertainment. It had been an occasion of much preparation.

All of the most distinguished and the oldest patrons of the house of Shimadzu had taken great care to be present. A sumptuous feast had been made ready, and each patron was in his accustomed place, when the silken hangings of a seldom-used entrance parted and Shimadzu appeared, leading by the hand a diminutive figure. She wore a *kimono* of dove-gray silk, tied about with a purple *obi*. Her hair was done high on her head and spread out like a fan in the butterfly mode of coiffure. Altogether, she presented a bewitching appearance. Extending her arms, like the wings of a bird, in a semicircle that began at the waist, reaching an arm's length away, she prostrated herself before the company, her forehead touching the floor. A murmur of admiration and approval went up from the assemblage. The guests, rising from their chairs, bowed profoundly before her. A moment later the little figure, raising itself from the floor, stood proudly erect. There was not a trace of embarrassment on her face. In fact, she hurried forward with the air of a business woman, crossed to a chair that had been twisted out of position to suit the whim of an old patron, in whose settled nook it stood, and set it back against the table. The company watched the movements of the bride curiously.

"That should be so," she said to her husband, in excellent English.

Shimadzu delightedly explained to his guests that in San Francisco she had catered to English customers; and, he added, she had had the finest trade on the Pacific coast.

Within a comparatively few hours the entire policy and management of the house of Shimadzu were altered. The day following the advent of the wife of Shimadzu a glaring advertisement appeared in the newspapers soliciting the trade of American patrons. Outside the door of the restaurant a poster announced that Ma-

dame Shimadzu had taken charge of the place and was now ready to receive customers.

From that time forward the hospitable Japanese precincts hitherto reserved exclusively for sons of Nippon became the stamping-ground of that class which, drinking unknown wines in foreign show restaurants, calls itself "bohemian." Writers who had gained a certain short vogue, accompanied by actresses, were to be found in profusion. And curiously enough the place was known to these no longer as the house of Shimadzu, but "that cute little place of Madame Chrysanthemum's."

Before this peroxide invasion the guests of Shimadzu—the Japanese guests—melted away. A few of them out of old-time loyalty still continued to visit the place, but only out of loyalty. To remain, they were compelled to battle constantly with Madame Shimadzu, whose management of the restaurant's interior set at variance all traditions. The nooks and corners, hitherto occupied for years by this or that Japanese dignitary, were either utterly eliminated or were so altered that their former owners no longer recognized them. To the apathetic Shimadzu the old patrons went.

"May it please you," they complained, "your honorable wife has so altered the appearance of your honorable house that we no longer recognize our insignificant selves."

Shimadzu shrugged a fat shoulder, something he had not done prior to his marriage.

"Pray complain to Madame Shimadzu," he said; "she augustly runs my insignificant house."

Madame Shimadzu had been so spoiled by the flattery that had always been her due that at the first question of her authority her temper burst out on the unfortunate Japanese gentlemen who had ventured to complain, the chief of whom was Narabara. Thereafter he was an object of especial dislike to her, and she took a malicious pleasure

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in making him as uncomfortable as possible, never allowing the opportunity to escape her of venting her spleen on him.

Meanwhile, the month of suspense allotted to Narabara by Miss Wallace came to a conclusion. Narabara with a carriage waited on her during one of those nights that had been celebrated formerly in the house of Shimadzu as "ladies' days." Enough Japanese were still present in the restaurant on their arrival to make their wearing of Japanese costume not a subject of uncomfortable remark.

"How changed everything is!" the girl exclaimed to Narabara, as they were seated in the corner of the new arrangement as near as possible to that once occupied by Narabara.

The girl's first mood of disappointment wore off as the meal and the evening progressed. The leaping forth of the music wisely retained by Madame Shimadzu brought back the old light to the girl's eyes. Madame Shimadzu herself was nowhere to be seen.

"Yes, my dear Narabara," the girl told the artist as they sat listening to the music, "I feel all Japanese tonight."

The *kimono* she wore set off her Oriental blood. She looked unmistakably Japanese this night.

"You will marry me?" the artist breathed forth.

"I think I—" began the girl.

The quick eye of Madame Shimadzu as she entered identified at once the feature traits of the Eurasian manifest in the young girl at Narabara's side. It was a mixture of blood she despised. Angrily she crossed to Narabara's table. Just as the young girl was about to answer Narabara, Madame Shimadzu blazed out at her, regardless of the numerous company in the crowded supper-room.

"Despicable woman," she cried, with the bitterest vindictiveness, "out of my house!"

The company stared. As the insult left the lips of Madame Shimadzu,

Miss Wallace started hastily to her feet. She spoke in a hard, tense voice to Narabara.

"You see what your race is, how they regard me. No! I thank heaven I am not entirely pagan myself. I certainly shall not marry you."

Then, without waiting to slip off the *kimono* she wore, the girl passed quickly to her carriage and was driven away before the astounded Narabara could offer to conduct her thither.

Two evenings later there was open, violent revolt in the house of Shimadzu, led by Narabara. The old patrons, under the vigorous direction of the artist, met in grave, earnest and serious conclave. Everything was done in order. First, the grievances of each member were set forth at voluminous length in Japanese hieroglyphics. Then a remedy was discussed and an ultimatum framed for Shimadzu. A deputation appointed from this conference waited on Shimadzu, carrying several rolls of parchment. They were little, yellow-faced men, but they were in earnest.

"Shimadzu, your honorable house has become an offense and an abomination to all good sons of Nippon," said Narabara, the spokesman. "The old places where we long sat, which were hallowed to us because of the dreams dreamed there, are no more. The *shoji* of this place are no longer visible to the eye of Japanese gentlemen alone. Honorable barbarians are permitted to enter at will. They are a curse, and they taint the air—"

The spokesman paused. Shimadzu rolled his eyes lazily.

"But my wife, she do all that; tell her," he objected.

"True, your wife has done this. It is of her we would speak," went on Narabara.

He paused ominously.

"You must divorce your wife," he growled.

"Divorce my wife!" shrieked Shimadzu. "Gods!"

"Divorce your wife," repeated Nara-

bara, while the seven other members of the delegation bowed as one.

"If I refuse?" said Shimadzu.

"If you refuse, your name shall be branded throughout all Nippon as an unworthy son, as one who, keeping an orderly house, has made it an offense to his countrymen; as one who, having made a home for exiles, has turned them out."

"No, no!" said Shimadzu.

"If you refuse, thirty devout Japanese gentlemen shall pray that your soul be accursed."

"No, no!" Shimadzu groaned, cringing and doubling over.

"I would consent, gentlemen," he added, "but how can it be done? I cannot get rid of the woman."

"It can readily be managed," relentlessly continued Narabara; "do as in Nippon. Announce to the woman that you have divorced her. Give her her passage money and such dowry as you may choose, and let her return to that Western city which can spare her but ill."

"It shall be done," said Shimadzu.

When next Miss Wallace, in response to the fervid appeals of Narabara, visited the house of Shimadzu, all was as before. The serpent had departed from their Eden. Old patrons were in their former places. All was restored, and the "bohemians" were rigidly turned away at the door,

to their complete disgust and bewilderment. Only Japanese and the women brought by them and their friends were allowed to enter the place. The sign was gone from the front of the house. The advertisement had disappeared from the newspapers.

At first Narabara's guest was constrained and distant. Hers was a sensitive soul, and she had been deeply wounded. But as each event of the evening reassured her, her mood softened. When at the meal's close the *shoji* rolled back, disclosing the old pictures of Japan she had loved, she uttered a cry of joy. Narabara thought his time had come.

"Shimadzu divorce his wife," he remarked, generally.

"Divorced his wife!" she exclaimed. "Why, how could he do that?"

Then Narabara shrugged expressive shoulders.

"All the same thing—he send her away," he said, simply.

"Well, what if he has?" she asked.

"We make him do it, partly because she change everything and have vicious temper, most because she insult you. Now will you marry me?"

The girl laughed a trifle hysterically. Then, her eyes shining with tears in the semi-darkness of the room, she laid her hand impulsively on his.

"Yes, I will, Narabara," she said, softly.



THE TOPER'S VIEW

TO keep him in his state of grace,
The youth can find no safer place
Than where they sell potatoes;
For there the best of spirits are
To serve whoever seeks a bar
To evil inclinations.

JOHN B. TABB.



SOME people not only let their right hand know what their left hand does,
but they also bring in their feet.