## CHAPTER XII

### FALLEN CHERRY-BLOSSOMS

*Iro wa nioedo*
*Chirinuru wo—*
*Waga yo tare zo*
*Tsune naran?*
*Ui no okuyama*
*Kyo koete,*
*Asaki yume miji*
*Ei mo sezu.*

The colours are bright but
The petals fall!
In this world of ours who
Shall remain for ever?
To-day crossing
The high mountains of
mutability,
We shall see no fleeting
dreams,
Being inebriate no longer.

*'O hayō gozaimas'!'* (Respectfully early!)

Twitterings of maid-servants salute the lady of the house with the conventional morning greeting. Mrs Fujinami Shidzuyé replies in the high, fluty, unnatural voice which is considered refined in her social set.

The servants glide into the room which she has just left, moving noiselessly so as not to wake the master who is still sleeping. They remove from his side the thick warm mattresses upon which his wife has been lying, the hard wooden pillow like the block of history, the white sheets and the heavy padded coverlet with sleeves like an enormous kimono. They roll up all these *yagu* (night implements), fold them and put them away into an unsuspected cupboard in the architecture of the veranda.

Mr Fujinami Gentaro still snores.

After a while his wife returns. She is dressed for the morning in a plain grey silk kimono with a broad olive-green *obi* (sash). Her hair is arranged in a formidable

helmet-like *coiffure*—all Japanese matrons with their hair done properly bear a remote resemblance to Pallas Athene and Britannia. This will need the attention of the hairdresser so as to wax into obedience a few hairs left wayward by the night in spite of that severe wooden pillow, whose hard, high discomfort was invented by female vanity to preserve from disarray the rigid order of their locks. Her feet are encased in little white *tabi* like gloves, for the big toe has a compartment all to itself. She walks with her toes turned in, and with the heels hardly touching the ground. This movement produces a bend of the knees and hips so as to maintain the equilibrium of the body, and a sinuous appearance which is considered the height of elegance in Japan, so that the grace of a beautiful woman is likened to 'a willow-tree blown by the wind,' and the shuffle of her feet on the floor-matting to the wind's whisper.

Mrs Fujinami carries a red lacquer tray. On the tray is a tiny teapot and a tiny cup and a tiny dish, in which are three little salted damsons, with a toothpick fixed in one of them. It is the *petit déjeuner* of her lord. She put down the tray beside the head of the pillow, and makes a low obeisance, touching the floor with her forehead.

'*O hayō gozaimas*'!'

Mr Fujinami stirs, gapes, stretches, yawns, rubs his lean fist in his hollow eyes, and stares at the rude incursion of daylight. He takes no notice of his wife's presence. She pours out tea for him with studied pose of hands and wrists, conventional and graceful. She respectfully requests him to condescend to partake. Then she makes obeisance again.

Mr Fujinami yawns once more, after which he condescends. He sucks down the thin, green tea with a whistling noise. Then he places in his mouth the damson balanced on the point of the toothpick. He turns it

over and over with his tongue as though he was chewing a cud. Finally he decides to eat it, and to remove the stone.

Then he rises from his couch. He is a very small wizened man. Dressed in his night kimono of light blue silk, he passes along the veranda in the direction of the morning ablutions. Soon the rending sounds of throat-clearing show that he has begun his wash. Three maids appear as by magic in the vacated room. The bed is rolled away, the matting swept, and the master's morning clothes are laid out ready for him on his return.

Mrs Fujinami assists her husband to dress, holding each garment ready for him to slip into, like a well-trained valet. Mr Fujinami does not speak to her. When his belt has been adjusted, and a watch with a gold fob thrust into its interstice, he steps down from the veranda, slides his feet into a pair of *geta*, and strolls out into the garden.

Mr Fujinami's garden is a famous one. It is a temple garden many centuries old; and the eyes of the initiated may read in the miniature landscape, in the grouping of shrubs and rocks, in the sudden glimpses of water, and in the bare pebbly beaches, a whole system of philosophic and religious thought worked out by the patient priests of the Ashikaga period, just as the Gothic masons wrote their version of the Bible history in the architecture of their cathedrals.

But for the ignorant, including its present master, it was just a perfect little park, with lawns six feet square and ancient pine-trees, with impenetrable forests which one could clear at a bound, with gorges, waterfalls, arbours for lilliputian philanderings and a lake round whose tiny shores were represented the Eight Beautiful Views of the Lake of Biwa near Kyoto.

The bungalow mansion of the family lies on a knoll overlooking the lake and the garden valley, a rambling

construction of brown wood with grey scale-like tiles, resembling a domesticated dragon stretching itself in the sun.

Indeed, it is not one house but many, linked together by a number of corridors and spare rooms. For Mr and Mrs Fujinami live in one wing, their son and his wife in another, and also Mr Ito, the lawyer, who is a distant relative and a partner in the Fujinami business. Then, on the farther side of the house, near the pebble drive and the great gate, are the swarming quarters of the servants, the rickshaw-men, and Mr Fujinami's secretaries. Various poor relations exist unobserved in unfrequented corners; and there is the following of University students and professional swashbucklers which every important Japanese is bound to keep, as an advertisement of his generosity, and to do his dirty work for him. A Japanese family mansion is very like a hive—of drones.

Nor is this the entire population of the Fujinami *yashiki*. Across the garden and beyond the bamboo grove is the little house of Mr Fujinami's stepbrother and his wife; and in the opposite corner, below the cherry-orchard, is the *inkyo*, the dower house, where old Mr Fujinami Gennosuké, the retired lord—who is the present Mr Mr Fujinami's father by adoption only,—watches the progress of the family fortunes with the vigilance of Charles the Fifth in the cloister of Juste.

Mr Fujinami Gentaro shuffled his way towards a little room like a kind of summer-house, detached from the main building and overlooking the lake and garden from the most favourable point of vantage.

This is Mr Fujinami's study—like all Japanese rooms, a square box with wooden framework, wooden ceiling, sliding paper *shoji*, pale golden *tatami* and double alcove,

All Japanese rooms are just the same, from the Emperor's to the rickshaw-man's; only in the quality of the wood, in the workmanship of the fittings, in the newness and freshness of paper and matting, and by the ornaments placed in the alcove, may the prosperity of the house be known.

In Mr Fujinami's study, one niche of the alcove was fitted up as a bookcase; and that bookcase was made of a wonderful honey-coloured satinwood brought from the hinterland of China. The lock and the handles were inlaid with dainty designs in gold wrought by a celebrated Kyoto artist. In the open alcove the hanging scroll of Lao Tze's paradise had cost many hundreds of pounds, as had also the Sung dish below it, an intricacy of lotus leaves carved out of a single amethyst.

On a table in the middle of this chaste apartment lay a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and a yellow book. The room was open to the early morning sunlight; the paper walls were pushed back. Mr Fujinami moved a square silk cushion to the edge of the matting near the outside veranda. There he could rest his back against a post in the framework of the building—for even Japanese get wearied by the interminable squatting which life on the floor level entails—and acquire that condition of bodily repose which is essential for meditation.

Mr Fujinami was in the habit of meditating for one hour every morning. It was a tradition of his house; his father and his grandfather had done so before him. The guide of his meditations was the yellow book, the *Rongo* (Maxims) of Confucius, that Bible of the Far East which has moulded Oriental morality to the shape of the Three Obediences, the obedience of the child to his parents, of the wife to her husband, and of the servant to his lord.

Mr Fujinami sat on the sill of his study, and meditated.

Around him was the stillness of early morning. From the house could be heard the swish of the maids' brooms brushing the *tatami*, and the flip-flap of their paper flickers, like horses' tails, with which they dislodged the dust from the walls and cornices.

A big black crow had been perched on one of the cherry-trees in the garden. He rose with a shaking of branches and a flapping of broad black wings. He crossed the lake, croaking as he flew with a note more harsh, rasping and cynical than the consequential caw of English rooks. His was a malevolent presence 'from the night's Plutonian shore,' the symbol of something unclean and sinister lurking behind this dainty beauty and this elaboration of cleanliness.

Mr Fujinami's meditations were deep and grave. Soon he put down the book. The spectacles glided along his nose. His chest rose and fell quickly under the weight of his resting chin. To the ignorant observer Mr Fujinami would have appeared to be asleep.

However, when his wife appeared about an hour and a half afterwards, bringing her lord's breakfast on another red lacquer table she besought him kindly to condescend to eat, and added that he must be very tired after so much study. To this Mr Fujinami replied by passing his hand over his forehead and saying, '*Dōmō! So des' né!* (Indeed, it is so!) I have tired myself with toil.'

This little farce repeated itself every morning. All the household knew that the master's hour of meditation was merely an excuse for an after-sleep. But it was a tradition in the family that the master should study thus; and Mr Fujinami's grandfather had been a great scholar in his generation. To maintain the tradition Mr Fujinami had hired a starveling journalist to write a series of random essays of a sentimental nature, which he had published under his own name, with the title, *Fallen Cherry-Blossoms.*

Such is the hold of humbug in Japan that nobody in the whole household, including the students who respected nothing, ever allowed themselves the relief of smiling at the sacred hour of study, even when the master's back was turned.

'*O hayō gozaimas' !*'

'For honourable feast of yesterday evening indeed very much obliged !'

The oily forehead of Mr Ito touched the matting floor with the exaggerated humility of conventional gratitude. The lawyer wore a plain kimono of slate-grey silk. His American manners and his pomposity had both been laid aside with the tweed suit and the swallow-tail. He was now a plain Japanese business-man, servile and adulatory in his patron's presence. Mr Fujinami Gentaro bowed slightly in acknowledgment across the remnants of his meal.

'It is no matter,' he said, with a few waves of his fan; 'please sit at your ease.'

The two gentlemen arranged themselves squatting cross-legged for the morning's confidential talk.

'The cherry-flowers,' Ito began, with a sweep of the arm towards the garden grove, 'how quickly they fall, alas !'

'Indeed, human life also,' agreed Mr Fujinami. 'But the guests of last evening, what is one to think?'

'*Ma !* In truth, *sensei* (master or teacher), it would be impossible not to call that Asa San a beauty.'

'Ito Kun,' said his relative in a tone of mild censure, 'it is foolish always to think of women's looks. This foreigner, what of him?'

'For a foreigner, that person seems to be honourable and brave,' answered the retainer, 'but one fears that it is a misfortune for the house of Fujinami.'

'To have a son who is no son,' said the head of the family, sighing.

'*Dōmō!* It is terrible!' was the reply; 'besides, as the *sensei* so eloquently said last night, there are so few blossoms on the old tree.'

The better to aid his thoughts, Mr Fujinami drew from about his person a case which contained a thin bamboo pipe, called *kiseru* in Japanese, having a metal bowl of the size and shape of the socket of an acorn. He filled this diminutive bowl with a little wad of tobacco, which looked like coarse brown hair. He kindled it from the charcoal ember in the *hibachi*. He took three sucks of smoke, breathing them slowly out of his mouth again in thick grey whorls. Then with three hard raps against the wooden edge of the firebox, he knocked out again the glowing ball of weed. When this ritual was over, he replaced the pipe in its sheath of old brocade.

The lawyer sucked in his breath, and bowed his head.

'In family matters,' he said, 'it is rude for an outside person to advise the master. But last night I saw a dream. I saw the Englishman had been sent back to England; and that this Asa San with all her money was again in the Fujinami family. Indeed, a foolish dream, but a good thing, I think!'

Mr Fujinami pondered with his face inclined and his eyes shut.

'Ito Kun,' he said at last, 'you are indeed a great schemer. Every month you make one hundred schemes. Ninety of them are impracticable, eight of them are foolish, and two of them are masterpieces!'

'And this one?' asked Ito.

'I think it is impracticable,' said his patron, 'but it would be worth while to try. It would without doubt be an advantage to send away this foreigner. He is a great trouble, and may even become a danger. Besides, the house of Fujinami has few children. Where there are

no sons even daughters are welcome. If we had this Asa, we could marry her to some influential person. She is very beautiful, she is rich, and she speaks foreign languages. There would be no difficulty. Now, as to the present, how about this Osaka business?'

'I have heard from my friend this morning,' answered Ito; 'it is good news. The Governor will sanction the establishment of the new licensed quarter at Tobita, if the Home Minister approves.'

'But that is easy. The Minister has always protected us. Besides, did I not give fifty thousand *yen* to the funds of the *Seiyukwai*?' said Mr Fujinami, naming the political party then in the majority in Parliament.

'Yes, but it must be done quickly; for opposition is being organised. First, there was the Salvation Army and the missionaries. Now, there are Japanese people, too, people who make a cry and say this licensed prostitute system is not suitable to a civilised country, and it is a shame to Japan. Also, there may be a political change very soon, and a new Minister.'

'Then we would have to begin all over again, another fifty thousand *yen* to the other side.'

'If it is worth it?'

'My father says that Osaka is the gold mine of Japan. It is worth all that we can pay.'

'Yes, but Mr Fujinami Gennosuké is an old man now, and the times are changing.'

The master laughed.

'Times change,' he said, 'but men and women never change.'

'It is true,' argued Ito, 'that rich and noble persons no longer frequent the *yukwaku* (pleasure enclosure). My friend, Suzuki, has seen the Chief of the Metropolitan Police. He says that he will not be able to permit *Oiran Dochu* another year. He says too that it will soon be forbidden to show the *jorō* in their windows.

It will be photograph-system for all houses. It is all a sign of the change. Therefore, the Fujinami ought not to sink any more capital in the *yukwaku.*'

'But men will still be men, they will still need a laundry for their spirits.' Mr Fujinami used a phrase which in Japan is a common excuse for those who frequent the *demi-monde.*

'That is true, *sensei,*' said the counsellor; 'but our Japan must take on a show of Western civilisation. It is the thing called progress. It is part of Western civilisation that men will become more hypocritical. These foreigners say our Yoshiwara is a shame; but, in their own cities, immoral women walk in the best streets, and offer themselves to men quite openly. These virtuous foreigners are worse than we are. I myself have seen. They say, "We have no Yoshiwara system, therefore we are good." They pretend not to see, like a *geisha* who squints through a fan. We Japanese, we now become more hypocritical, because this is necessary law of civilisation. The two swords of the *samurai* have gone; but honour and hatred and revenge will never go. The *kanzashi* (hair ornaments) of the *oiran* will go too; but what the *oiran* lose, the *geisha* will gain. Therefore, if I were Fujinami San, I would buy up the *geisha,* and also perhaps the *inbai* (unregistered women).'

'But that is a low trade,' objected the Yoshiwara magnate.

'It is very secret; your name need never be spoken.'

'And it is too scattered, too disorganised, it would be impossible to control.'

'I do not think it would be so difficult. What might be proposed is a *geisha* trust.'

'But even the Fujinami have not got enough money.'

'Within one month I guarantee to find the right men, with the money and the experience and the influence.'

'Then the business would no longer be the Fujinami only——'

'It would be as in America, a combine, something on a big scale. In Japan one is content with such small business. Indeed, we Japanese are a very small people.'

'In America, perhaps, there is more confidence,' said the elder man; 'but in Japan we say, "Beware of friends who are not also relatives." There is, as you know, the temple of Inari Daimyōjin in Asakusa. They say that if a man worships at that temple he becomes the owner of his friend's wealth. I fear that too many of us Japanese make pilgrimage to that temple after nightfall.'

With those words, Mr Fujinami picked up a newspaper to indicate that the audience was terminated; and Mr Ito, after a series of prostrations, withdrew.

As soon as he was out of sight, Mr Fujinami Gentaro selected from the pile in front of him a number of letters and newspapers. With these in his hand, he left the study, and followed a path of broad, flat stepping-stones across the garden towards the cherry-orchard. Here the way sloped rapidly downward under a drift of fallen petals. On the black naked twigs of the cherry-trees one or two sturdy blossoms still clung pathetically, like weather-beaten butterflies. Beyond a green shrubbery, on a little knoll, a clean newly-built Japanese house, like a large rabbit hutch, rested in a patch of sunlight. It was the *inkyo*, the 'shadow dwelling' or dower house. Here dwelt Mr Fujinami, senior, and his wife—his fourth matrimonial experiment.

The old gentleman was squatting on the balcony of the front corner room, the one which commanded the best view of the cherry-grove. He looked as if he had just been unpacked; for he was surrounded by

reams and reams of paper, some white, and some with Chinese letters scrawled over them. He was busy writing these letters with a kind of thick paint-brush; and he was so deep in his task that he appeared not to notice his son's approach. His restless jaw was still imperturbably chewing.

'*O hayō gozaimas'!*'

'*Tarō, yo! O hayō!*' cried the old gentleman, calling his son by his short boy's name, and cutting off all honorifics from his speech. He always affected surprise at this visit, which had been a daily occurrence for many years.

'The cherry-flowers are fallen and finished,' said the younger man. 'Ah, human life, how short a thing!'

'Yes, one year more I have seen the flowers,' said Mr Fujinami Gennosuké, nodding his head and taking his son's generalisation as a personal reference. He had laid his brush aside; and he was really wondering what would be Gentaro's comment on last night's feast and its guests of honour.

'Father is practising handwriting again?'

The old man's mania was penmanship, just as his son's was literature. Among Japanese it is considered the pastime becoming to his age.

'My wrist has become stiff. I cannot write as I used to. It is always so. Youth has the strength, but not the knowledge; age has the knowledge, but no strength.'

As a matter of fact, Mr Gennosuké was immensely satisfied with his calligraphy, and was waiting for compliments.

'But this, this is beautifully written. It is worthy of Kobo Daishi!' said the younger man, naming a famous scholar priest of the Middle Ages. He was admiring a scroll on which four characters were written in a perpendicular row. They signified, 'From the midst of tranquillity I survey the world.'

'No,' said the artist; 'you see the *ten* (point) there is wrong. It is ill-formed. It should be written thus.'

Shaking back his kimono sleeve—he wore a sea-blue cotton kimono, as befitted his years—and with a little flourish of his wrist, like a golfer about to make his stroke, he traced off the new version of the character on the white paper.

Perched on his veranda, with his head on one side he looked very like the marabout stork, as you may see him at the Zoo, that raffish bird with the folds in his neck, the stained glaucous complexion, the bald head and the brown human eye. He had the same look of respectable rascality. The younger Fujinami showed signs of becoming exactly like him, although the parentage was by adoption only. He was not yet so bald. His black hair was patched with grey in a piebald design. The skin of the throat was at present merely loose, it did not yet hang in bags.

'And this Asa San?' remarked the elder after a pause; 'what is to be thought of her? Last night I became drunk, as my habit is, and I could not see those people well.'

'She is not loud-voiced and bold like foreign women. Indeed, her voice and her eyes are soft. Her heart is very good, I think. She is timid, and in everything she puts her husband first. She does not understand the world at all; and she knows nothing about money. Indeed, she is like a perfect Japanese wife.'

'Hm! A good thing, and the husband?'

'He is a soldier, an honourable man. He seemed foolish, or else he is very cunning. The English people are like that. They say a thing. Of course, you think it is a lie. But no, it is the truth; and so they deceive.'

'*Ma, mendo-kusai* (indeed, smelly-troublesome!) And why has this foreigner come to Japan?'

'Ito says that he has come to learn about the money. That means, when he knows he will want more.'

'How much do we pay to Asa San?'

'Ten per cent.'

'And the profits last year on all our business came to thirty seven and a half per cent. Ah! A fine gain. We could not borrow from the banks at ten per cent. They would want at least fifteen, and many gifts for silence. It is better to fool the husband, and to let them go back to England. After all, ten per cent is a good rate. And we want all our money now for the new brothels in Osaka. If we make much money there, then afterwards we can give them more.'

'Ito says that if the Englishman knows that the money is made in brothels, he will throw it all away and finish. Ito thinks it would be not impossible to send the Englishman back to England, and to keep Asa here in Japan.'

The old man looked up suddenly, and for once his jaw stopped chewing.

'That would be best of all,' he exclaimed. 'Then indeed he is honourable and a great fool. Being an Englishman, it is possible. Let him go back to England. We will keep Asa. She too is a Fujinami; and, even though she is a woman, she can be useful to the family. She will stay with us. She would not like to be poor. She has not born a baby to this foreigner, and she is young. I think also our Sada can teach her many things.'

'It is of Sada that I came to speak to father,' said Mr Gentaro. 'The marriage of our Sada is a great question for the Fujinami family. Here is a letter from Mr Osumi, a friend of the Governor of Osaka. The Governor has been of much help to us in getting the concession for the new brothels. He is a widower with no children. He is a man with a future. He is protected by the military clan. He is wishful to marry a

woman who can assist his career, and who would be able to take the place of a Minister's wife. Mr Osumi, who writes, had heard of the accomplishments of our Sada. He mentioned her name to the Governor; and His Excellency was quite willing that Mr Osumi should write something in a letter to Ito.'

'Hm!' grunted the old gentleman, squinting sidelong at his son; 'this Governor, has he a private fortune?'

'No, he is a self-made man.'

'Then it will not be with him, as it was with that Viscount Kamimura. He will not be too proud to take our money.'

The truth of the allusion to Viscount Kamimura was that the name of Sadako Fujinami had figured on the list of possible brides submitted to that young aristocrat on his return from England. At first, it seemed likely that the choice would fall upon her, because of her undisputed cleverness; and the Fujinami family were radiant at the prospect of so brilliant a match. For although nothing had been formally mentioned between the two families, yet Sadako and her mother had learned from their hairdresser that there was talk of such a possibility in the servants' quarter of the Kamimura mansion, and that old Dowager Viscountess Kamimura was undoubtedly making inquiries which could only point to that one object.

The young Viscount, however, on ascertaining the origin of the family wealth, eliminated poor Sadako from the competition for his hand.

It was a great disappointment to the Fujinami, and most of all to the ambitious Sadako. For a moment she had seen opening the doorway into that marvellous world of high diplomacy, of European capitals, of diamonds, duchesses and intrigue, of which she had read in foreign novels, where everybody is rich, brilliant, immoral and distinguished, and where to women are

given rôles to play even more important than those of the men. This was the only world, she felt, worthy of her talents; but few, very few, just one in a million Japanese women, ever get the remotest chance of entering it. This chance presented itself to Sadako—but for a moment only. The doorway shut to again; and Sadako was left feeling more acutely than before the emptiness of life, and the bitterness of woman's lot in a land where men are supreme.

Her cousin, Asako, by the mere luck of having had an eccentric parent and a European upbringing, possessed all the advantages and all the experience which the Japanese girl knew only through the glamorous medium of books. But this Asa San was a fool. Sadako had found that out at once in the course of a few minutes talk at the Maple Club dinner. She was sweet, gentle and innocent; far more Japanese, indeed, than her sophisticated cousin. Her obvious respect and affection for her big rough husband, her pathetic solicitude for the father whose face she could hardly remember and for the mother who was nothing but a name; these traits of character belong to the meek Japanese girl of *Onna Daigaku* (Woman's Great Learning), that famous classic of Japanese girlhood which teaches the submission of women and the superiority of men. It was a type which was becoming rare in her own country. Little Asako had nothing in common with the argumentative heroines of Bernard Shaw or with the desperate viragos of Ibsen, to whom Sadako felt herself spiritually akin. Asako must be a fool. She exasperated her Japanese cousin, who at the same time was envious of her, envious above all of her independent wealth. As she observed to her own mother, it was most improper that a woman, and a young woman too, should have so much money of her own. It would be sure to spoil her character.

Meanwhile Asako was a way of access to first-hand

knowledge of that world of European womanhood which so strongly attracted Sadako's intelligence, that almost incredible world in which men and women were equal, had equal rights to property, and equal rights to love. Asako must have seen enough to explain something about it; if only she were not a fool. But it appeared that she had never heard of Strindberg, Sudermann, or d'Annunzio; and even Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde were unfamiliar names.