CHAPTER XIII

THE FAMILY ALTAR

Yume no ai wa	(These) meetings in dreams
Kurushikari keri!	How sad they are!
Odorokite	When, waking up startled
Kaki-saguredomo	One gropes about—
Te ni mo fureneba.	And there is no contact to the hand.

MISS FUJINAMI made up her mind to cultivate Asako's friendship, and to learn all that she could from her. So she at once invited her cousin to the mysterious house in Akasaka, and Asako at once accepted.

The doors seemed to fly open at the magic of the wanderer's return. Behind each partition were family retainers, bowing and smiling. Three maids assisted her to remove her boots. There was a sense of expectation and hospitality, which calmed Asako's fluttering shyness.

'Welcome! Welcome!' chanted the chorus of maids, '*O agari nasaimashi*! (pray step up into the house!)'

The visitor was shown into a beautiful airy room overlooking the landscape garden. She could not repress an Ah! of wonder, when first this fairy pleasance came in sight. It was all so green, so tiny, and so perfect,—the undulating lawn, the sheet of silver water, the pigmy forests which clothed its shores, its disappearance round a shoulder of rock into that hinterland of high trees which closed the vista and shut out the intrusion of the squalid city.

The Japanese understand better than we do the mesmeric effects of sights and sounds. It was to give her time to assimilate her surroundings that Asako was left alone for half an hour or so, while Sadako and her mother were combing their hair and putting their kimonos straight. Tea and biscuits were brought for her, but her fancy was astray in the garden. Already to her imagination a little town had sprung up along the shingles of the tiny bay which faced her; the sails of white ships were glimpsing where the sunlight struck the water; and from round the rocky promontory she could catch the shimmer of the Prince's galleon with its high poop and stern covered with solid gold. He was on his way to rescue the lady who was immured in the top of the red pagoda on the opposite hill.

Asako's legs were getting numb. She had been sitting on them in correct Japanese fashion all this time. She was proud of the accomplishment, which she considered must be hereditary, but she could not keep it up for much longer than half an hour. Sadako's mother entered.

'Asa San is welcome.'

Much bowing began, in which Asako felt her disadvantage. The long lines of the kimono, with the big sash tied behind, lend themselves with peculiar grace to the squatting bow of Japanese intercourse. But Asako, in the short blue jacket of her tailor-made serge, felt that her attitude was that of the naughty little boys in English picture books, bending over for castigation.

Mrs Fujinami wore a perfectly plain kimono, blackish-brown in colour, with a plain gold sash. It is considered correct for middle-aged ladies in Japan to dress with modesty and reserve. She was tall for a Japanese woman and big-boned, with a long lantern-face, and an almost Jewish nose. The daughter was of her mother's build. But her face was a perfect oval, the melon-seed shape

which is so highly esteemed in her country. The severity of her appearance was increased by her blue-tinted spectacles; and like so many Japanese women, her teeth were full of gold stopping. She was resplendent in blue, the blue of the Mediterranean, with fronds of cherry-blossom and floating pink petals designed round her skirts and at the bottom of the long exaggerated sleeves. The sash of broad stiff brocade shone with light blue and silver in a kind of conventional wave pattern. This was tied at the back with a huge bow, which seemed perched upon its wearer like a gigantic butterfly alighting on a cornflower. Her straight black hair was parted on one side in 'foreign' style. But her mother wore the helmet-like *marumagé*, the edifice of conservative taste in married women, which looks more like a wig than like natural hair.

Rings sparkled on Sadako's fingers, and she wore a diamond ornament across her sash; but neither their taste nor their quality impressed her cousin. Her face was of the same ivory tint as Asako's, but it was hidden under a lavish coating of liquid powder. This hideous embellishment covers not only the Mongolian yellow, which every Japanese woman seems so anxious to hide, but also the natural and charming nuances of young skin, under a white monotonous surface like a mask of clay. Painted roses bloomed on the girl's cheeks. The eyebrows were artificially darkened as well as the lines round the eyes. The face and its expression, in fact, were quite obscured by cosmetics; and Miss Fujinami was wrapped in a cloud of cheap scent like a servant-girl on her evening out.

She spoke English well. In fact, at school she had achieved a really brilliant career, and she had even attended a University for a time with the intention of reading for a degree, an attainment rare among Japanese girls. But overwork brought on its inevitable result,

Books had to be banished, and glasses interposed to save the tired eyes from the light. It was a bitter disappointment for Sadako, who was a proud and ambitious girl, and it had not improved her disposition.

After the first formalities Asako was shown round the house. The sameness of the rooms surprised her. There was nothing to distinguish them except the different woods used in their ceilings and walls, a distinction which betrayed its costliness and its taste only to the most practised eye. Each room was spotless and absolutely bare, with golden *tatami*, rice-straw mats with edgings of black braid, fixed into the flooring, by whose number the size of a Japanese room is measured. Asako admired the pale white *shoji*, the sliding windows of opaque glowing paper along the side of the room open to the outdoor light, the *fusuma* or sliding partitions between room and room, set in the framework of the house, some of them charmingly painted with sketches of scenery, flowers, or people, some of them plain cream-coloured boards flecked with tiny specks of gold.

Nothing broke the sameness of these rooms except the double alcove, or *tokonoma* with its inevitable hanging picture, its inevitable ornament, and its spray of blossom. Between the double niche stood that pillar of wood which Sadako explained as being the soul of the room, the leading feature from which its character was taken, being either plain and firm, or twisted and ornate, or else still unshaped, with the bosses of amputated branches seared and black protesting against confinement. The *tokonoma*, as the word suggests, must originally have been the sleeping-place of the owner of the room, for it certainly is the only corner in a Japanese house which is secured from draughts. But perhaps it was respect for invisible spirits which drove the sleeper eventually to abandon his coign of vantage to the service

of æsthetic beauty, and to stretch himself on the open floor.

To Asako the rooms seemed all the same. Each gave the same impression of spotlessness and nudity. Each was stiffly rectangular like the honey squares fitted into a hive. Above all, there was nothing about any of them to indicate their individual uses, or the character of the person to whom they were specially assigned. No dining-room, or drawing-room, or library.

'Where is your bedroom?' asked Asako, with a frank demand for that sign of sisterhood among Western girls; 'I should so like to see it.'

'I generally sleep,' answered the Japanese girl, 'in that room at the corner where we have been already, where the bamboo pictures are. This is the room where father and mother sleep.'

They were standing on the balcony outside the apartment where Asako had first been received.

'But where are the beds?' she asked.

Sadako went to the end of the balcony, and threw open a big cupboard concealed in the outside wall of the house. It was full of layers of rugs thick, dark and wadded.

'These are the beds,' smiled the Japanese cousin. 'My brother Takeshi has a foreign bed in his room; but my father does not like them, or foreign clothes, or foreign food, or anything foreign. He says the Japanese things are best for the Japanese. But he is very old-fashioned.'

'Japanese style looks nicer,' said Asako, thinking how big and vulgar a bedstead would appear in that clean emptiness and how awkwardly its iron legs would trample on the straw matting; 'but isn't it draughty and uncomfortable?'

'I like the foreign beds best,' said Sadako; 'my brother has let me try his. It is very soft.'

So in this country of Asako's fathers, a bedstead was

lent for trial as though it had been some fascinating novelty, a bicycle or a piano.

The kitchen appealed most to the visitor. It was the only room to her mind which had any individuality of its own. It was large, dark and high, full of servant-girls scuttering about like little mice, who bowed and then fled when the two ladies came in. The stoves for boiling the rice interested Asako, round iron receptacles like coppers, each resting on a brick fireplace. Everything was explained to her: the high dressers hung with unfamiliar implements in white metal and white wood: the brightly labelled casks of *saké* and *shoyu* (sauce) waiting in the darkness like the deputation of a friendly society in its insignia of office: the silent jars of tea, greenish in colour and ticketed with strange characters, the names of the respective tea-gardens: the iron kettle hanging on gibbet chains from the top of the ceiling over a charcoal fire sunk in the floor: the tasteful design of the commonest earthenware bowl: the little board and chopper for slicing the raw fish: the clean white rice-tubs with their brass bindings polished and shining: the odd shape and entirely Japanese character which distinguished the most ordinary things, and gave to the short squat knives a romantic air and to the broad wooden spoons a suggestion of witchcraft: finally, the little shrine to the Kitchen God, perched on a shelf close to the ceiling, looking like the façade of a doll's temple, and decorated with brass vases, dry grasses, and strips of white paper. The wide kitchen was impregnated with a smell already familiar to Asako's nose, one of the most typical odours of Japan, the smell of native cooking, humid, acrid and heavy like the smell of wood smoke from damp logs, with a sour and rotten flavour to it contributed by a kind of pickled horse-radish called *Daikon* or the Great Root, dear to the Japanese palate.

The central ceremony of Asako's visit was her introduction to the memory of her dead parents. She was taken to a small room, where the alcove, the place of honour, was occupied by a closed cabinet, the *butsudan* (Buddha shelf), a beautiful piece of joiner's work in a kind of lattice pattern covered with red lacquer and gold. Sadako, approaching, reverently opened this shrine. The interior was all gilt with a dazzling gold like that used on old manuscripts. In the centre of this glory sat a golden-faced Buddha with dark blue hair and cloak, and an aureole of golden rays. Below him were arranged the *ihai*, the Tablets of the Dead, miniature grave-stones about one foot high, with a black surface edged with gold upon which were inscribed the names of the dead persons, the new names given by the priests.

Sadako stepped back and clapped her hands together three times, repeating the formula of the Nichiren Sect of Buddhists.

'*Namu myōhō renge kyō!* (Adoration to the Wonderful Law of the Lotus Scriptures!)'

She instructed Asako to do the same.

'For,' she said, 'we believe that the spirits of the dead people are here; and we must be very good to them.'

Asako did as she was told, wondering whether her confessor would give her penance for idolatry. Sadako then motioned her to sit on the floor. She took one of the tablets from its place and placed it in front of her cousin.

'That is your father's *ihai*,' she said; and then removing another and placing it beside the first, she added,—

'This is your mother.'

Asako was deeply moved. In England we love our dead; but we consign them to the care of nature, to the change of the seasons, and the cold promiscuity of the graveyard. The Japanese dead never seem to leave the

shelter of their home or the circle of their family. We bring to our dear ones flowers and prayers; but the Japanese give them food and wine, and surround them with everyday talk. The companionship is closer. We chatter much about immortality. We believe, many of us, in some undying particle. We even think that in some other world the dead may meet the dead whom they have known in life. But the actual communion of the dead and the living is for us a beautiful and inspiring metaphor rather than a concrete belief. Now the Japanese, though their religion is so much vaguer than ours, hardly question this survival of the ancestors in the close proximity of their children and grandchildren. The little funeral tablets are for them clothed with an invisible personality.

'This is your mother.'

Asako felt influences floating around her. Her mind was in pain, straining to remember something which seemed to be not wholly forgotten.

Just at this moment Mrs Fujinami arrived, carrying an old photograph album and a roll of silk. Her appearance was so opportune that any one less innocent then Asako might have suspected that the scene had been rehearsed. In the hush and charm of that little chamber of the spirits, the face of the elder woman looked soft and sweet. She opened the volume at the middle, and pushed it in front of Asako.

She saw the photograph of a Japanese girl seated in a chair with a man standing at her side, with one hand resting on the chair back. Her father's photograph she recognised at once, the broad forehead, the deep eyes, the aquiline nose, the high cheek bones, and the thin, angry sarcastic lips; not a typically Japanese face, but a type recurrent throughout our over-educated world, cultured, desperate and stricken. Asako had very little in common with her father; for his character had been

moulded or warped by two powerful agencies, his intellect and his disease; and it was well for his daughter that she had escaped this dire inheritance. But never before had she seen her mother's face. Sometimes she had wondered who and what her mother had been; what she had thought of as her baby grew within her; and with what regrets she had exchanged her life for her child's. More often she had considered herself as a being without a mother, a fairy's child, brought into this world on a sunbeam or born from a flower.

Now she saw the face which had reflected pain and death for her. It was impassive, doll-like and very young, pure oval in outline, but lacking in expression. The smallness of the mouth was the most characteristic feature, but it was not alive with smiles like her daughter's. It was pinched and constrained, with the lower lips drawn in.

The photograph was clearly a wedding souvenir. She wore the black kimono of a bride, and the multiple skirts. A kind of little pocket-book with silver charms dangling from it, an ancient marriage symbol, was thrust into the opening at her breast. Her head was covered with a curious white cap like the 'luggage' of Christmas crackers. She was seated rigidly at the edge of her uncomfortable chair; and her personality seemed to be overpowered by the solemnity of the occasion.

'Did she love him,' her daughter wondered, 'as I love Geoffrey?'

Through Sadako's interpretation Mrs Fujinami explained that Asako's mother's name had been Yamagata Haruko (Spring child). Her father had been a *samurai* in the old two-sworded days. The photograph was not very like her. It was too serious.

'Like you,' said the elder woman, 'she was always laughing and happy. My husband's father used to call her the *Semi* (the cicada), because she was always

singing her little song. She was chosen for your father because he was so sad and wrathful. They thought that she would make him more gentle. But she died; and then he became more sad than before.'

Asako was crying very gently. She felt the touch of her cousin's hand on her arm. The intellectual Miss Sadako also was weeping, the tears furrowing her whitened complexion. The Japanese are a very emotional race. The women love tears; and even the men are not averse from this very natural expression of feeling, which our Anglo-Saxon schooling has condemned as babyish. Mrs Fujinami continued,—

'I saw her a few days before you were born. They lived in a little house on the bank of the river. One could see the boats passing. It was very damp and cold. She talked all the time of her baby. "If it is a boy," she said, "everybody will be happy; if it is a girl, Fujinami San will be very anxious for the family's sake; and the fortune-tellers say that it will surely be a little girl." "But," she used to say, "I could play better with a little girl; I know what makes them laugh!" When you were born she became very ill. She never spoke again, and in a few days she died. Your father became like a madman, he locked his house, and would not see any of us; and as soon as you were strong enough, he took you away in a ship.'

Sadako placed in front of her cousin the roll of silk, and said,—

'This is Japanese *obi* (sash). It belonged to your mother. She gave it to my mother a short time before you were born; for she said, "It is too bright for me now; when I have my baby, I shall give up society, and I shall spend all my time with my children." My mother gives it to you for your mother's sake.'

It was a wonderful work of art, a heavy golden brocade, embroidered with fans, and on each fan a

Japanese poem and a little scene from the olden days.

'She was very fond of this *obi*; she chose the poems herself.'

But Asako was not admiring the beautiful workmanship. She was thinking of the mother's heart which had beat for her under that long strip of silk, the little Japanese mother who 'would have known how to make her laugh.' Tears were falling very quietly on to the old sash.

The two Japanese women saw this; and with the instinctive tact of their race, they left her alone face to face with this strange introduction to her mother's personality.

There is a peculiar pathos about the clothes of the dead. They are so nearly a part of our bodies that it seems unnatural almost that they should survive with the persistence of inanimate things, when we who gave them the semblance of life are far more dead than they. It would be more seemly, perhaps, if all these things which have belonged to us so intimately were to perish with us in a general *suttee*. But the mania for relics would never tolerate so complete a disappearance of one whom we had loved; and our treasuring of hair and ornaments and letters is a desperate—and perhaps not an entirely vain—attempt to check the liberated spirit in its leap for eternity.

Asako found in that old garment of her mother's a much more faithful reflection of the life which had been transmitted to her, than the stiff photograph could ever realise. She had chosen the poems herself. Asako must get them transcribed and translated; for they would be a sure indication of her mother's character. Already the daughter could see that her mother too must have loved rich and beautiful things, happiness and laughter.

Old Mr Fujinami had called her 'the *Semi*.' Asako did not yet know the voice of the little insects which

are the summer and autumn orchestra of Japan. But she knew that it must be something happy and sweet; or they would not have told her.

She rose from her knees, and found her cousin waiting for her on the veranda. Whatever real expression she may have had was effectively hidden behind the tinted glasses, and the false white complexion, now renovated from the ravages of emotion. But Asako's heart was won by the power of the dead, of whom Sadako and her family were, she felt, the living representatives.

Asako took both of her cousin's hands in her own.

'It was sweet of you and your mother to give me that,' she said—and her eyes were full of tears—'you could not have thought of anything which would please me more.'

The Japanese girl was on the point of starting to bow and smile the conventional apologies for the worthlessness of the gift, when she felt herself caught by a power unfamiliar to her, the power of the emotions of the West.

The pressure on her wrists increased, her face was drawn down towards her cousin's, and she felt against the corner of her mouth the warm touch of Asako's lips.

She started back with a cry of '*Iya*! (don't!),' the cry of outraged Japanese femininity. Then she remembered from her readings that such kissings were common among European girls, that they were a compliment and a sign of affection. But she hoped that it had not disarranged her complexion again; and that none of the servants had seen.

Her cousin's surprise shook Asako out of her dream; and the kiss left a bitter powdery taste upon her lips which disillusioned her.

'Shall we go into the garden?' said Sadako, who felt that fresh air was advisable.

They joined hands; so much familiarity was permitted by Japanese etiquette. They went along the gravel path to the summit of the little hillock where the cherry-trees had lately been in bloom, Sadako in her bright kimono, Asako in her dark suit. She looked like a mere mortal being introduced to the wonders of Titania's country by an authentic fairy.

The sun was setting in the clear sky, one half of which was a tempest of orange, gold and red, and the other half warm and calm with roseate reflections. Over the spot where the focus point of all this glory was sinking into darkness, a purple cloud hovered like a shred of the monarch's glory caught and torn away on the jag of some invisible obstruction. Its edges were white flame, as though part of the sun's fire were hidden behind it.

Even from this high position little could could be seen beyond the Fujinami enclosure except tree-tops. Away down the valley appeared the grey scaly roofs of huddled houses, and on a hill opposite more trees with the bizarre pinnacle of a pagoda forcing its way through the midst of them. It looked like a series of hats perched one on the top of the other by a merchant of Petticoat Lane.

Lights were glimpsing from the Fujinami mansion; more lights were visible among the shrubberies below. This soft light, filtered through the paper walls, shone like a luminous pearl. This is the home light of the Japanese, and is as typical of their domesticity as the blazing log-fire is of ours. It is greenish, still and pure, like a glow-worm's beacon.

Out of the deep silence a bell tolled. It was as though an unseen hand had struck the splendour of that metallic firmament; or as though a voice had spoken out of the sunset cloud.

The two girls descended to the brink of the lake. Here at the farther end the water was broader; and it was

hidden from view of the houses. Green reeds grew along the margin, and green iris leaves, like sword blades, black now in the failing light. There was a studied roughness in the tiny landscape, and in the midst of the wilderness a little hut.

'What a sweet little summer-house!' cried Asako.

It looked like a settler's shack, built of rough unshapen logs and thatched with rushes.

'It is the room for the *chanoyu*, the tea-ceremony,' said her cousin.

Inside, the walls were daubed with earth; and a round window barred with bamboo sticks gave a view into what was apparently forest depths.

'Why, it is just like a doll's house,' cried Asako, delighted. 'Can we go in?'

'Oh, yes,' said the Japanese. Asako jumped in at once and squatted down on the clean matting; but her more cautious cousin dusted the place with her handkerchief before risking a stain.

'Do you often have tea-ceremonies?' asked Asako.

The Muratas had explained to her long ago something about the mysterious rites.

'Two or three times in the Spring, and then two or three times in the Autumn. But my teacher comes every week.'

'How long have you been learning?' Asako wanted to know.

'Oh, since I was ten years old about.'

'Is it so difficult then?' said Asako, who had found it comparatively easy to pour out a cup of drawing-room tea without clumsiness.

Sadako smiled tolerantly at her cousin's naïve ignorance of things æsthetic and intellectual. It was as though she had been asked whether music or philosophy were difficult.

'One can never study too much,' she said, 'one is

always learning; one can never be perfect. Life is short, art is long.'

'But it is not an art like painting or playing the piano, just pouring out tea?'

'Oh, yes,' Sadako smiled again, 'it is much more than that. We Japanese do not think art is just to be able to do things, showing off like *geisha*. Art is in the character, in the spirit. And the tea-ceremony teaches us to make our character full of art, by restraining everything ugly and common, in every movement, in the movement of our hands, in the position of our feet, in the looks of our faces. Men and women ought not to sit and move like animals; but the shape of their bodies, and their way of acting ought all to express a poetry. That is the art of the *chanoyu*.'

'I should like to see it,' said Asako, excited by her cousin's enthusiasm, though she hardly understood a word of what she had been saying.

'You ought to learn some of it,' said Sadako, with the zeal of a propagandist. 'My teacher says—and my teacher was educated at the court of the Tokugawa Shogun—that no woman can have really good manners, if she has not studied the *chanoyu*.'

Of course, there was nothing which Asako would like more than to sit in this fascinating arbour in the warm days of the coming summer, and play at tea-parties with her new-found Japanese cousin. She would learn to speak Japanese, too; and she would help Sadako with her French and English.

The two cousins worked out the scheme for their future intimacy until the stars were reflected in the lake and the evening breeze became too cool for them.

Then they left the little hermitage and continued their walk round the garden. They passed a bamboo grove, whose huge plumes, black in the darkness, danced and beckoned like the Erl-king's daughters. They passed

a little house shuttered like a Noah's Ark, from which came a monotonous moaning sound as of some one in pain, and the rhythmic beat of a wooden clapper.

'What is that?' asked Asako.

'That is my father's brother's house. But he is illegitimate brother; he is not of the true family. He is a very pious man. He repeats the prayer to Buddha ten thousand times every day; and he beats upon the *mokugyo*, a kind of drum like a fish which the Buddhist priests use.'

'Was he at the dinner last night?' asked Asako.

'Oh no, he never goes out. He has not once left that house for ten years. He is perhaps rather mad; but it is said that he brings good luck to the family.'

A little farther on they passed two stone lanterns, cold and blind like tomb stones. Stone steps rose between them to what in the darkness looked like a large dog-kennel. A lighted paper lantern hung in front of it like a great ripe fruit.

'What is that?' asked Asako.

In the failing twilight this fairy garden was becoming more and more wonderful. At any moment, she felt, she might meet the Emperor himself in the white robes of ancient days and the black coal-scuttle hat.

'That is a little temple,' explained her cousin, 'for Inari Sama.'

At the top of the flight of steps Asako distinguished two stone foxes. Their expression was hungry and malign. They reminded her of—what? She remembered the little temple outside the Yoshiwara on the day she had gone to see the procession.

'Do you say prayers there?' she asked her companion.

'No, *I* do not,' answered the Japanese, 'but the servants light the lamp every evening; and we believe it makes the house lucky. We Japanese are very superstitious. Besides, it looks pretty in the garden.'

'I don't like the foxes' faces,' said Asako, 'they look bad creatures.'

'They *are* bad creatures,' was the reply, 'nobody likes to see a fox; they fool people.'

'Then why say prayers, if they are bad?'

'It is just because they are bad,' said Sadako, 'that we must please them. We flatter them so that they may not hurt us.'

Asako was unlearned in the difference between religion and devil-worship, so she did not understand the full significance of this remark. But she felt an unpleasant reaction, the first which she had received that day; and she thought to herself that if she were the mistress of that lovely garden, she would banish the stone foxes and risk their displeasure.

The two girls returned to the house. Its shutters were up, and it, too, had that same appearance of a Noah's Ark but of a more complete and expensive variety. One little opening was left in the wooden armature for the girls to enter by.

'Please come again many, many times,' was cousin Sadako's last farewell. 'The house of the Fujinami is your home. *Sayonara* !'

Geoffrey was waiting for his wife in the hall of the hotel. He was anxious at her late return. His embrace seemed to swallow her up, to the amusement of the *boy sans* who had been discussing the lateness of *okusan*, and the possibility of her having an admirer.

'Thank goodness,' said Geoffrey, 'what have you been doing? I was just going to organise a search party.'

'I have been with Mrs Fujinami and Sadako,' Asako panted, 'they would not let me go; and oh !'—She was going to tell him all about her mother's picture; but she

suddenly checked herself, and said instead, 'They've got such a lovely garden.'

She described the home of the cousins in glowing colours, the hospitality of the family, the cleverness of cousin Sadako, and the lessons which they were going to exchange. Yes, she replied to Geoffrey's questions, she had seen the memorial tablets of her father and mother, and their wedding photograph. But a strange paralysis sealed her lips, and her soul became inarticulate. She found herself absolutely incapable of telling that big foreign husband of hers, truly as she loved him, the veritable state of her emotions when brought face to face with her dead parents.

Geoffrey had never spoken to her of her mother. He had never seemed to have the least interest in her identity. These 'Jap women,' as he called them, were never very real to him. She dreaded the possibility of revealing to him her secret, and then of receiving no response to her emotion. Also she had an instinctive reluctance to emphasise in Geoffrey's mind her kinship with these alien people.

After dinner, when she had gone up to her room, Geoffrey was left alone with his cigar and his reflections.

'Funny that she did not speak more about her father and mother. But I suppose they don't mean much to her, after all. And, by Jove, it's a good thing for me. I wouldn't like to have a wife who was all the time running home to her people, and comparing notes with her mother.'

Upstairs in her bedroom, Asako had unrolled the precious *obi*. An unmounted photograph came fluttering out of the parcel. It was a portrait of her father alone, taken a short time before his death. He was dressed in a suit of European clothes, his face was transparent and unearthly, with deep lines round the mouth and under

the eyes. At the back of the photograph was some Japanese writing.

'Is Tanaka there?' Asako asked her maid Titine.

Yes, of course, Tanaka was there, in the next room with his ear near the door.

'Tanaka, what does this mean?'

The little man gazed at the writing, his head on one side.

'Japanese poem,' he said, 'meaning very difficult: very many meanings: I think perhaps it means, having travelled all over the world, he feels very sad.'

'Yes, but word for word, Tanaka, what does it mean?'

'This writing means, World is really not the same it says: all the world very many tell lies.'

'And this?'

'This means, Travelling everywhere.'

'And this at the end?'

'It means, Everything always the same thing. Very bad translation I make. Very sad poem.'

'And this writing here?'

'That is Japanese name—Fujinami Katsundo—and the date, twenty-fifth year of Meiji, twelfth month.'

Tanaka had turned over the photograph and was looking attentively at the portrait.

'It is the honoured father of Ladyship, I think,' he remarked.

'Yes,' said Asako.

Then she thought she heard her husband's step away down the corridor. Hurriedly she thrust *obi* and photograph into a drawer.

Now, why did she do that? wondered Tanaka.