CHAPTER II

HONEYMOON

Asa ne kami	(My) morning sleep hair
Ware wa kezuraji;	I will not comb;
Utsukushiki	For it has been in contact
Kimi ga ta-makura	with
Fureteshi mono wo.	The pillowing hand of
	My beautiful Lord !

THE Barringtons left England for a prolonged honeymoon, for Geoffrey was now free to realise his favourite project of travelling abroad. So they became numbered among that shoal of English people out of England, who move in restless leisure between Paris and the Nile.

Geoffrey had resigned his commission in the army. His friends thought that this was a mistake. For the loss of a man's career, even when it is uncongenial to him, is a serious amputation, and entails a lesion of spiritual blood. He had refused his father's suggestion of settling down in a house on the Brandan estate, for Lord Brandan was an unpleasing old gentleman, a frequenter of country bars and country barmaids. His son wished to keep his young bride as far away as possible from a spectacle of which he was heartily ashamed.

First of all they went to Paris, which Asako adored; for was it not her home? But this time she made the acquaintance of a Paris unknown to her, save by rumour, in the convent days or within the discreet precincts of Monsieur Murata's villa. She was enchanted by the theatres, the shops, the restaurants, the music, and the

life which danced around her. She wanted to rent an *appartement*, and to live there for the rest of her existence.

'But the season is almost over,' said her husband; 'everybody will be leaving.'

Unaccustomed as yet to his freedom, he still felt constrained to do the same as Everybody.

Before leaving Paris, they paid a visit to the Auteuil villa, which had been Asako's home for so many years.

Murata was the manager of a big Japanese firm in Paris. He had spent almost all his life abroad and the last twenty years of it in the French capital, so that even in appearance, except for his short stature and his tilted eyes, he had come to look like a Frenchman with his beard *à l'impériale*, and his quick birdlike gestures. His wife was a Japanese, but she too had lost almost all traces of her native mannerisms.

Asako Fujinami had been brought to Paris by her father, who had died there while still a young man. He had entrusted his only child to the care of the Muratas with instructions that she should be educated in European ways and ideas, that she should hold no communication with her relatives in Japan, and that eventually a white husband should be provided for her. He had left his whole fortune in trust for her, and the interest was forwarded regularly to M. Murata by a Tokyo lawyer, to be used for her benefit as her guardian might deem best. This money was to be the only tie between Asako and her native land.

To cut off a child from its family, of which by virtue of vested interests it must still be an important member, was a proceeding so revolutionary to all respectable Japanese ideas that even the enlightened Murata demurred. In Japan the individual counts for so little, the family for so much. But Fujinami had insisted, and disobedience to a man's dying wish brings the curse

of a 'rough ghost' upon the recalcitrant, and all kinds of evil consequences.

So the Muratas took Asako and cherished her as much as their hearts, withered by exile and by unnatural living, were capable of cherishing anything. She became a daughter of the well-to-do French *bourgeoisie*, strictly but affectionately disciplined with the proper restraints on the natural growth of her brain and individuality.

Geoffrey Barrington was not very favourably impressed by the Murata household. He wondered how so bright a little flower as Asako could have been reared in such gloomy surroundings. The spirits dominant in the villa were respectable economy and slavish imitation of the tastes and habits of Parisian friends. The living-rooms were as impersonal as the rooms of a boarding-house. Neutral tints abounded, ugly browns and nightmare vegetable patterns on carpets, furniture and wall-papers. There was a marked tendency towards covers, covers for the chairs and sofas, tablecloths and covers for the tablecloths, covers for cushion-covers, anti-macassars, lamp-stands, vase-stands and every kind of decorative duster. Everywhere the thick smell of concealed grime told of insufficient servants and ineffective sweeping. There was not one ornament or picture which recalled Japan, or gave a clue to the personal tastes of the owners.

Geoffrey had expected to be the nervous witness of an affecting scene between his wife and her adopted parents. But no, the greetings were polite and formal. Asako's frock and jewellery were admired, but without that note of angry envy which often brightens the dullest talk between ladies in England. Then, they sat down to an atrocious lunch eaten in complete silence.

When the meal was over, Murata drew Geoffrey aside into his shingly garden.

'I think that you will be content with our Asa San,' he said; 'the character is still plastic. In England it is different; but in France and in Japan we say it is the husband who must make the character of his wife. She is the plain white paper; let him take his brush and write on it what he will. Asa San is a very sweet girl. She is very easy to manage. She has a beautiful disposition. She does not tell lies without reason. She does not wish to make strange friends. I do not think you will have trouble with her.'

'He talks about her rather as if she were a horse,' thought Geoffrey. Murata went on,—

'The Japanese woman is the ivy which clings to the tree. She does not wish to disobey.'

'You think Asako is still very Japanese, then?' asked Geoffrey.

'Not her manners, or her looks, or even her thoughts,' replied Murata, 'but nothing can change the heart.'

'Then do you think she is homesick sometimes for Japan?' said her husband.

'Oh no,' smiled Murata. The little wizened man was full of smiles. 'She left Japan when she was not two years old. She remembers nothing at all.'

'I think one day we shall go to Japan,' said Geoffrey, 'when we get tired of Europe, you know. It is a wonderful country, I am told; and it does not seem right that Asako should know nothing about it. Besides, I should like to look into her affairs and find out about her investments.'

Murata was staring at his yellow boots with an embarrassed air. It suddenly struck the Englishman that he, Geoffrey Barrington, was related to people who looked like that, and who now had the right to call him cousin. He shivered.

'You can trust her lawyers,' said the Japanese,

'Mr Ito is an old friend of mine. You may be quite certain that Asako's money is safe.'

'Oh yes, of course,' assented Geoffrey, 'but what exactly are her investments? I think I ought to know.'

Murata began to laugh nervously, as all Japanese do when embarrassed.

'*Mon Dieu!*' he exclaimed, 'but I do not know myself. The money has been paid regularly for nearly twenty years; and I know the Fujinami are very rich. Indeed, Captain Barrington, I do not think Asako would like Japan. It was her father's last wish that she should never return there.'

'But why?' asked Geoffrey. He felt that Murata was keeping something from him. The little man answered,—

'He thought that for a woman the life is more happy in Europe; he wished Asako to forget altogether that she was Japanese.'

'Yes, but now she is married and her future is fixed. She is not going back permanently to Japan, but just to see the country. I think we would both of us like to. People say it is a magnificent country.'

'You are very kind,' said Murata, 'to speak so of my country. But the foreign people who marry Japanese are happy if they stay in their own country, and Japanese who marry foreigners are happy if they go away from Japan. But if they stay in Japan they are not happy. The national atmosphere in Japan is too strong for those people who are not Japanese or are only half Japanese. They fade. Besides, life in Japan is very poor and rough. I do not like it myself.'

Somehow Geoffrey could not accept these as being the real reasons. He had never had a long talk with a Japanese man before; but he felt that if they were all like that, so formal, so unnatural, so secretive, then he had better keep out of the range of Asako's relatives.

He wondered what his wife really thought of the Muratas, and during the return to their hotel he asked,—

'Well, little girl, do you want to go back again and live at Auteuil?'

She shook her head.

'But it is nice to think you have always got an extra home in Paris, isn't it?' he went on, fishing for an avowal that home was in his arms only, a kind of conversation which was the wine of life to him at that period.

'No,' she answered with a little shudder, 'I don't call that home.'

Geoffrey's conventionality was a little bit shocked at this lack of affection; he was also disappointed at not getting exactly the expected answer.

'Why, what was wrong with it?' he asked.

'Oh, it was not pretty or comfortable,' she said, 'they were so afraid to spend money. When I wash my hands, they say, "Do not use too much soap; it is waste."'

Asako was like a little prisoner released into the sunlight. She dreaded the idea of being thrust back into darkness again.

In this new life of hers anything would have made her happy, that is to say, anything new, anything given to her, anything good to eat or drink, anything soft and shimmery to wear, anything—so long as her big husband was with her. He was the most fascinating of all her novelties. He was much nicer than Lady Everington; for he was not always saying, 'Don't,' or making clever remarks, which she could not understand. He gave her absolutely her own way, and everything that she admired. He reminded her of an old Newfoundland dog who had been her slave when she was a little girl.

He used to play with her as he would have played

with a child, watching her as she tried on her finery, hiding things for her to find, holding them over her head and making her jump for them like a puppy, arranging her ornaments for her in those continual private exhibitions which took up so much of her time. Then she would ring the bell and summon all the chambermaids within call to come and admire; and Geoffrey would stand among all these womenfolk, listening to the chorus of '*Mon Dieu!*' and '*Ah, que c'est beau!*' and '*Ah, qu'elle est gentille!*' like some Hector who had strayed into the *gynæceum* of Priam's palace. He felt a little foolish, perhaps, but very happy, happy in his wife's naïve happiness and affection, which did not require any mental effort to understand, nor that panting pursuit on which he had embarked more than once in order to keep up with the witty flirtatiousness of some of the beauties of Lady Everington's *salon*.

Happiness shone out of Asako like light. But would she always be happy? There were the possibilities of the future to be reckoned with, sickness, childbirth, and the rearing of children, the hidden development of the character which so often grows away from what it once cherished, the baleful currents of outside influences, the attraction and repulsion of so-called friends and enemies, all of which complicate the primitive simplicity of married life and forfeit the honeymoon Eden. Adam and Eve in the garden of the Creation can hear the voice of God whispering in the evening breeze; they can live without jars and ambitions, without suspicion and without reproaches. They have no parents, no parents-in-law, no brothers, sisters, aunts, or guardians, no friends to lay the train of scandal or to be continually pulling them from each other's arms. But the first influence which crosses the walls of their paradise, the first being to whom they speak, which possesses the semblance of a human voice, is most certainly Satan and that Old

Serpent, who was a liar and a slanderer from the beginning, and whose counsels will lead inevitably to the withdrawal of God's presence and to the doom of a life of pain and labour.

There was one cloud in the heaven of their happiness. Geoffrey was inclined to tease Asako about her native country. His ideas about Japan were gleaned chiefly from musical comedies. He would call his wife Yum Yum and Pitti Sing. He would fix the end of one of her black veils under his hat, and would ask her whether she liked him better with a pigtail.

'Captain Geoffrey,' she would complain, 'it is the Chinese who wear the pigtail; they are a very savage people.'

Then he would call her his little *geisha*, and this she resented; for she knew from the Muratas that *geisha* were bad women who took husbands away from their wives, and that was no joking matter.

'What nonsense!' exclaimed Geoffrey, taken aback by this sudden reproof; 'they are dear little things like you, darling, and they bring you tea and wave fans behind your head, and I would like to have twenty of them—to wait upon you!'

He would tease her about a supposed fondness for rice, for chopsticks, for paper umbrellas and *jiujitsu*. She liked him to tease her, just as a child likes to be teased, while all the time on the verge of tears. With Asako, tears and laughter were never far apart.

'Why do you tease me because I am Japanese?' she would sob; 'besides, I'm not really. I can't help it, I can't help it!'

'But, sweetheart,' her Captain Geoffrey would say, suddenly ashamed of his elephantine humour, 'there's nothing to cry about. I would be proud to be a Japanese. They are jolly brave people. They gave the Russians a jolly good hiding.'

It made her feel well to hear him praise her people, but she would say,—

'No, no, they're not. I don't want to be a Jap. I don't like them. They're ugly and spiteful. Why can't we choose what we are? I would be an English girl—or perhaps French,' she added, thinking of the *Rue de la Paix*.

They left Paris and went to Deauville; and here it was that the serpent first crawled into Eden, whispering of forbidden fruit. These serpents were charming people, amusing men and smart women, all anxious to make the acquaintance of the latest sensation, the Japanese millionairess and her good-looking husband.

Asako lunched with them and dined with them and sat with them near the sea in wonderful bathing costumes which it would be a shame to wet. Conscious of the shortcomings of her figure as compared with those of the lissom mermaids who surrounded her, Asako returned to kimonos, much to her husband's surprise; and the mermaids had to confess themselves beaten.

She listened to their talk and learned a hundred things, but another hundred at least remained hidden from her.

Geoffrey left his wife to amuse herself in the cosmopolitan society of the French watering-place. He wanted this. All the wives whom he had ever known seemed to enjoy themselves best when away from their husbands' company. He did not quite trust the spirit of mutual adoration, which the gods had given to him and his bride. Perhaps it was an unhealthy symptom. Worse still, it might be Bad Form. He wanted Asako to be natural and to enjoy herself, and not to make their love into a prison house.

But he felt a bit lonely when he was away from her.

Occupation did not seem to come easily to him as it did when she was there to suggest it. Sometimes he would loaf up and down on the esplanade; and sometimes he would take strenuous swims in the sea. He became the prey of the bores who haunt every seaside place at home and abroad, lurking for lonely and polite people upon whom they may unload their conversation.

All these people seemed either to have been in Japan themselves or to have friends and relations who knew the country thoroughly.

A wonderful land, they assured him. The nation of the future, the Garden of the East, but of course Captain Barrington knew Japan well. No, he had never been there? Ah, but Mrs Barrington must have described it all to him. Impossible! Really? Not since she was a baby? How very extraordinary! A charming country, so quaint, so original, so picturesque, such a place to relax in: and then the Japanese girls, the little *mousmés*, in their bright kimonos, who came fluttering round like little butterflies, who were so gentle and soft and grateful; but there! Captain Barrington was a married man; that was no affair of his. Ha! Ha!

The elderly *roués*, who buzzed like February flies in the sunshine of Deauville, seemed to have particularly fruity memories of tea-house sprees and Oriental philanderings under the cherry-blossoms of Yokohama. Evidently, Japan was just like the musical comedies.

Geoffrey began to be ashamed of his ignorance concerning his wife's native country. Somebody had asked him, what exactly *bushido* was. He had answered at random that it was made of rice and curry powder. By the hilarious reception given to this explanation he knew that he must have made a *gaffe*. So he asked one of the more erudite bores to give him the names of the best books about Japan. He would 'mug it up,' and get some answers off pat to the leading questions. The

erudite one promptly lent him some volumes by Lafcadio Hearn, and Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème*. He read the novel first of all. Rather spicy, wasn't it?

Asako found the book. It was an illustrated edition; and the little drawings of Japanese scenes pleased her immensely, so that she began to read the letter-press.

'It is the story of a bad man and a bad woman,' she said; 'Geoffrey, why do you read bad things? They bring bad conditions.'

Geoffrey smiled. He was wondering whether the company of the fictitious *Chrysanthème* was more demoralising than that of the actual Mme Laroche Meyerbeer, with whom his wife had been that day for a picnic lunch.

'Besides it isn't fair,' his wife continued. 'People read that book and then they think that all Japanese girls are bad like that.'

'Why, darling, I didn't think you had read it,' Geoffrey expostulated, 'who has been telling you about it?'

'The Vicomte de Brie,' Asako answered. 'He called me *Chrysanthème* and I asked him why.'

'Oh, did he?' said Geoffrey. Really it was time to put an end to lunch picnics and mermaidism. But Asako was so happy and so shiningly innocent.

She returned to her circle of admirers, and Geoffrey to his studies of the Far East. He read the Lafcadio Hearn books, and did not perceive that he was taking opium. The wonderful sentences of that master of prose poetry rise before the eyes in whorls of narcotic smoke. They lull the brain as in a dream, and form themselves gradually into visions of a land more beautiful than any land that has ever existed anywhere, a country of vivid rice plains and sudden hills, of gracious forests and red temple gateways, of wise priests and folklore

imagery, of a simple-hearted smiling people with children bright as flowers laughing and playing in unfailing sunlight, a country where everything is kind, gentle, small, neat, artistic, and spotlessly clean, where men become gods not by sudden apotheosis but by the easy processes of nature, a country, in short, which is the reverse of our own poor vexed continent where the monstrous and the hideous multiply daily.

One afternoon Geoffrey was lounging on the terrace of the hotel reading *Kokoro*, when his attention was attracted by the arrival of Mme Laroche Meyerbeer's motor-car with Asako, her hostess and another woman embedded in its depths. Asako was the first to leap out. She went up to her apartment without looking to right or left, and before her husband had time to reach her. Mme Meyerbeer watched this arrow flight and shrugged her large shoulders before lazily alighting.

'Is all well?' asked Geoffrey.

'No serious damage,' smiled the lady, who is known in Deauville as *Madame Cythère*, 'but you had better go and console her. I think she has seen the devil for the first time.'

He opened the door of their sunny bedroom, and found Asako packing feverishly, and sobbing in spasms.

'My poor little darling,' he said, lifting her in his arms, 'whatever is the matter?'

He laid her on the sofa, took off her hat, and loosened her dress, until gradually she became coherent.

'He tried to kiss me,' she sobbed.

'Who did?' her husband asked.

'The Vicomte de Brie.'

'Damned little monkey,' cried Geoffrey, 'I'll break every miserable bone in his pretence of a body.'

'Oh no, no,' protested Asako, 'let us go away from here at once. Let us go to Switzerland, anywhere.'

The serpent had got into the garden, but he had not

been a very adroit reptile. He had shown his fangs; and the woman had promptly bruised his head and had given him an eye like an Impressionist sunset, which for several days he had to hide from the ridicule of his friends.

But Asako too had been grievously injured in the innocence of her heart; and it took all the snow winds of the Engadine to blow away from her face the hot defilement of the man's breath. She clung closely to her husband's protection. She, who had hitherto abandoned herself to excessive amiability, barbed the walls of their violated paradise with the broken glass of bare civility. Every man became suspect, the German professors culling Alpine plants, the mountain maniacs with their eyes fixed on peaks to conquer. She had no word for any of them. Even the man-like womenfolk, who golfed and rowed and clambered, were to her indignant eyes dangerous panders to the lusts of men, disguised allies of *Madame Cythère*.

'Are they all bad?' she asked Geoffrey.

'No, little girl, I don't suppose so. They look too dismal to be bad.'

Geoffrey was grateful for the turn of events which had delivered up his wife again into his sole company. He was delighted with her suggestion that they should take their meals in their suite and avoid the public rooms. He had been sobered by his loneliness at Deauville. He had missed her society more than he dared confess; for uxoriousness is a pitiful attitude. In fact, it is Bad Form.

At this period he wanted her as a kind of mirror for his own mind and for his own person. She saw to it that his clothes were spotless and that his tie was straight. Of course, he always dressed for dinner even when they dined in their room. She too would dress herself up in her new finery for his eyes alone. She would listen to

him laying down the law on subjects which he would not dare broach were he talking to any one else. She would never interrupt him, or fail to pay attention, though her answers were often strangely off the track. She flattered him in that silent way which is so soothing to a man of his character. Her mind seemed to absorb his thoughts with the readiness of blotting-paper; and he did not pause to observe whether the impression had come out backwards or forwards. He who had been so mute among Lady Everington's geniuses fell all of a sudden into a loquaciousness which was merely the reaction of his love for his wife, the instinct which makes the male bird sing. He just went on talking; and every day he became in his own estimation and in that of Asako, a more intelligent, a more original and a more eloquent man.