CHAPTER XX

THE KIMONO

Na wo to wa wo	It is other people who have
Hito zo saku naru.	separated
Ide, wagimi !	You and me.
Hito no naka-goto	Come, my Lord !
Kiki-kosu na yume !	Do not dream of listening
	To the between-words of
	people !

AFTER a ghastly night of sleeplessness at Nikko, Geoffrey Barrington reached Tokyo in time for lunch. His thoughts were confused and discordant.

'I feel as if I had been drunk for a week,' he kept on saying to himself. Indeed, he felt a fume of unreality over all his actions.

One thing was certain; financially, he was a ruined man. The thousands a year which yesterday morning had been practically his, the ease and comfort which had seemed so secure, were lost more hopelessly than if his bank had failed. Even the cash in his pocket he touched with the greatest disgust, as if those identical bills and coins had been paid across the brothel counter as the price for a man's dirty pleasures and a girl's shame and disease. He imagined that the Nikko hotelkeeper looked at his notes suspiciously as though they were endorsed with the seal of the Yoshiwara.

Geoffrey was ruined. He was henceforth dependent on what his brain could earn and on what his father would allow him, five hundred pounds a year at the outside. If he had been alone in the world, it would

not have mattered much; but Asako, poor little Asako, the innocent cause of this disaster, she was ruined too. She who loved her riches, her jewellery, her pretty things, she would have to sell them all. She would have to follow him into poverty, she, who had no experience of its meaning. This was his punishment, perhaps, for having steadily pursued the idea of a rich marriage. But what had Asako done to deserve it? Thank God, his marriage had at least not been a loveless one.

Geoffrey felt acutely the need of human sympathy in his trouble. By sheer bad luck he had forfeited Reggie's friendship. But he could still depend upon his wife's love.

So he ran up the stairs at the Imperial Hotel longing for Asako's welcome, though he dreaded the obligation to break the bad news.

He threw open the door. The room was empty. He looked for cloaks and hats and curios, for luggage, for any sign of her presence. There was nothing to indicate that the room was hers.

Sick with apprehension, he returned to the corridor. There was a *boy san* near at hand.

'*Okusan* go away,' said the *boy san*. 'No come back, I think.'

'Where has she gone?' asked Geoffrey.

The *boy san*, with the infuriating Japanese grin, shook his head.

'I am very sorry for you,' he said. 'To-day very early plenty people come, Tanaka San and two Japanese girls. Very plenty talk. *Okusan* cry tears. All nice kimono take away very quick.'

'Then Tanaka, where is he?'

'Go away with *okusan*,' the *boy* grinned again, 'I am very sorry——'

Geoffrey slammed the door in the face of his tormentor. He staggered into a chair and collapsed, staring blankly. What could have happened?

Slowly his ideas returned. Tanaka! He had seen the little beast in Yaé's motor-car at Chuzenji. He must have come spying after his master as he had done fifty times before. He and that half-caste devil had raced him back to Tokyo, had got in ahead of him, and had told a pack of lies to Asako. She must have believed them, since she had gone away. But where had she gone to? The *boy san* had said 'two Japanese girls.' She must have gone to the Fujinami house, to her horrible unclean cousins.

He must find her at once. He must open her eyes to the truth. He must bring her back. He must take her away from Japan—for ever.

Barrington was crossing the hall of the Hotel muttering to himself, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, when he felt a hand laid on his arm. It was Titine, Asako's French maid.

'*Monsieur le capitaine*,' she said, '*madame est partie*. It is not my fault, *monsieur le capitaine*. I say to madame, Do not go, wait for monsieur. But madame is bewitched. She, who is *bonne catholique*, she say prayers to the temples of these yellow devils. I myself have seen her clap her hands—so!—and pray. Her saints have left her. She is bewitched.'

Titine was a Breton peasant girl. She believed implicitly in the powers of darkness. She had long ago decided that the gods of the Japanese and the *korrigans* of her own country were intimately related. She had served Asako since before her marriage, and would have remained with her until death. She was desperately faithful. But she could not follow her mistress to the Fujinami house, and risk her soul's salvation.

'*Monsieur le capitaine* go away; and madame very, very unhappy. Every night she cry. Why did monsieur stay away so long time?'

'It was only a fortnight,' expostulated Geoffrey.

'For the first parting it was too long,' said Titine

judicially. 'Every night madame cry; and then she write to monsieur and say, "Come back." Monsieur write and say, "Not yet." Then madame break her heart and say, "It is because of some woman that he stay away so long time!" She say so to Tanaka; and Tanaka say, "I go, and detect, and come again, and tell madame;" and madame say, "Yes, Tanaka can go: I wish to know the truth!" And still more she cry and cry. This morning very early Tanaka come back with Mademoiselle Smith and mademoiselle *la cousine*. They all talk a long time with madame in the bedroom. But they send me away. Then madame call me. She cry and cry, "Titine," she say, "I go away. Monsieur do not love me now. I go to the Japanese house. Pack all my things, Titine." I say, "No, madame, never. I never go to that house of devils. How can madame tell the good confessor? How can madame go to the Holy Mass? Will madame leave her husband and go to these people who pray to stone beasts? Wait for monsieur!" I say, "What Tanaka say, it is lies, all the time lies. What Mademoiselle Smith say all lies." But madame say, "No, come with me, Titine!" But I say again, "Never!" And madame go away, crying all the time: and sixteen rickshaw all full of baggage. Oh, *monsieur le capitaine*, what shall I do?'

'I'm sure, I don't know,' said the helpless Geoffrey.

'Send me back to France, monsieur. This country is full of devils, devils and lies.'

He left her sobbing in the hall of the hotel with a cluster of *boy sans* watching her.

Geoffrey took a taxi to the Fujinami house. No one answered his ringing; but he thought that he could hear voices inside the building. So he strode in, unannounced, and with his boots on his feet, an unspeakable offence against Japanese etiquette.

He found Asako in a room which overlooked the garden where he had been received on former occasions. Her cousin Sadako was with her and Ito, the lawyer. To his surprise and disgust, his wife was dressed in the Japanese kimono and *obi* which had once been so pleasing to his eyes. Her change of nationality seemed to be already complete.

This was an Asako whom he had never known before. Her eyes were ringed with weeping, and her face was thin and haggard. But her expression had a new look of resolution. She was no longer a child, a doll. In the space of a few hours she had grown to be a woman.

They were all standing. Sadako and the lawyer had formed up behind the runaway as though to give her moral support.

'Asako,' said Geoffrey sternly, 'what does this mean?'

The presence of the two Japanese exasperated him. His manner was tactless and unfortunate. His tall stature in the dainty room looked coarse and brutal. Sadako and Ito were staring at his offending boots with an expression of utter horror. Geoffrey suddenly remembered that he ought to have taken them off.

'Oh, damn,' he thought.

'Geoffrey,' said his wife, 'I can't come back. I am sorry. I have decided to stay here.'

'Why?' asked Geoffrey brusquely.

'Because I know that you do not love me. I think you never loved anything except my money.'

The hideous irony of this statement made poor Geoffrey gasp. He gripped the wooden framework of the room so as to steady himself.

'Good God!' he shouted. 'Your money! Do you know where it comes from?'

Asako stared at him, more and more bewildered.

'Send these people out of the room, and I'll tell you,' said Geoffrey.

'I would rather they stayed,' his wife answered.

It had been arranged beforehand that, if Geoffrey called, Asako was not to be left alone with him. She had been made to believe that she was in danger of physical violence. She was terribly frightened.

'Very well,' Geoffrey blundered on, 'every penny you have is made out of prostitution, out of the sale of women to men. You saw the Yoshiwara, you saw the poor women imprisoned there, you know that any drunken beast can come and pay his money down and say, "I want that girl," and she has to give herself up to be kissed and pulled about by him, even if she hates him and loathes him. Well, all this filthy Yoshiwara and all those poor girls and all that dirty money belongs to these Fujinami and to you. That is why they are so rich, and that is why we have been so rich. If we were in England, we could be flogged for this, and imprisoned, and serve us right too. And all this money is bad; and, if we keep it, we are worse than criminals; and neither of us can ever be happy, or look any one in the face again.'

Asako was shaking her head gently like an automaton, understanding not a word of all this outburst. Her mind was on one thing only, her husband's infidelity. His mind was on one thing only, the shame of his wife's money. They were like card-players who concentrate their attention exclusively on the cards in their own hands, oblivious to what their partners or opponents may hold.

Asako remaining silent, Mr Ito began to speak. His voice seemed more squeaky than ever.

'Captain Barrington,' he said, 'I am very sorry for you. But you see now true condition of things. You must remember you are English gentleman. Mrs Barrington wishes not to return to you. She has been told that you make misconduct with Miss Smith at Kamakura, and again at Chuzenji. Miss Smith herself says so. Mrs

Barrington thinks this story must be true; or Miss Smith do not tell so bad story about herself. We think she is quite right——'

'Shut up!' thundered Geoffrey. 'This is a matter for me and my wife alone. Please, leave us. My wife has heard one side of a story which is unfair and untrue. She must hear from me what really happened.'

'I think, some other day, it would be better,' cousin Sadako intervened. 'You see, Mrs Barrington cannot speak to-day. She is too unhappy.'

It was quite true. Asako stood like a dummy, neither seeing nor hearing apparently, neither assenting nor contradicting. How powerful is the influence of clothes! If Asako had been dressed in her Paris coat and skirt, her husband would have crossed the few mats which separated them, and would have carried her off willy-nilly. But in her kimono did she wholly belong to him? Or was she a Japanese again, a Fujinami? She seemed to have been transformed by some enchanter's spell; as Titine had said, she was bewitched.

'Asako, do you mean this?' The big man's voice was harsh with grief. 'Do you mean that I am to go without you?'

Asako still showed no sign of comprehension.

'Answer me, my darling; do you want me to go?'

Her head moved in assent, and her lips whispered 'Yes.'

That whisper made such a wrench at her husband's heart that his grip tightened on the frail *shoji*, and with a nervous spasm he sent it clattering out of its socket flat upon the floor of the room, like a screen blown down by the wind. Ito dashed forward to help Geoffrey replace the damage. When they turned round again, the two women had disappeared.

'Captain Barrington,' said Ito, 'I think you had better go away. You make bad thing worse.'

Geoffrey frowned at the little creature. He would

have liked to have crushed him underfoot like a cockroach. But as that was impossible, nothing remained for him to do but to depart, leaving the track of his dirty boots on the shining corridor. His last glimpse of his cousins' home was of two little serving-maids scuttering up with dusters to remove the defilement.

Asako had fainted.

As Reggie had said in Chuzenji, 'What actually happens does not matter: it is the thought of what might have happened which sticks.' If Reggie's tolerant and experienced mind could not rid itself of the picture conjured up by the possibility of his friend's treachery and his mistress's lightness, how could Asako, ignorant and untried, hope to escape from a far more insistent obsession? She believed that her husband was guilty. But the mere feeling that it was possible that he might be guilty would have been enough to numb her love for him, at any rate for a time. She had never known heartache before. She did not realise that it is a fever which runs its appointed course of torment and despair, which at length after a given term abates, and then disappears altogether, leaving the sufferer weak but whole again. The second attack of the malady finds its victim familiar with the symptoms, resigned to a short period of misery and confident of recovery. A broken heart, like a broken horse, is of great service to its owner.

But Asako was like one stricken with an unknown disease. Its violence appalled her, and in her uncertainty she prayed for death. Moreover, she was surrounded by counsellors who traded on her little faith, who kept on reminding her that she was a Japanese, that she was among her father's people who loved her and understood her, that foreigners were notoriously

treacherous to women, that they were blue-eyed and cruel-hearted, that they thought only of money and material things. Let her stay in Japan, let her make her home there. There she would always be a personage, a member of the family. Among those big, bold-voiced foreign women, she was overshadowed and out of place. If her husband left her for a half-caste, what chance had she of keeping him when once he got back among the women of his own race? Mixed marriages, in fact, were a mistake, an offence against nature. Even if he wished to be faithful to her, he could not really care for her as he could for an Englishwoman.

As soon as Geoffrey Barrington had left the house, Mr Ito went in search of the head of the Fujinami, whom he found at work on the latest literary production of his tame students, *The Pinegrove by the Sea-shore.*

Mr Fujinami Gentaro put his writing-box aside with a leisurely gesture, for a Japanese gentleman of culture must never be in a hurry.

'Indeed, it has been so noisy, composition has become impossible,' he complained; 'has that foreigner come to the house?'

He used the uncomplimentary word '*ketōjin*,' which may be literally translated 'hairy rascal.' It is a survival from the time of Perry's black ships and the early days of foreign intercourse, when 'Expel the Barbarians!' was a watchword in the country. Modern Japanese assure their foreign friends that it has fallen altogether into disuse; but such is not the case. It is a word loaded with all the hatred, envy and contempt against foreigners of all nationalities, which still pervade considerable sections of the Japanese public.

'This Barrington,' answered the lawyer, 'is indeed a rough fellow, even for a foreigner. He came into the

house with his boots on, uninvited. He shouted like a coolie, and he broke the *shoji*. His behaviour was like that of Susa-no-O in the chambers of the Sun-Goddess. Perhaps he had been drinking whisky-sodas.'

'A disgusting thing, is it not?' said the master. 'At this time I am writing an important chapter on the clear mirror of the soul. It is troublesome to be interrupted by these quarrels of women and savages. You will have Keiichi and Gorō posted at the door of the house. They are to refuse entrance to all foreigners. It must not be allowed to turn our *yashiki* into a battlefield.'

Mr Fujinami's meditations that morning had been most bitter. His literary preoccupation was only a sham. There was a tempest in the political world of Japan. The Government was tottering under the revelations of a corruption in high places more blatant than usual. With the fall of the Cabinet, the bribes which the Fujinami had lavished to obtain the licences and privileges necessary to their trade, would become waste money. True, the Governor of Osaka had not yet been replaced. A Fujinami familiar had been despatched thither at full speed to secure the new Tobita brothel concessions as a *fait accompli*, before the inevitable change should take place.

The head of the house of Fujinami, therefore, being a monarch in a small way, had much to think of besides 'the quarrels of women and savages.' Moreover, he was not quite sure of his ground with regard to Asako. To take a wife from her husband against his will, seems to the Japanese mind so flagrantly illegal a proceeding; and old Mr Fujinami Gennosuké had warned his irreligious son most gravely against the danger of tampering with the testament of Asako's father, and of provoking thereby a visitation of his 'rough spirit.'