CHAPTER XXV

JAPANESE COURTSHIP

O-bune no	With a rocking
Hatsuru-tomari no	(As) of great ships
Tayutai ni	Riding at anchor
Mono-omoi-yase-nu	I have at last become
Hito no ko yuye ni.	worn out with love,
	Because of a child of man.

WHEN the Fujinami returned to Tokyo, the wing of the house in which the unfortunate son had lived, had been demolished. An ugly scar remained, a slab of charred concrete strewn with ashes and burnt beams. Saddest sight of all was the twisted iron-work of Takeshi's foreign bedstead, once the symbol of progress and of the *haikara* spirit. The fire was supposed to have been accidental; but the ravages had been carefully limited to the offending wing.

Mr Fujinami Gentaro, disgusted at this unsightly wreckage, wished to rebuild at once. But the old grandfather had objected that this spot of misfortune was situated in the north-east corner of the mansion, a quarter notoriously exposed to the attacks of *oni* (evil spirits). He was in favour of total demolishment.

This was only one of the differences of opinion between the two seniors of the house of Fujinami, which became more frequent as the clouds of disaster gathered over the home in Akasaka. A far more thorny problem was the question of the succession.

With the living death of Takeshi, there was no male

heir. Several family councils were held in the presence of the two Mr Fujinami generally in the dower-house, at which six or seven members of the collateral branches were also present. Grandfather Gennosuké, who despised Takeshi as a waster, would not listen to any plea on behalf of his children.

'To a bad father a bad child,' he enunciated, his restless jaw masticating more ferociously than ever.

He was strongly of opinion that it was the curse of Asako's father which had brought this sorrow upon his family. Katsundo and Asako were representatives of the elder branch. Himself, Gentaro and Takeshi were mere usurpers. Restore the elder branch to its rights, and the indignant ghost would cease to plague them all.

Such was the argument of grandfather Gennosuké.

Fujinami Gentaro naturally supported the claims of his own progeny. If Takeshi's children must be disinherited because of the leprous strain, then, at least, Sadako remained. She was a well-educated and serious girl. She knew foreign languages. She could make a brilliant marriage. Her husband would be adopted as heir. Perhaps the Governor of Osaka?

The other members of the council shook their heads, and breathed deeply. Were there no Fujinami left of the collateral branches? Why adopt a *tanin* (outside person)? So spoke the M.P., the man with a wen, who had an axe of his own to grind.

It was decided to choose the son-in-law candidate first of all; and, afterwards, to decide which of the girls he was to marry. Perhaps, it would be as well to consult the fortune-tellers. At any rate, a list of suitable applicants would be prepared for the next meeting.

'When men speak of the future,' said grandfather Gennosuké, 'the rats in the ceiling laugh.'

So the conference broke up.

Mr Fujinami Gentaro had no sooner returned to the

academic calm of his chaste reading-room, than Mr Ito appeared on the threshold.

The oily face was more moist than usual, the buffalo-horn moustache more truculent; and though the autumn day was cool, Ito was agitating a fan. He was evidently nervous. Before approaching the sanctum, he had blown his nose into a small square piece of soft paper, which is the Japanese apology for a handkerchief. He had looked around for some place where to cast the offence; but finding none along the trim garden border, he had slipped it into his wide kimono sleeve.

Mr Fujinami frowned. He was tired of business matters, and the worry of other people's affairs. He longed for peace.

'Indeed, the weather becomes perceptibly cooler,' said Mr Ito, with a low prostration.

'If there is business,' his patron replied crisply, 'please, step up into the room.'

Mr Ito slipped off his *geta*, and ascended from the garden path. When he had settled himself in the correct attitude with legs crossed and folded, Mr Fujinami pushed over towards him a packet of cigarettes, adding,—

'Please, without embarrassment, speak quickly what you have to say.'

Mr Ito chose a cigarette, and slowly pinched together the cardboard holder, which formed its lower half.

'Indeed, *sensei*, it is a difficult matter,' he began. 'It is a matter which should be handled by an intermediary. If I speak face to face like a foreigner, the master will excuse my rudeness.'

'Please, speak clearly.'

'I owe my advancement in life entirely to the master. I was the son of poor parents. I was an emigrant and a vagabond over three thousand worlds. The master gave me a home, and lucrative employment. I have served the master for many years; with my poor effort

the fortunes of the family have perhaps increased. I have become as it were a *son* to the Fujinami.'

He paused at the word 'son.' His employer had caught his meaning, and was frowning more than ever. At last he answered,—

'To expect too much is a dangerous thing. To choose a *yoshi* (adopted son) is a difficult question. I myself cannot decide such grave matters. There must be consultation with the rest of the Fujinami family. You yourself have suggested that Governor Sugiwara might perhaps be a suitable person.'

'At that time, the talk was of Sada San; this time, the talk is of Asa San.'

A flash of inspiration struck Mr Fujinami Gentaro, and a gush of relief. By giving her to Ito, he might be able to side-track Asako, and leave the highway to inheritance free for his own daughter. But Ito had grown too powerful to be altogether trusted.

'It must be clearly understood,' said the master, 'that it is the husband of our Sada who will be the Fujinami *yoshi*.'

Ito bowed.

'Thanks to the master,' he said, 'there is money in plenty. There is no desire to speak of such matters. The request is for Asa San only. Truly, the heart is speaking. That girl is a beautiful child, and altogether a *haikara* person. My wife is old and barren and of low class. I wish to have a wife who is worthy of my position in the house of Fujinami San.'

The head of the family cackled with sudden laughter; he was much relieved.

'Ha! Ha! Ito Kun! So it is love, is it? You are in love like a school student. Well, indeed, love is a good thing. What you have said shall be well considered.'

So the lawyer was dismissed.

Accordingly, at the next family council Mr Fujinami

put forward the proposal that Asako should be married forthwith to the family factotum, who should be given a lump sum down in consideration for a surrender of all further claim in his own name or his wife's to any share in the family capital.

'Ito Kun,' he concluded, 'is the brain of our business. He is the family *karo* (prime minister). I think it would be well to give this Asa to him.'

To his surprise, the proposal met with unanimous opposition. The rest of the family envied and disliked Ito, who was regarded as Mr Fujinami's pampered favourite.

Grandfather Gennosuké was especially indignant.

'What?' he exploded, in one of those fits of rage common to old men in Japan; 'give the daughter of the elder branch to a butler, to a man whose father ran between rickshaw shafts. If the spirit of Katsundo has not heard this foolish talk, it would be a good thing for us. Already there is a bad *ingé*. By doing such a thing, it will become worse and worse, until the whole house of Fujinami is ruined. This Ito is a rascal, a thief, a good-for-nothing, a——'

The old gentleman collapsed.

Again the council separated, still undecided except for one thing that the claim of Mr Ito to the hand of Asako was quite inadmissible.

When the 'family prime minister' next pressed his master on the subject, Mr Fujinami had to confess that the proposal had been rejected.

Then Ito unmasked his batteries; and his patron had to realise that the servant was a servant no longer.

Ito said that it was necessary for him to have Asa San, and that before the end of the year. He was in love with this girl. Passion was an overwhelming thing.

'Two things have ever been the same
Since the Age of the Gods,—
The flowing of water,
And the way of Love.'

This old Japanese poem he quoted as his excuse for what would otherwise be an inexcusable impertinence. The master was aware that politics in Japan were in an unsettled state, and that the new Cabinet was scarcely established; that a storm would overthrow it, and that the Opposition were already looking about for a suitable scandal to use for their revenge. He, Ito, held the evidence which they desired,—the full story of the Tobita concession, with the names and details of the enormous bribes distributed by the Fujinami. If these things were published, the Government would certainly fall; also the Tobita concession would be lost and the whole of that great outlay; also the Fujinami's leading political friends would be discredited and ruined. There would be a big trial, and exposure, and outcry, and judgment, and prison. The master must excuse his servant for speaking so rudely to his benefactor. But in love there are no scruples; and he must have Asa San. After all, after his long service, was his request so unreasonable?

Mr Fujinami Gentaro, thoroughly scared, protested that he himself was in favour of the match. He begged for time so as to be able to convert the other members of the family council.

'Perhaps,' suggested Ito, 'if Asa San were sent away from Akasaka, perhaps if she were living alone, it would be more easy to manage. What is absent is soon forgotten. Mr Fujinami Gennosuké is a very old gentleman; he would soon forget. Sada San could then take her proper position as the only daughter of the

Fujinami. Was there not a small house by the river-side at Mukojima, which had been rented for Asa San? Perhaps she would like to live there—quite alone.'

'Perhaps Ito Kun would visit her from time to time,' said Mr Fujinami, pleased with the idea; 'she will be so lonely: there is no knowing!'

The one person who was never consulted, and who had not the remotest notion of what was going on, was Asako herself.

Asako was most unhappy. The disappearance of Fujinami Takeshi exasperated the competition between herself and her cousin. Just as formerly all Sadako's intelligence and charm had been exerted to attract her English relative to the house in Akasaka, so now she applied all her force to drive her cousin out of the family circle. For many weeks now, Asako had been ignored; but after the return from Ikégami a positive persecution commenced. Although the nights were growing chilly, she was given no extra bedding. Her meals were no longer served to her; she had to get what she could from the kitchen. The servants, imitating their mistress's attitude, were deliberately disobliging and rude to the little foreigner.

Sadako and her mother would sneer at her awkwardness and at her ignorance of Japanese customs. Her *obi* was tied anyhow; for she had no maid. Her hair was untidy; for she was not allowed a hairdresser.

They nicknamed her *rashamen* (goat-face), using an ugly slang word for a foreigner's Japanese mistress; and they would pretend that she smelt like a European.

'*Kusai! Kusai!* (Stink! Stink!)' they would say.

The war, even, was used to bait Asako. Every German success was greeted with acclamation. The exploits of

the *Emden* were loudly praised; and the tragedy of Coronel was gloated over with satisfaction.

'The Germans will win, because they are brave,' said Sadako.

'The English lose too many prisoners; Japanese soldiers are never taken prisoner.'

'When the Japanese general ordered the attack on Tsingtao, the English regiment ran away!'

Cousin Sadako announced her intention of studying German.

'Nobody will speak English now,' she said. 'The English are disgraced. They cannot fight.'

'I wish Japan would make war on the English,' Asako answered bitterly, 'you would get such a beating that you would never boast again. Look at my husband,' she added proudly; 'he is so big and strong and brave. He could pick up two or three Japanese generals like toys and knock their heads together.'

Even Mr Fujinami Gentaro joined once or twice in these debates, and announced sententiously,—

'Twenty years ago, Japan defeated China and took Korea. Ten years ago we defeated Russia, and took Manchuria. This year, we defeat Germany and take Tsingtao. In ten years, we shall defeat America and take Hawaii and the Philippines. In twenty years, we shall defeat England and take India and Australia. Then we Japanese shall be the most powerful nation in the world. This is our divine mission.'

It was characteristic of the loyalty of Asako's nature, that, although very ignorant of the war, of its causes and its vicissitudes, yet she remained fiercely true to England and the Allies, and could never accept the Japanese detachment. Above all, the thought of her husband's danger haunted her. Waking and sleeping she could see him, sword in hand, leading his men to desperate hand-to-hand struggles, like those portrayed

in the crude Japanese chromographs, which Sadako showed her to play upon her fears. Poor Asako! How she hated Japan, now! How she loathed the cramped, draughty, uncomfortable life! How she feared the smiling faces and the watchful eyes, from which it seemed she never could escape!

Christmas was at hand, the season of pretty presents and good things to eat. Her last Christmas she had spent with Geoffrey on the Riviera. Lady Everington had been there. They had watched the pigeon-shooting in the warm sunlight. They had gone to the opera in the evening,—*Madame Butterfly*! Asako had imagined herself in the rôle of the heroine, so gentle, so faithful, waiting and waiting in her little wooden house for the big white husband—who never came. What was that? She heard the guns of his ship saluting the harbour. He was coming back to her at last—but not alone! A woman was with him, a white woman!

Alone, in her bare room—her only companion a flaky yellow chrysanthemum nodding in the draught—Asako sobbed and sobbed as though her heart were breaking. Somebody tapped at the sliding shutter. Asako could not answer. The *shoji* was pushed open, and Tanaka entered.

Asako was glad to see him. Alone of the household Tanaka was still deferential in his attitude towards his late mistress. He was always ready to talk about the old times, which gave her a bitter pleasure.

'If Ladyship is so sad,' he began, as he had been coached in his part beforehand by the Fujinami, 'why Ladyship stay in this house? Change house, change trouble, we say.'

'But where can I go?' Asako asked helplessly.

'Ladyship has pretty house by river brink,' suggested Tanaka. 'Ladyship can stay two month, three month. Then the springtime come, and Ladyship feel quite happy

again. Even I, in the winter season, I find the mind very distress. It is often so.'

To be alone, to be free from the daily insults and cruelty; this in itself would be happiness to Asako.

'But will Mr Fujinami allow me to go?' she asked, timorously.

'Ladyship must be brave,' said the counsellor. 'Ladyship is not prisoner. Ladyship must say, I go. But perhaps I can arrange matter for Ladyship.'

'Oh Tanaka, please, please do. I'm so unhappy here.'

'I will hire cook and maid for Ladyship. I myself will be seneschal!'

Mr Fujinami Gentaro and his family were delighted to hear that their plan was working so smoothly, and that they could so easily get rid of their embarrassing cousin. The 'seneschal' was instructed at once to see about arrangements for the house, which had not been lived in since its new tenancy.

Next evening, when Asako had spread the two quilts on the golden matting, when she had lit the rushlight in the square *andon*, when the two girls were lying side by side under the heavy wadded bedclothes, Sadako said to her cousin,—

'Asa Chan, I do not think you like me now as much as you used to like me.'

'I always like people, when I have once liked them,' said Asako; 'but everything is different now.'

'I see, your heart changes quickly,' said her cousin bitterly.

'No, I have tried to change, but I cannot change. I have tried to become Japanese, but I cannot even learn the Japanese language. I do not like the Japanese way of living. In France and in England I was always happy. I don't think I shall ever be happy again.'

'You ought to be more grateful,' said Sadako severely.

'We have saved you from your husband, who was cruel and deceitful——'

'No, I don't believe that now. My husband and I loved each other always. You people came between us with wicked lies, and separated us.'

'Anyhow, you have made the choice. You have chosen to be Japanese. You can never be English again.'

The Fujinami had hypnotised Asako with this phrase, as a hen can be hypnotised with a chalk line. Day after day it was dinned into her ears, cutting off all hope of escape from the country or of appeal to her English friends.

'You had better marry a Japanese,' said Sadako, 'or you will become old maid. Why not marry Ito San? He says he likes you. He is a clever man. He has plenty of money. He is used to foreign ways.'

'Marry Mr Ito!' Asako exclaimed, aghast; 'but he has a wife already.'

'They will divorce. It is no trouble. There are not even children.'

'I would rather die than marry any Japanese,' said Asako, with conviction.

Sadako Fujinami turned her back and pretended to sleep; but long through the dark cold night Asako could feel her turning restlessly to and fro.

Sometime about midnight, Asako heard her name called,—

'Asa Chan, are you awake?'

'Yes, is anything the matter?'

'Asa Chan, in your house by the river, you will be lonely. You will not be afraid?'

'I am not afraid to be lonely,' Asako answered; 'I am afraid of people.'

'Look!' said her cousin; 'I give you this.'

She drew from the bosom of her kimono the short

sword in its sheath of shagreen, which Asako had seen once or twice before.

'It is very old,' she continued; 'it belonged to my mother's people. They were *samurai* of the Sendai clan. In old Japan every noble girl carried such a short sword; for she said, "Better death than dishonour." When the time came to die, she would strike—here, in the throat, not too hard, but pushing strongly. But first she would tie her feet together with the *obidomé*, the silk string which you have to hold your *obi* straight. That was in case the legs open too much; she must not die in immodest attitude. So when General Nogi did *harakiri* at Emperor Meiji's funeral, his wife, Countess Nogi, killed herself also with such a sword. I give you my sword because in the house by the river you will be lonely—and things might happen. I can never use the sword myself now. It was the sword of my ancestors. I am not pure now. I cannot use the sword. If I kill myself, I throw myself into the river like a common *geisha*. I think it is best you marry Ito. In Japan, it is bad to have a husband; but to have no husband, it is worse.'