CHAPTER IX

ITO SAN

Ama no kara	Can even the God of Thunder
Fumi-todorokashi	Whose footfall resounds
Naru-kami mo	In the plains of the sky
Omou-naka wo ba	Put asunder
Sakuru mono ka wa?	Those whom love joins?

GEOFFREY'S conscience was disturbed. His face was lined and worried with thought, such as had left him untroubled since the effervescences of his early youth. Like many young men of his caste, he had soon submitted all the baffling riddles of conduct to the thumb rule of Good Form. This Yoshiwara question was to him something more than a moral conundrum. It was a subtle attack by the wife of his bosom, aided and abetted by his old friend Reggie Forsyth and by the mysterious forces of this unfamiliar land as typified by Yaé Smith, against the citadel of Good Form, against the stronghold of his principles.

Geoffrey himself wished to see the Yoshiwara. His project had been that one evening, when Asako had been invited to dinner by friends, he and Reggie would go and look at the place. This much was sanctioned by Good Form.

For him to take his wife there, and for people to know that he had done so, would be the worst of Bad Form, the conduct of a rank outsider. Unfortunately, it was also Bad Form for him to discuss the matter with Asako.

A terrible dilemma.

Was it possible that the laws of Good and Bad Form were only locally binding, and that here in Japan they were no longer valid?

Reggie was different. He was so awfully clever. He could extemporise on Good Form as he could extemporise on the piano. Besides, he was a victim to the artistic temperament, which cannot control itself. But Reggie had not been improved by his sojourn in this queer country, or he would never have so far forgotten himself as to speak in such a way in the presence of ladies.

Geoffrey would give him a good beating at tennis; and then, having reduced him to a fit state of humility. he would have it out with him. For Barrington was not a man to nurse displeasure against his friends.

The tennis-courts at Tokyo,—which stand in a magnificent central position one day to be occupied by the Japanese Houses of Parliament—are every afternoon the meeting-place for youth in exile with a sprinkling of Japanese, some of whom have acquired great skill at the game. Towards tea-time the ladies arrive to watch the evening efforts of their husbands and admirers, and to escort them home when the light begins to fail. So the tennis-courts have become a little social oasis in the vast desert of Oriental life. Brilliant it is not. Sparkle there is none. But there is a certain chirpiness, the forced gaiety of caged birds.

The day was warm and bright. The snow had vanished as though by supernatural command. Geoffrey enjoyed his game thoroughly, although he was beaten, being out of practice and unused to gravel courts. But the exercise made him, in his own language, 'sweat like a pig,' and he felt better. He thought he would shelve the unpleasant subject for the time being; but it was Reggie himself who revived it.

'About the Yoshiwara,' he said, seating himself on

one of the benches placed round the courts. 'They are having a special show down there to-morrow. It will probably be worth seeing.'

'Look here,' said Geoffrey, 'is it the thing for ladies—English ladies—to go to a place like that?'

'Of course,' answered his friend, 'it is one of the sights of Tokyo. Why, I went with Lady Cynthia not so long ago. She was quite fascinated.'

'By Jove!' Geoffrey ejaculated. 'But for a young girl—? Did Miss Cairns go too?'

'Not on that occasion; but I have no doubt she has been.'

'But isn't it much the same as taking a lady to a public brothel?'

'Not in the least,' was Reggie's answer, 'it is like going along Piccadilly after nightfall, looking in at the Empire, and returning via Regent Street; and in Paris, like a visit to the *Rat Mort* and the *Bal Tabarin*. It is the local version of an old theme.'

'But is that a nice sight for a lady?'

'It is what every lady wants to see.'

'Reggie, what rot! Any clean-minded girl——'

'Geoffrey, old man, would *you* like to see the place?'

'Yes, but for a man it's different.'

'Why do you want to see it? You're not going there for business, I presume?'

'Why? for curiosity, I suppose. One hears such a lot of people talk about the Yoshiwara——'

'For curiosity, that's right: and do you really think that women, even clean-minded women, have less curiosity than men?'

Geoffrey Barrington started to laugh at his own discomfiture.

'Reggie, you were always a devil for arguing!' he said. 'At home one would never talk about things like that.'

'There must be a slight difference then between Home and Abroad. Certain bonds are relaxed. Abroad, one is a sight-seer. One is out to watch the appearance and habits of the natives in a semi-scientific mood, just as one looks at animals in the Zoo. Besides, nobody knows or cares who one is. One has no awkward responsibilities towards one's neighbours; and there is little or no danger of finding an intimate acquaintance in an embarrassing position. In London one lives in constant dread of finding people out.'

'But my wife,' Geoffrey continued, troubled once more, 'I can't imagine——'

'Mrs Barrington may be an exception; but take my word for it, every woman, however good and holy, is intensely interested in the lives of her fallen sisters. They know less about them than we do. They are therefore more mysterious and interesting to them. And yet they are much nearer to them by the whole difference of sex. There is always a personal query arising, "I, too, might have chosen that life—what would it have brought me?" There is a certain compassion, too; and above all there is the intense interest of rivalry. Who is not interested in his arch-enemy? and what woman does not want to know by what unholy magic her unfair competitor holds her power over men ?'

The tennis-courts were filling with youths released from offices. In the court facing them, two young fellows had begun a single. One of them was a Japanese; the other, though his hair and eyes were of the native breed, was too fair of skin and too tall of stature. He was a Eurasian. They both played exceedingly well. The rallies were long sustained, the drives beautifully timed and taken. The few unemployed about the courts soon made this game the object of their special attention.

'Who are they?' asked Geoffrey, glad to change the conversation.

'That's Aubrey Smith, Yaé's brother, one of the best players here, and Viscount Kamimura, who ought to be quite the best; but he has just married, and his wife will not let him play often enough.'

'Oh,' exclaimed Geoffrey, 'he was on the ship with us coming out.'

He had not recognised the good-looking young Japanese. He had not expected to meet him somehow in such a European *milieu*. Kamimura had noticed his fellow-traveller however; and when the set was over and the players had changed sides, he came up and greeted him most cordially.

'I hear you are already married,' said Geoffrey. 'Our best congratulations!'

'Thank you,' replied Kamimura, blushing. Japanese blush readily in spite of their complexion.

'We Japanese must not boast about our wives. It is what you call Bad Form. But I would like her to meet Mrs Barrington. She speaks English not so badly.'

'Yes,' said Geoffrey, 'I hope you will come and dine with us one evening at the Imperial.'

'Thank you very much,' answered the young Viscount. 'How long are you staying in Japan?'

'Oh, for some months.'

'Then we shall meet often, I hope,' he said, and returned to his game.

'A very decent fellow; quite human,' Reggie commented.

'Yes, isn't he?' said Geoffrey; and then he asked suddenly,—

'Do you think he would take his wife to see the Yoshiwara?'

'Probably not; but then they are Japanese people living in Japan. That alters everything.'

'I don't think so,' said Geoffrey; and he was conscious of having scored off his friend for once.

Miss Yaé Smith had arrived on her daily visit to the courts. She was already surrounded by a little retinue of young men, who, however, scattered at Reggie's approach.

Miss Yaé smiled graciously on the two new-comers and inquired after Mrs Barrington.

'It was so nice to talk with her the other day; it was like being in England again.'

Yes, Miss Yaé had been in England and in America too. She preferred those countries very much to Japan. It was so much more amusing. There was so little to do here. Besides, in Japan it was such a small world; and everybody was so disagreeable; especially the women, always saying untrue, unkind things.

She looked so immaterial and sprite-like in her blue kimono, her strange eyes downcast as her habit was when talking about herself and her own doings, that Geoffrey could think no evil of her, nor could he wonder at Reggie's gaze of intense admiration which beat upon her like sunlight on a picture.

However, Asako must be waiting for him. He took his leave, and returned to his hotel.

Asako had been entertaining a visitor. She had gone out shopping for an hour, not altogether pleased to find herself alone. On her return, a Japanese gentleman in a vivid green suit had risen from a seat in the lounge of the hotel, and had introduced himself.

'I am Ito, your attorney-of-law.'

He was a small, podgy person with a round oily face and heavy voluted moustaches. The expression of his eyes was hidden behind gold-rimmed spectacles. It would have been impossible for a European to guess his age, anything between twenty-five and fifty. His thick, plum-coloured hair was brushed up on his forehead in

a butcher-boy's curl. His teeth glittered with dentist's gold. He wore a tweed suit of bright pea-soup colour, a rainbow tie and yellow boots. Over the bulge of an egg-shaped stomach hung a massive gold watch-chain blossoming into a semi-heraldic charm, which might be a masonic emblem or a cycling club badge. His breast-pocket appeared to hold a quiverful of fountain-pens.

'How do you do, Mrs Barrington? I am pleased to meet you.'

The voice was high and squeaky, like a boy's voice when it is breaking. The extended hand was soft and greasy in spite of its attempt at a firm grip. With elaborate politeness he ushered Mrs Barrington into her chair. He took his place close beside her, crossed his fat legs, and stuck his thumbs into his arm-holes.

'I am your old friend Ito,' he began, 'your father's friend, and I am sure to be your friend, too.'

But for the reference to her father she would have snubbed him. She decided to give him tea in the lounge, and not to invite him to her private rooms. A growing distrust of her countrymen, arising largely from observation of the ways of Tanaka, was making little Asako less confiding than of yore. She was still ready to be amused by them, but she was becoming less credulous of the Japanese pose of simplicity and the conventional smile. However, she was soon melted by Mr Ito's kindliness of manner. He patted her hand, and called her 'little girl.'

'I am your old lawyer,' he kept on saying, 'your father's friend, and your best friend too. Anything you want, just ring me and you have it. There's my number. Don't forget now. Shiba 1326. What do you think of Japan, now? Beautiful country, I think. And you have not yet seen Miyanoshita, or Kamakura, or Nikko temples. You have not yet got automobile, I think. Indeed, I am sorry for you! That is a very wrong thing!

I shall at once order for you a very splendid automobile, and we must make a grand trip. Every rich and noble person possesses splendid automobile.'

'Oh, that would be nice!' Asako clapped her hands. 'Japan is so pretty. I do want to see more of it. But I must ask my husband about buying the motor.'

Ito laughed a fat, oily laugh.

'Indeed, that is Japanese style, little girl. Japanese wife say, "I ask my husband." American style wife very different. She say, "My husband do this, do that"—like coolie. I have travelled much abroad. I know American custom very well.'

'My husband gives me all I want, and a great deal more,' said Asako.

'He is very kind man,' grinned the lawyer, 'because the money is all yours—not his at all. Ha, ha!'

Then, seeing that his officiousness was overstepping the mark, he added,—

'I know American ladies very well. They don't give money to their husbands. They tell their husbands, "You give money to me." They just do everything themselves, writing cheques all the time!'

'Really?' said Asako; 'but my husband is the kindest and best man in the world!'

'Quite right, quite right. Love your husband like a good little girl. But don't forget your old lawyer, Ito. I was your father's friend. We were at school together here in Tokyo.'

This interested Asako immensely. She tried to make the lawyer talk further, but he said that it was a very long story, and he must tell her some other time. Then she asked him about her cousin, Mr Fujinami Gentaro.

'He is away from town just now. When he returns, I think he will invite you to splendid feast.'

With that he took his leave.

'What do you think of him?' Asako asked Tanaka,

who had been watching the interview with an attendant chorus of *boy sans*.

'He is *haikara* gentleman,' was the reply.

Now, *haikara* is a native corruption of the words 'high collar,' and denoted at first a variety of Japanese 'nut,' who aped the European and the American in his habits, manners and dress—of which pose the high collar was the most visible symbol. The word was presumably contemptuous in its origin. It has since, however, changed its character as so to mean anything smart and fashionable. You can live in a *haikara* house, you can read *haikara* books, you can wear a *haikara* hat. It has become indeed practically a Japanese equivalent for that untranslatable expression '*chic*.'

Asako Barrington, like all simple people, had little familiarity save with the superficial stratum of her intelligence. She lived in the gladness of her eyes like a happy young animal. Nothing, not even her marriage, had touched her very profoundly. Even the sudden shock of de Brie's love-making had not shaken anything deeper than her natural pride and her ignorance of mankind.

But in this strange, still land, whose expression looks inwards and whose face is a mask, a change was operating. Ito left her, as he had intended, with a growing sense of her own importance as distinct from her husband. Tanaka's deference had already prepared the ground for the sowing. The lawyer's last few words had opened a deep gap between herself and the broad-shouldered fair-haired barbarian whose name she bore. 'I was your father's friend: we were at school together here in Tokyo.' Why, Geoffrey did not even know her father's name.

Asako did not think as closely as this. She could not.

But she must have looked very thoughtful; for when Geoffrey came in, he saw her still sitting in the lounge, and exclaimed,—

'Why, my little Yum-Yum, how serious we are! We look as if we were at our own funeral. Couldn't you get the things you wanted?'

'Oh yes,' said Asako, trying to brighten up, 'and I've had a visitor. Guess!'

'Lady Cynthia Cairns?'

'No.'

'Relations?'

'No and yes. It was Mr Ito, the lawyer.'

'Oh, that little blighter. That reminds me. I must go and see him to-morrow, and find out what he is doing with our money.'

'*My* money,' laughed Asako, 'Tanaka never lets me forget that.'

'Of course, little one,' said Geoffrey, 'I'd be in the workhouse it if wasn't for you.'

'Geoffrey darling,' said his wife hesitating, 'will you give me something?'

'Yes, of course, my sweetheart, what do you want?'

'I want a motor-car, yes please; and I'd like to have a cheque-book of my own. Sometimes when I am out by myself I would like——'

'Why, of course,' said Geoffrey, 'you ought to have had one long ago. But it was your own idea; you didn't want to be bothered with money.'

'Oh Geoffrey, you angel, you are so good to me.'

She clung to his neck; and he, seeing the hotel deserted and nobody about, raised her in his arms and carried her bodily upstairs to the interest and amusement of the chorus of *boy sans*, who had just been discussing why *danna san* had left *okusan* for so many hours that afternoon, and who and what was the Japanese gentleman who had been talking to *okusan* in the hall.