That falling side."

"A FATHER"

by Onodo Watanna

Illustration by Louis Bents

26-JUL-2002 21:38

Malam Sonbeam smiled blissfully. She drew a dainty card from the bosom of her kina. She was amused. The American had taken it. He bore the name of one of Chicago’s most prominent citizens—a millionaire, and a married man! Perhaps the officer meant to be kind. I do not know. But he told Malam Sonbeam the truth, adding in a strangely muffled voice that it was best she should not be deceived any longer.

Yuri remembered all this very distinctly, because her mother had cried out for a moment, and then had left her all alone, a pitiful, lonely, crying heap on the deck. Yuri crept down to the little cabin, as children do, tremblingly down the stairs, one little foot following the other. The mother was lying on the floor—asleep. Yuri crept to her and kissed her, for she was smiling and looked very beautiful. Then something dark and red colored her little hand and she screamed in terror, for she was very frightened at she knew not what.

Yuri cried all that long night through, for they carried her mother from her—two big, tall men. Some of the beautiful ladies on the ship had cried, and one of them had taken Yuri in her arms and tried to soothe her. She never saw her mother again. That was years and years ago.

Yuri was nineteen years old now. She wore American clothes—a cotton shirt waist and cloth skirt, but in her bosom she, too, carried a little card, as her mother had done; and the girl knew it bore her father’s name.

Some kind American woman had given the little waist a home when they had arrived. She was a poor woman, however, and as soon as Yuri was old enough she secured her a position in one of the large dry-goods stores of Chicago, and here the girl had worked ever since. Her life had been uneventful since then. She worked from eight in the morning till six at night, and her beautiful little half-Japanese face bore the pallor of the shopgirl. The girl was a dreamer. If she had ambition it had been smothered from the stern necessity of the moment. Her kind benefactor had died, and she was left utterly alone in the world and altogether dependent on herself. Mechanically she took up the burden of life, going to school from work each day, ever genteel and courteous to her fellow-workmen, never familiar with them, knowing none of them intimately. Instinctively the girl felt she was different from them, and she shrank in her unsupersensitiveness from mixing with companions who were as foreign to her as if they had lived in different parts of the world all their lives.

Yuri was beautiful, with a wild, inexplicable beauty that defied description. She did not look Japanese. She did not look American. Her face was mysterious in its dusky mixed beauty, but the immense childlike sweetness and softness of her half-breed were stamped indelibly on her features and reflected in the somber depths of her dark eyes.

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Gerald Latimer was in love. He had told his father so, and that gentleman was furious.

"A shopgirl! The idea was preposterous!" Gerald’s usual happy boyish face was very white and set as he listened to his father. That gentleman, still quite a young man himself, was highly incensed and disgusted with his young son. He himself was a rich banker, and he had married
a wife with the blood of Condé in her veins. He was one of those self-made Americans who reverence blood and aristocracy, and in return for the superabundance of wealth they bestow on their children, demand that they marry to please them. Mr. Latimer was thoroughly disgusted with his son. Is this all his Yale training had done for him? Where had he inherited his low taste from? In the library he was reading the Sunday papers and smoking. He had read in a good-natured mood lately. She knew he would join them soon in the sitting-room, and would know the truth. She rose nervously to her feet when she heard Gerald's quick, joyous tread on the stairs. Now she was looking at Yuri, the half-Japanese girl of whom Gerald had raved—the shop-girl her husband detested, without knowing. The girl was the most composed of the three, for she knew nothing as yet. She was glad to meet Mr. Gerald's "mother, " she said simply. She called him Mr. Gerald always, the mother noticed, and it sounded soft and pretty from her lips. Neither of the two women spoke much. Gerald monopolized most of the conversation, and told them bright, witty college tales, chasing away the constraint and fear from the mother's face, and lighting Yuri's with arch fun. "Your house is so beautiful," she told Mrs. Latimer directly, looking after. She got up and stood with clapped hands in front of a large oil painting in the room. "That is mother when a girl."

"That's very beautiful." There was still a foreign limp left. "Are your father? You have picture, too, of knew?"

"Well, not large like that. Mother, where's that small medalion of father, taken about the same time as yours? Ah! here it is." He put the miniature on ivory into the girl's hand. "Father, with mamma's permission I brought Miss a—Santaro to meet you. Whatever surprise or anger his father felt he did not betray it, for the girl was very beautiful. He bowed courteously to her, murmuring something about "pleasure at meeting," and forgetting over to give a side glimpse of pleasure at his wife and son. The girl did not return the greeting in the slightest. There was a peculiar look about her face, and she was standing very straight and proudly. She turned to Gerald. "I call you always Mr. Gerald. Ees that your name?"

The young man flushed. "Yes, my first name; Professor Grenier always called me that and—"

"Oh! I didn know that. Whad ees—?"

"Our last name? Oh! Latimer."

The girl was quiet now, her eyes still on the older man's face. She suddenly slipped her hand into the bosom of her gown and pulled out an old card and a faded miniature.

"Are these yours?" she asked Mr. Latimer. He took them wonderingly from her. "Mine? Why, no; that is—yes, By Jove! Where?"

The girl interrupted him. She had forgotten the mother and son.

"You are my father, " she said slowly. "Your father? They all echo it—stupidly."

"Yaes!" Her eyes were stony with hatred and contempt now. "Yaes, my mother left me only that to know my father by. Do you remember her? Madame Sunbeam of Nagasaki?"

The man had come closer to her now, and was looking at her face with sad eyes. "Yes, yes; and you."

"I was born after you left—nineteen years ago."

He saw his wife's white, horror-stricken face, his son's stupefied look of agony, and he tried to pull himself together."

"I—er—"

"My mother killed herself;" the girl's voice was relentless as fate. "They told her you had a wife here in America. She did not want to live after that—"

"Father! Father! Yuri! What does it mean?"

Gerald's frantic voice broke on them now. He had stood there listening, only half comprehending the truth. The cry seemed wrong from him. "Father, I love her. If— if it is all a hideous mistake, say something. Speak—for God's sake!" "It is true, " he said slowly. Gerald rose uneasily. He looked at his father a moment, and caressed the girl with one last look of love and heartbreak, then he turned and left them.

"He will recover," said the father, "he is only a boy. You shall have everything money can buy, all heart could desire; I will—"

The tense excitement was gone. Weary shadows of care crept into the girl's face.

"But I—I love him with all my soul," she said brokenly.