

HER JAPANESE LOVER

BY ONOTO WATANNA

ILLUSTRATED BY ALBERT D. BLASHFIELD



LONG after the young Japanese had left her Alicia Allan stood in silence, her hands clasped before her, a look of sadness and indecision on her face. She had known him now for some months. He was a student friend of her brother, in whom she had taken an especial interest, not only on account of his nationality, but because he had been so exceptionally clever in college. He had spent the summer vacation with them, and she had been thrown a great deal into his company, as a result of which a strong sympathy and friendship had sprung up between them.

Alicia Allan, who had all the delightful, restless ambition of an American girl, could not help but be attracted to him, for the young man was both interesting and interested, and the girl took pleasure in telling him all she could of her home.

He was an exceedingly good-looking Japanese, of medium height, slim but athletic, with fine features, and with eyes wider than the average Japanese eyes; and he carried himself with all the grace and dignity of a Japanese nobleman of the most ancient blood.

Alicia Allan had encouraged the first timid advances he had made toward her, for she was delighted with the novelty of their friendship. Now he had told her he loved her; told her so in his gentle, earnest way, and had asked her to be his wife. Alicia had grown quite white while he had been speaking, and when she spoke there was almost a note of despair in her voice.

"Oh, Mr. Shimoda, you have spoiled our delightful friendship! You have—" She had broken off here, for the young man's face showed how deeply he was suffering. "I am so sorry! I never thought of you otherwise than as a friend." She had watched his face anxiously. "Anything more than that is impossible."

Shimoda had remained silent, his head drooping a trifle, his face drawn with pain. Then he had crossed the room slowly, and paused for a moment at the door.

"You will excuse me this evening?" he asked.

"Yes." She had gone toward him, her sweet blue eyes full of misty tears. "I am so sorry, so sorry!" she kept murmuring. "Don't let it spoil our friendship. I want to be your friend still."

"Thanks," he said, smiling a trifle, and then added, gently, "We will still be friends."

Though there was suffering in his eyes he had bowed with perfect composure and had started slowly out of the room. Her eyes had followed him, but she had been able to summon to her tongue no last words; and so in perfect silence on both sides these two had parted.

SHIMODA ORITO left America almost immediately after his refusal by Alicia, and spent some time in Europe. Then he returned to Japan, there to take a position as sensei (professor) in the Imperial University. He had kept up an almost regular correspondence with Alicia, and the genuine liking and admiration for each other seemed not to have abated on either side, save, perhaps, that the young man had schooled himself to regard her only as a very dear and sweet friend.

He had told his parents about Alicia only a few days after his arrival home. Although Shimoda had tried in every way possible to let his parents see the ideality of his relationship to Alicia (from an American standpoint), nevertheless the two old people could not, and perhaps would not, understand him. They had set their hearts on marrying their son to a young Japanese girl who lived only a short distance from them, and they wondered mournfully whether the years of loneliness they had spent because they had sent him abroad to study was to be recompensed by his loving, not one of his own countrywomen, but an American girl—a girl whom they, the parents, had never even seen.

Now, in all Kyushu there was no girl as beautiful or charming as Haru-san. When she was a little bit of a child Shimoda had carried her home on his shoulder, and had announced to his parents that he intended having her for his little wife some day. The idea had pleased and amused them at the time, for Haru's parents were quite well-to-do people of standing in the city; and, moreover, the girl's daintiness and charm had delighted them so much that they could not help loving her on her own account.

A few days after their son had returned they took him to call on Haru. Haru knew of and expected this visit, so she dressed herself in her prettiest, most becoming costume, arranged her hair in the most bewildering

manner, and was all ready to meet them with the sweet, inimitable grace peculiar to the Japanese girl.

Shimoda's trip abroad had somewhat spoiled his natural love and appreciation of his own home. He had imbued so much of the restless, progressive spirit of the West that at first he found it hard to settle down to the easeful manner of living which the Japanese cultivate, and in which they delight. Yet now, as he sat before Haru-san, watching her deft, pretty fingers as she prepared the tea for him, he felt a sense of restfulness and peace such as he had not experienced during the years in America. He was keenly alive, too, to the girl's beauty and her exquisite taste in all things. She came over and sat down beside him, and the young man was filled with a desire to keep her beside him always, and with a wonder at himself that he should ever have forgotten her.

"WE ARE all glad to see you home, Orito-sama," she told him, very sweetly. He knew she was speaking most for herself, and he smiled at her with quiet pleasure.

Later in the day they went out together and visited the old familiar spots where they had spent so many happy hours together in childhood.

"Always I think you will forget," she said once, very sadly. "I never forget."

In her quiet, gentle words there was to him something of accusation. He looked down upon the dainty little figure, into the dainty little face, and into the eyes in which now sat sadness; but even then behind that sadness he knew there was a smile. A flood of tenderness rushed through him, and for the time swept out of his heart the image of Alicia Allan that long had completely filled it. He had been doing wrong anyhow to cherish the memory of her, he had often told himself, for she did not care.

"No, I have not forgotten," he whispered, bending low over her.

She looked up shyly and searched his face with her eyes.

"It all comes back now, Haru-san," he went on, softly. "How sweet you always were, and what promises we made to each other."

"Promises that we broke," she murmured, still sadly, for they had told her of his infatuation for the American girl. All morning she had been trying to win him back to her. Perhaps she had succeeded already.

"If the promises were broken, Haru-san, may we not mend them? You know what our parents desire, and I am prepared to obey them in all things."

Haru smiled joyously at him. After all, Shimoda was only a young man, and Haru was very beautiful.

IT WAS fifteen months later. Alicia Allan was expecting a visitor. She had filled all the tall vases with exquisite American beauties and had lighted long sticks of incense, whose odor mingled with the fragrance of the roses. Flames leaped up from a cheerful fireplace and added to the comfort of the room. The brightness and warmth of the fire, the fragrance of the incense and of the roses—these Alicia knew would be grateful to the visitor whom she was awaiting, and who would soon be with her.

When Shimoda Orito bowed gravely before her there was a soft light in the girl's face that had not been there when he had seen her last.

"I am so glad to see you back," she told him, holding out both her hands to him, which he took into his own.

"An' I am mos' glad to see you, Miss Allan."

They sat down on a small settee together, and the girl questioned him about his travels. He told her of them, always avoiding one subject, however, just as he had done in his letters from Japan. This was Haru-san.

After he had talked for quite a time, and the constraint that at first seemed to have been about him had worn away, and he had drifted back into the old-time feeling of confidence and sympathy, he in his turn asked what she had been doing since he had left her. She turned her eyes into the glowing grate fire and sketched briefly the course of her life since he had gone away.

A long silence followed her last sentence, during which he saw by her tense face and nervously twisting hands that there was something on her mind of which she would speak to him, but which, seemingly, she half feared to put into words. He waited, motionless, and at

length she turned and looked straight into his face with her beautiful, fearless eyes.

"Do you know," she said, with a bit of maidenly confusion, "I am going to make a confession to you that may sound strange." She paused, flushing a trifle, and for a moment watched the flames from the grate fire as they sprang, wildly roaring, up the chimney. Then she continued:

"After you left America—after you left me—" Again she hesitated. She seemed to be choosing her words with difficulty. "We often make mistakes, you know; we do not know ourselves always. Do you follow me?"

"No."

The flush on her face deepened.

"You make it harder for me. But—I am not like most women; I cannot keep back that which is in me. I must speak now, even—" She had thought it would be an easy matter to tell him, and that he would understand her, as he always did so readily, but she was faltering painfully.

In the months that had gone the girl's heart had awakened. At first it had seemed to her inconceivable that she should love—and marry—a Japanese; she had thought she was merely interested in him. But hardly had she sent him away before she realized that she had made a mistake; that she *did* love him.

"You see—I—" she began again, pitifully, hoping that he would understand and help her. But he sat there, calm and still, watching with grave eyes that seemed only a trifle surprised at her hesitancy.

"Won't you repeat the question you asked me before going away?" she said.

IT WAS out now, and the girl was leaning forward, her face flushed and warm, but very sweet and beautiful with the great moist eyes. She was so sure of her place in his heart that before the man had time to answer she went on with a little nervous catch in her voice:

"You must not think me—bold. It would have been foolish to go through life so, when a few words would have

made things all right. I was mistaken then. I did not know my own heart. Ah! I knew it as soon as you were gone, and you do not know how I regretted—suffered. But I knew you would come back to me, and that all would be well."

The man was shivering. His face looked cold and gray, even in the firelight. He rose to his feet with a quick movement of pain. She, too, had risen, and she was watching him with those beautiful eyes, which still held their trembling joy. How yielding and inviting she looked with her hands half outstretched to him. He did not take them in his. Instead he stepped back a few paces from her.

"It is too late now!"

"Too late!" the girl echoed. She went nearer to him, a frightened, uncomprehending gaze replacing the former look of delight. "I don't understand."

Her voice was so pitiful that even the Japanese calm broke down before it.

"I do not lig' to tell you—to pain you," he said. The light had faded altogether from her face now, but the mute, expectant pain seemed to demand some further explanation. "I respect you with all my heart," he said, with an effort, "and—I will not deceive you."

"No," she broke in, "you do not deceive me. I understand. You have ceased to care for me."

"Not that," he said.

"At first I think I shall never recover that you are impossible for me. Afterward I try very hard to forget you. Your letters comfort much, and I value your friendship most of all on earth. Then I return to Japan, and to please my parents I marry with a Japanese girl. You understand now?"

THE girl dropped into a chair and covered her face with her hands. "Yes, I understand," she said, with heartbreak in her voice.

"Oh, forgive me, Miss Allan!" he said.

"There is nothing to forgive." Her voice quivered a trifle. He was standing by her chair now, looking at her with a mournful gaze.

"Do you love her?" she whispered, huskily.

"Ah, not as I do you!" the young man burst out with a passion she had not thought him capable of.

"And is she with you?" she whispered.

"Yes; at the hotel."

"Bring her to see me."

"Yes."

"No, don't bring her! I don't want to see her!" The passionate, resentful tears were in her eyes. She put her head down on the arm of the chair and began to sob in a hopeless, pitiful fashion.

Shimoda Orito stood watching her a moment in silence. Then very gently he stooped and brushed the soft curls from the girl's forehead, and kissed her, just once. And so he left her.



"Promises that we broke," she murmured.



"He was an exceedingly good-looking Japanese."



"Alicia Allan was expecting a visitor."



"There was no girl as charming as Haru-san."