Chapter I.

THE DANCE

The last rays of sun were lingering in splendor above the bay. The waters had caught the golden glow, and, like his reflection, seemed to be moving to music. Some men also have been an artist, had built a tea-house and laid out a garden. Such a place! In the were round and high and curved in the center, and clinging vines and creeping flowers crisscrossed the sides and the tiny steps by which they were ascended.

The beggars of pleasure who made their way out to the little island on this night moored their boats in the shadows beneath the trees, and drove in fairy vehicles pulled by picturesque coolies, clear around the island, under the pine-trees, over miniature bridges, into the mysterious dark of a forest. Suddenly they were in a blaze of swinging, dazzling lights, laughter and mirth, the chattering of dishes, the twang of the samisen, the recitation of the hero; they had reached the garden and the tea-house. Some pleasure-loving Japanese were giving a banquet in honor of the full moon, and the moon, just over their heads, clothed in glorious raiment, and sitting on a sky-tribute of luscious silver, was attending the banquet in person. Each of the guests had his own little mat, table and waiters. They sat in a circle, and drank the solid hot in tiny cups that went thirty or more to the pint, or the Okra beer that had been ordered for the foreigners, who were the chief guests. This is the toast the Japanese made to the moon, "May she give us drink of immortality," and then each wished the one nearest him ten thousand years of joy.

Now the moon-path widened on the bay and the moon itself grew more luminous, as though understanding and being invited sympathy with the thousand bunyats held in her honor that night. All the music and noise and clatter and revel had gradually ceased, and for a time an eloquent silence was everywhere.

Some one snuffed the candles in the lanterns and threw a large mat in the center of the garden and dined it extravagantly with rice and flour. Then a shaft of light that might have been the combination of a thousand moonbeams was flashed on the mat from an opening in the upper part of the house, and out of the shadows sprang onto the mat a wild, vivid little figure clad in scintillating robes that reflected every ray of the light thrown on them, and with her coming the air was filled with the weird, wholly fascinating music of the koto and samisen.

She presented around on the tips of the toes of one little foot, clasped her hands and curtseyed to the four corners of the earth. Her dance was one of the body rather than of the feet, as back and forth she swayed. There was a patter, patter, patiie. Her garments seemed endowed with life and took on a sorrowing appearance; the lights changed to accompany her; the music sobbed and quivered. It had begun to rain! She was glowing! It seemed almost as if the patter-patter of her feet were the falling of tiny raindrops; the sadness of her garments had increased, and now they seemed to be weeping; at first gradually, then faster and still faster, until finally she was a storm—a dark, blazing, lightning storm. From above the light shot down in quick, sharp flashes, the drums clanged madly, the koto went on and the samisen shrieked vindictively.

Suddenly the storm quieted down and ceased. A blue light flung itself against the now slightly swarving figure, then the seven colors of the spectrum flashed on her. She spread her garments wide; they fluttered above her in a large half-circle, and underneath the rainbow of the gown a girl's face of exquisite beauty smiled and drooped. Then the extinction of light—and she was gone.

A common cry of admiration and wonder broke out from Japanese and foreigners alike. They called for her—clapped, stamped, whistled and cheered. One man's voice rose above the clatter of noises. He was demanding excitedly of the proprietor to tell him who she was.

The proprietor, smiling and bowing, would not tell.

The American theatrical manager lost his head for a moment. He could make that girl's fortune in America! He was ready to offer a good price for her. What was her address—where—?

But the proprietor, still bowing and smiling, shook his head; and then the disputants stilled their argument, for a thrilling, picturesque note had stolen out on the air, so vividly beautiful that indiscriminately every man flushed his breath. The one long note never trembled or wavered. When it had ended they could not say, only that it had passed into other notes as strangely beautiful, and a girl was singing. Again the light flashed down and showed her standing on the same mat on which she had danced, her hands clasped, her face raised. She was ethereal—divinely so. Her kimono was all white save where the shaft of moonbeams touched the silk to silvery brilliance. And her voice! All the notes were minor, piercing, sweet, melancholy, terribly beautiful. She was singing music unheard in any land save Japan, understood only by Japanese, and now for the first time, perhaps, appreciated by the foreigners, because of that voice—a voice meant for just such a medley of melody. And when she had ceased the last note had not died out, did not fall, but remained raised, unfinished, giving to the Occidental ears a sense of incompleteness. Her knees bent forward, peering into the darkness, waiting for the end. The American theatrical manager stalked toward the light, which lingered a moment, and died out as if by magic when he reached it. But the girl was gone...

"By jove! She's great!" he cried out, exultantly.

"A regular nightingale!" Then he turned to the proprietor. "Where is she? Where can I find her?"

"That person shook his head.

"Oh, come now," the American demanded, impatiently; "I'll pay you."

"I don't know; she's gone."

"But you know where she lived?"

"The proprietor again answered in the negative.

"Now wouldn't this make one of this country's rarity of little girls grow?" the exaggerated manager demanded of a young man who had followed him forward.

"She would be a great card in vaudeville," the young man contented himself by saying.

"There's a fortune in her! I'm going to find her if she's on this island! Come on, Reynolds!"

NOTHING lasted. Reynolds fared forth behind the theatrical man, whom he had never seen till that afternoon, and whom he never expected to see again. They hurried down one of the narrow, shady roads that almost made a labyrinth of the island. But fortune was with them. A turn in the road revealed just in front of them two figures—two women—both small, but one a trifle larger than her companion.

"Hi, there! Yes?" shouted the manager, who, though among a people whose civilization was older than his own, considered them but heathens and gave them scant courtesy.

The two figures suddenly stopped.

"Are you the girl who sang?"

"Yes," came the answer in a clear voice from the larger figure.

The manager was not slow in coming to the point.

"Would you like to be rich?"

Again the reply was the positive monosyllable, uttered with much sarcasm.
"Well, I suppose I can't use force to make her take a seat," thought Laurin as she drew out her card-case and handed the girl his card. "Perhaps you'll change your mind after you think about this. You may want to return here on that card; just come around and see me. I'm going downtown this afternoon to get up a prettily arranged meeting at the (guest-room); but you'd better understand that I don't intend to marry anyone at all, even postcards of that class."

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"He attempted to know what she was like who was seeking for a husband, and the last time he saw her, was as little as the girl herself as any of them. She had come to him in quite a different mood. She had attempted to have her followed, but she had eluded him, and had made him promise never to follow her again. He judged from this that her service was slight, and she knew little of her. She came only at night, apparently as a matter of custom. She refused to say to Tokyo, where she disappeared among the crowd. She came irregularly and only when her mind white, appeared when he least expected her and when he needed most, on festivals and occasions of this kind; but he had no means of finding out the truth of the matter.

She was sneaky, uncanny, unlike any Japanese girl he had met before.

"She is beautiful," some one said, almost reverently, after time disjoined statements had come to an end.

At the same time a moment and then added, "Not from a Japanese standpoint."

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"What do you want with me?"

She raised her head and saw her eyes. They startled her. They were large, though narrow, and at one instant, vividly, bright, but so neatly and smoothly and dressed, he had noticed nothing extraordinary about them. She was not a beauty, nor a clever girl, nor even, crushing her lower lip to his nails, she was an 'little creature that made all the other creatures marvelling at her.

"But why do you want to marry me?"

She blushed and her eyes went down. To explain to him why she had come to him in this wise was a painful task. He could guess that. But if he was to be forced to make up the story, he supposed that the friends would make this trip together—which in Tokyo sometimes happened. If his friends believed he was left as a mere boy, and for Laurin Reynolds was to be the beginning of a year's travel preliminary to entering the huskiness of his father, who was a rich shipbuilder. But for some reason, which he never clearly set forth to his friends, he had been left alone. He had urged Laurin to undertake the trip alone, and, under promise to follow shortly, had finally prevailed.

"The woman's home companion."

"Ah, Laurin turned upon him quickly and gave him a sharp push."

A bolt of relief had come over the girls face when Laurin had cried out that he would not marry her, and at this he was overwhelmed. This relief in her face was not needed almost instantaneously by disappointment, but she was far away. She gave him a single hurried glance, until with her head about on a side with his knees, and left him.

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