

The Marriage of Jinyo

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ISHIDA JINYO returned to Japan at the command of his father and the solicitation of his mother. Six years residence in the most modern city in the world had convinced the young man that it would be fatal and impossible for him to submit to rules and duties which, to his now enlightened mind, appeared mediæval.

Men of the modern lands married for love, he told himself fervently. He did not love this girl whom they had chosen for him, and whom he had never even seen. He loved one of the fair daughters of this wonderful land of his adoption. To his supreme joy, she had but recently expressed her willingness to become the Lady Ishida Jinyo. In a condition of youthful ecstasy he hastened to announce the fact to his honorable parents. Hardly had he despatched the letter, however, when he was seized with a sense of uneasiness.

Whatever his apprehensions as to the effect of the announcement upon his parents, he was hardly prepared for the sharp and drastic summons of his father to return to Japan at once. Something in the curt tone of the letter brought before him a memory of his father's unsmiling, impassive face. How quickly had he once rushed to obey the slightest word of command of that parent! Even now, instinctively, mechanically, he obeyed; but his young soul was filled with bitterness and rebellion as he made the journey across the waters. He told himself, repeatedly, that he was a different being from the one who had left Japan so willingly and gone out into the great unknown West. His eyes had been opened to new wonders and truths. He had drunk of an intoxicating fount! There had been much written and said

of the lure of the East; but the spell of the West was stronger, utterly irresistible. Not alone his clothes had changed, but his very mode of thought! He had learned to love! It would be impossible to resume the life of his boyhood, which seemed to him now like a dream.

With these thoughts in mind, he was unprepared for the effect upon him of the first sight of his home. As the rosy-tinted form of the white-robed Fuji-Yama traced its pure outline against the sky, Jinyo was conscious of an exciting throb. Loitering for a few days in Tokyo, the peculiar fascination of the home-land seemed to press itself upon him; unable to analyze it, he started upon the last stages of his journey and arrived at night in his home city, Kioto. As he passed through the familiar streets he felt like one awakening from a strange, long dream, very hard to shake off, and impossible to forget.

Threading in and out through the narrow, twisting streets, watching the shining bodies of his runners as they drew him up and up through the hill country which closes in about Kioto on all sides, Jinyo at last resigned himself to that delicious sense of awakening. Presently the runners had dropped the poles of the vehicle, and he had alighted before his father's house. His emotions strangled him. He could not speak, nor scarcely dared to look at the faces of his parents. The flutter of his mother's sleeves as she came down the path to meet him awoke in his breast old memories. His father's bald head, bowing to the level of Jinyo's knees, touched him to the soul. His mother was prostrating! He tried to return their deep obeisances, but it was six years since he had indulged in such exquisite courtesies. His

back and neck were stiff. He was painfully conscious of his American clothes, the derby hat, creased trousers, yellow gloves and shoes.

Jinyo put out his hands gropingly:

"Mother! Father!"

His voice was husky, unsteady. There was a pause. Then, her sweet voice trembling slightly, his mother spoke the simple words with which the polite Japanese greet each other when they meet:

"I pray you excuse my rudeness the last time we met."

And his father:

"It is a long time since I hung upon your honorable eye-brows."

This was his welcome home! There came up vividly before the young man a memory of his farewell with his American sweetheart and her family. They had kissed him—the mother and many sisters of the girl, and finally she herself! He blushed hotly at the very memory, and again felt that tingling thrill which had weakened and dazzled him then. How they had clung to his hands, thrown their arms about his neck, wept noisily!

Now his own parents mechanically bowed to him and murmured polite words of greeting. He felt the need, the thirsty desire for the warm expressions of that other land.

As he followed them up the path, something in his mother's drooping shoulders moved him. Stooping suddenly he looked into her face wistfully. There was a silvery light from the moon, and under its beam for a moment he saw clearly his mother's eyes. They were moist! Then he understood. It was he who had raised the barrier between them. It was he who had changed, who was queer—unnatural. He drew his mother back into the shadow of the wistaria grove, and as his father passed out of sight, Jinyo took her in his arms and kissed her!

"What is—that?" she stammered in a muffled voice, wiping with her sleeve her cheek where his lips had touched.

"An expression of—love!" he whispered huskily.

Timidly, she laid her hand upon his

arm, as if to restrain him, and her touch recalled the many times when, as a boy, her little hand had rested there, half chidingly, half pleadingly. In the dim light he could see that her eyes were shining.

"Pray thee excuse the honorable father from the new embrace, my son," she said, and there was a touch of anxiety in her voice. "It is"—she thought a moment, and tried to smile approvingly—"honorably comfortable, but—er—requiring scientific knowledge properly to appreciate."

At that he laughed, but there was an hysterical sound to his laughter. His father, hearing him, turned back. Jinyo, upon a sudden impulse, told him what he had done, and the comment of his mother. His father looked at him stolidly a moment, and then, the *samurai* calm of his face unbroken, he said, brusquely:

"The honorable father will endure the West embrace also."

With unblinking eyes, he solemnly lifted his face. Jinyo bent quickly and kissed him. Then, his heart feeling strangely light, he threw an arm about the shoulder of either parent, and three abreast, they went up the path.

In the doorway, above which a single lantern shed a ruddy light, a young girl awaited them. As Jinyo saw the little bowing figure, all his moodiness and misery returned upon him in a flood. His arms slipped, unconsciously, from his parents' shoulders. Almost he seemed about to retreat. He desired to retrace his steps, to go anywhere, save into his father's house, where, upon the very threshold, the one they had chosen for him awaited his coming.

The light of the lantern gleamed upon the glittering ornaments of her head and showed the two small hands submissively placed upon her knees; but it was impossible to see the girl's face. Slowly, shyly she retreated from the doorway, bowing at every step. Presently she had vanished into the house.

His father's voice was very cool and sturdy:

"Daughter of the Saito house of im-

perishable fame! It will be an honor to be allied to so august a family."

His mother's voice was timid, and the note of anxiety had deepened. Her eyes, too, entreated her son's gaze.

"She is as virtuous as she is beautiful, my son."

He started to speak, but bit back the passionate words. Not yet could he find it in him to drive the light from his father's face, the hope from his mother's.

They did not even consult him in regard to the celebrations in his honor. His father, a man of wealth, spared no expense in the matter. Invitations were despatched to even the most remote relatives and connections, and the entire Ishida family (one might say clan) gathered in Kioto to celebrate the nuptials of Ishida Jinyo and Saito Ochika.

The very assurance and speed with which his father had pressed the preparations for the wedding, swept the young man from his feet. There seemed no opportunity, even had he found the courage, to declare himself, as, daily, he told himself he must do. Passive, filial obedience was what they seemed to expect of him. And so, with incredible speed the days passed away, and finally there came the ceremony of betrothal.

The house and extensive gardens were put into a holiday dress; thousands of butterflies purchased to illuminate the gardens were set free from their cages, while the geisha houses contributed of their best talent for the night.

There was an air of festivity in the entire neighborhood, over which the Ishida family dominated by reason of its ancestry, power and wealth.

Ochika was invisible, but it had already become the boast of the family that no lovelier bride in all Kioto had ever entered the house of the dread ancestors. Certain it was that they would be propitiated, just as the heart of the bridegroom must inevitably be won.

Meanwhile, the sliding doors of his chamber securely fastened by an imported lock, the distracted bridegroom paced the floor. At his father's desire, he was garbed in the conventional dress of

the Japanese; but the *hakama* were awry, the dress badly fastened; for he had refused assistance from man or maid. He was biting his lips so cruelly that the blood started to the surface, and one hand, deep in the pocket of his sleeve, was clenched about a piece of paper. It was a letter that had come to him only that day, answering his own desperate summons to her to join him at once in Japan.

From day to day, he had gone along, passively, automatically obeying the voice of authority, just as he had done when a boy. To all true Japanese he was but doing his instinctive duty. Duty! That was the greatest word, so they said, in the entire language. It was greater than love, so they earnestly averred and believed. But, ah! in America, the land to which he believed he truly belonged, love was paramount! He felt that his weakness, cowardice, as he named it, would vanish were she but to come to him. Her presence would strengthen his vacillating will. Now, desperately, despairingly, his hand was clenched about the girl's answer to his appeal:

"There is only one way in which I can answer you," she had written. "Come to me here, in America, Jinyo. I cannot understand the Japanese code of honor. I only know we love each other, and that by every natural law and instinct you should be at my side. With your family hostile to me, can you really ask me to go to you in Japan? I cannot do that. It is your place to come to me. I give you the choice of two courses. Come to me—or give me up!"

It seemed to the agonized young man that two forces were dragging him in opposite directions. How ardently had he hoped she would understand the situation, and would help him! What should he do? What was his duty? Should he obey the impulse of desire and hasten to her side with the speed of wings?

It was not possible to put behind one the claims not alone of a lifetime, but of one's very ancestors. Nor could he disgrace the ones who had given him life.

Out in the gardens a geisha's voice shrilled sweetly. She was singing an ancient song of honor and supreme sacrifice. He opened a *shoji* and looked out. Everywhere the swinging lanterns were hung from eave and lintel, and strung down the long bamboo avenue. Like twinkling, fairy lights, the fireflies danced in and out among the trees. The buzz of murmuring voices, the moving figures of attending waitresses, the penetrating odor of the pipes, all the dimly familiar symbols of his early youth, dazzled him now. As on that first night when he had driven up to his father's house through the hills, Jinyo was conscious now of a sense of beguilement, almost of hypnotism. It was as if suddenly he had found a treasure, long-lost. Why, then, could he not rid his heart of this piercing ache?

His mother's voice called to him gently outside the screens. All through the evening she had sought to force the sliding screens apart, but the unyielding western lock held them firmly closed.

"Jinyo!" Her voice was barely above a whisper.

Now she was moistening the paper, scratching a hole in the *furuma* (new and costly in his honor). Her lips were at the opening.

"Jinyo!"

"Mother?"

"They toast the honorable moon!"

Silence a moment; then he said gruffly:

"That is well."

"It is necessary," she pleaded, "that you lend prestige to the occasion with your honorable presence."

Silence again, and then he said less gruffly:

"I will come. Go before me, if you please."

Over the gardens the moon rode in lordly splendor. There was a clear, star-sprinkled sky, and the air was balmy and cool. A dancer, attended by her apprentice and maid, was posturing, her body, arms, hands and head, moving and swaying with a curious preciseness in the classical dance. There was, to Jinyo, a subtle fascination about her every move-

ment. Not the slightest twist or motion of even her smallest finger was lost upon him. It was incredible the effect obtained by the mere motion of the body. How the little sparkling hands seemed to speak! Was ever a neck or wrist more fragile! He found himself marveling at his ability to feel so keenly. Why, even the dancing of this geisha girl caused him a pang. Was it pleasure or pain—or both, he asked himself, and knew that it was because she was typical of Japan, the land he had believed he had put far behind him.

His father's face, benevolent, even smiling now, beamed at him from across the circle of guests. A lump rose in his throat, and the hand, clenched about the letter, loosened. Could he, publicly, turn against the honored parent?

The smiling, friendly gaze of those who wished him well, smote his heart. Was it possible to betray their confidence in him?

Why, these honorable guests who drank to his health and wished him ten thousand years of joy, were of his own blood, his kindred, his family! They were of one seed with him. The family honor, the ancestors' honor, this was what they had gathered together to celebrate!

His father was speaking, the relatives giving respectful attention to every word. Modestly, yet with a certain dignified pride, the head of the family sketched the honorable history of the illustrious ancestors.

"There is no seed to a great man!" The father of Jinyo quoted the ancient proverb reverently. At the same time he pointed out that while none could inherit greatness, it behooved the descendants to honor the exalted ones, by striving to imitate their virtues and talents. It was impossible to turn a deaf ear to the voices of the departed ones, who demanded that their race be honorably sustained. It was the supreme duty of the descendants to make the offerings and keep the race alive! Marriage was a sacred duty, not a matter of desire. Modern times had not, fortunately, effaced from the Japanese conscience the

supreme ideal of duty. His son, Jinyo, represented an honorable example of this, for, after six years residence in foreign lands, he had returned to Japan—to do his duty! The West lands might alter his clothes, his food, his point of view even, they could not change—his heart! That, happily, would remain through all time, pure Japanese!

In the pause that ensued the relatives refilled their pipes and swallowed countless thimblefuls of *saké*. They smiled significantly at one another, and whispered cheerfully among themselves. All knew of Jinyo's American predilections, and of his expressed desire to marry a daughter of that land; but one and all were confident that his wavering was but transient. Strange drinks intoxicate.

Now, pipes suspended, bowls inverted, attentively they awaited the speech of the bridegroom; for, suddenly, he had arisen unsteadily to his feet. Even in the shadowy light of the gardens, his eyes glittered strangely, and the pallor of his face was marked. His voice was hoarse. He seemed to be laboring under some intense excitement, no longer possible of repression.

"The frog in the pond knows not the great ocean," said the young man, "and, knowing it not, is happy in its pool. Transported to the great sea's bosom the hapless one, intoxicated by its vastness, must in the end become engulfed. So it is with the youth sent out into strange lands. Alas! the vast waters suck them into their heart, and it is not possible ever again completely to escape. The fate of the honorable frog has been that of the humble member of the honorable house of Ishida. He has tried, vainly, to dam up the ocean with his hand—but his hand is small, and 'the ocean ignores the dust.'"

He stopped, conscious of the effect of his words. The silence of the family was more eloquent than a torrent of noises. The unaccustomed *saké* rose to Jinyo's head, which seemed to swim in vertigo. He tried to speak further, but his tongue refused. Suffering intensely, aware of the disgrace of his visible emotion, a sob rose in his throat.

Suddenly, he became conscious that some one very close to him had whispered his name.

"Jinyo! Jinyo-sama!"

It might have been his mother's voice, so gentle, so coaxing, so wistful its tone. Like one in a dream, slowly he turned, and, for the first time, he beheld the face of his bride.

She was as pale as he, but in her long, dark eyes was a calm as soothing and sweet as a summer sea. The eyes of a Japanese woman are a veiled mystery, into which a man may not look, until his marriage day. The girl beside him had lifted the veil, and Jinyo saw! Such a sense of light flooded the being of the tempest-tossed Jinyo, he felt enervated, weakened. Reaching out his hand blindly, he felt it enclosed by hers, warm, pressing, comforting beyond expression.

His eyes wandered vaguely across the circle—embraced the surrounding scenery, lingered on the moving maids, the geishas tuning their instruments, and suddenly he ceased to struggle. His home—his own land had drawn him back! It alone was real, and all else that had come between was as a dim dream, soon to be blotted out. Looking at that precious circle of faces, he knew, with a glad, triumphant thrill, that he was part of it. In the eyes of the one, whose little hand rested confidently within his own, he had found the most precious treasure of life—peace!

The guests were bestirring themselves. It was growing very late. With repressed smiles, low chuckles, whispered assurances and, perhaps, a few tears, they were departing.

Something crinkled in the sleeve of Ishida Jinyo. Half absently he drew it out. For a moment he looked at it, almost curiously. Then, still abstractedly, he began to roll it into a little ball. As, suddenly, he snapped it with his fingers, so that it bounced into the air and disappeared, the girl beside him broke into low, silvery laughter, and Jinyo, looking into her deep eyes again, laughed with her.