

A KISS



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ILLUSTRATED BY HOWARD V. BROWN

MISS PINE TWIG pricked her little finger. It hurt, but she did not cry; nor did she even lift her cool little face from her work. As far as her companion could see, his words had affected her very little. After a moment of apparently calm reflection, however, she said, very politely:

"Thas very nize speech you mek unto me. Why you doan also speag it unto my papa?"

He had immediately a mental picture of the unsmiling, sphinxlike countenance of the great Japanese admiral. Tell *him*, the silent, brooding, fearful old warrior, whose very presence inspired one with a creepy feeling of reluctant respect and uneasy admiration, that his daughter's face was like unto a half-blown lotus blossom, and that it was the dearest desire of his heart to transport her from the land of gods to the suspicious home of "foreign devils"!

Pine Twig watched his face out of the corner of her tip-tilted little eye, and, at the expression of dismay her suggestion aroused, she turned slightly

away from him and resumed her work, her lips drawn into a pout. For a time she worked away in silence, drawing her needle in and out mechanically and steadying the embroidery frame upon her knee. Presently, however, she condescended to speak again, and her soft little words seemed to graze him almost like the blow from a ball of eiderdown.

"I *lig* you ask my papa," she said.

"You *like*!" he repeated ecstatically. "Oh, then you *do* care! Look at me, Pine Twig—or are you afraid to?"

She gave him a serene, perfectly composed glance, then dropped her eyes demurely.

"I daughter of a fighter," she said gently. "I am not 'fraid of anyt'ing." She paused, and added, with just the slightest touch of reproach: "Bud you are 'fraid! You 'fraid to speag those words unto my papa."

"No, I'm not!" he protested. "I'll speak to him—er—to-night! I'll beard the old lion—I mean I'll even get down on my knees to him, if necessary!"

She shook her head very gravely at that.



"Maybe—no!" exclaimed the young man, aghast. "You don't mean there's the possibility of his turning me down, do you?"

"My papa nod lig knees. He a fighter!"

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Robert Bradley ruefully. Then, edging a bit nearer to her: "But as long as you have decided for me, that about settles it, doesn't it?"

"It nod even begun git settled yit!" said Pine Tree in remonstrance. "Japanese girl kinnod speag for herself in soach matter. She got no tongue. Her papa got speag for her. He say, 'Yaes' —or, mebbe, 'No-o.' Thas hard to say which word he speag unto you."

"Maybe—no!" exclaimed the young

man, aghast. "You don't mean there's the possibility of his turning me down, do you?"

"It mos' ligely!" said Pine Twig, and she sighed hugely at the thought.

Her lover sat up very stiffly.

"What would he find to object to in me?" he demanded.

The girl examined him, with her little head on one side. Then she spoke very softly:

"Nossing. I t'ink you are all ride, bud —all same you jus' 'Merican-jin. My papa prefer me marry wiz glorious Japanese gents."

"We'll have to knock that idea out of his head. That'll be dead easy. You leave it to me. Any one with an ounce of horse sense can see that a girl is better off as the wife of an American than a Japanese. You know it, don't you, darling? For Heaven knows I've been at pains enough ever since I've known you to show you the advantage of marrying an American. Why, here you are nothing but a little dove in a cage!"

A dimple stole into Miss Pine Twig's pretty round cheek, and she looked at her lover very archly, very teasingly.

"Ah, yes, you always tellin' me 'boud those nize t'ings those American girls kin do. But I dunno, account I have never seen any those nize t'ings. I lig learn some of them. Why you doan tich me, Misterer Bradley?"

She had actually laid aside her embroidery frame, and was standing up, facing him, the tempting, naughty little smile still dimpling her face. In the short, sharp-drawn silence that fell between them, she must have guessed that he contemplated something new and audacious, for there came into her brown eyes an excitement equal to his own. As he stepped nearer to her, she put out her hand suddenly, as if to ward off what was about to come

"You—you goin' give me demonstration—mebbe now—of some those nize t'ings—mebbe?" she demanded breathlessly.

"I am going to kiss you!" said Robert Bradley tensely.

"Oh-h!" said Miss Pine Twig, her cheeks very red, her little eyes stretched as wide as they would open. "I—I—have already hear 'boud those kuss, b-but—I have n-never yet—taste! Though I wan' do so!"

Whereupon, Mr. Bradley kissed her.

He felt very brave, very superior even, when he first looked down from his great height at the short and stumpy

little Japanese whom he contemplated annexing as a father-in-law; but as the keen, beady little eyes took him in from head to foot in one sharp, comprehensive, and seemingly unflattering glance, Bob became conscious of an inner sense of inferiority and meanness. He was glad indeed to sit, even upon the floor—politely indicated by the admiral—for he was painfully aware of a certain knee weakness of which previously he had not known he was capable.

His tongue moved in his mouth, and he carefully moistened his lips. He also opened them, but no words of demand rushed riotously forth.

At the age of seventeen Bob had once launched upon a similar undertaking in America, and the result of that explosive interview had left such a vivid and lasting effect upon his young mind that even now, at the mature age of twenty-three, he recalled it with an inner quaking. Before he had entered the presence of the Japanese admiral, Bob had assured himself that circumstances were entirely different. An American father was a totally different proposition from a little Japanese. Now, however, as he stealthily watched Admiral Higo calmly lighting and re-lighting his one-whiff pipe, apparently utterly indifferent to, and indeed oblivious of, his caller, all the old terrors of his position rushed upon the youth.

So far, the admiral had addressed not a single word to his enforced guest. He appeared to be in a brown study and had apparently forgotten even the presence of Mr. Bradley. Evidently he thought the young man like the many other curious people, native and foreign, who came to his house—and always were courteously received—merely in order to look at the little great man who had whipped so thoroughly a certain proud and boastful Western nation. They were a daily occurrence—these calls—and they bored the little hero. He drowsed and nodded over his

pipe, while the young man sat watching him in a condition of real anguish.

The silence, at first embarrassing, became unendurable torture as it continued, and at last Bob desperately broke it.

"America is a place where——"

The admiral stopped drawing on his pipe. His eyelids quivered as if about to lift. Bob continued heroically:

"——where stars and s——"

Admiral Higo had resumed his smoking. His head nodded more drowsily. Could it be possible, thought Bob heatedly, that he was going to sleep? He must be aroused at all hazards. He now shouted his words:

"America is a country where women are treated like—like——" he began excitedly, and just then he encountered the steely, beady, seemingly threatening glitter of the admiral's little black eyes, as for what seemed the fraction of a moment the shielding lids were lifted. There was something almost humorously sinister about that quick, cynical glance.

Mr. Bradley now sat with his mouth grimly closed. He waited a while, hoping that by some miracle his host would actually speak, but when he found this was not to be, he again made an effort, but jerked back abruptly before he had spoken a word. A creepy, prickly sensation ran down his spine as he recognized a sound with which foreigners in Japan soon become familiar. Some one outside the screen, directly at the back of the admiral, was scratching a hole in the fusuma. Bob watched the point, fascinated. A little rosy, fine finger presently wiggled its way through, then disappeared, and in its place came an eye. Bob knew that eye. It put the final gag upon his fluttering tongue. He sat there, grinning foolishly at the blank-faced Japanese.

The shadows in the room began to darken. A maid in stocking feet pattered silently into the room and lit the

andons. There was the movement outside the screens of maids scurrying to and fro. Then came the clatter of dishes, and Bob knew that dinner was in progress. They were waiting for him to go! His ardently desired father-in-law yawned capacious behind his fan.

Bob stood up. There were "pins and needles" in his feet and legs from the unaccustomed position. Also, there were bitter pins and needles pricking at his young heart. His host arose, too, still indifferently polite and still—silent! He was bowing mechanically, and his attitude was clearly that of one bidding farewell to, or, as Bob bitterly put it, dismissing, an esteemed caller.

"I wanted to say——" said Bob huskily.

The Japanese turned his little eyes upon the American, and the latter ingloriously finished, "er—to say—good night!"

The admiral bowed, and continued to bow.

Once outside the house, Bob walked blindly down the little pebbled pathway, swung the bamboo garden gate savagely open, and was in the roadway when he heard Miss Pine Twig calling to him:

"Misterer! Misterer Bladley!"

There she was leaning over the gate, and, though it was quite dark, Bob could have sworn she was laughing at him. He went miserably back toward her.

"So-o," she began softly, "you 'fraid my papa. He a fighter—nod lig 'fraid mans. Now he goin' to marry me ride away to Misterer Marquis Ichigo. He —those Marquis Ichigo fighter, too. He nod 'fraid speag to Admiral Higo!"

"What's that? You mean to tell me you'd marry any one but me?" demanded Bob, in raging excitement. This was the last straw. Pine Twig turning on him, too! He was gripping her little hand so tightly that it

hurt, and she let out a little squeal of pain and indignation.

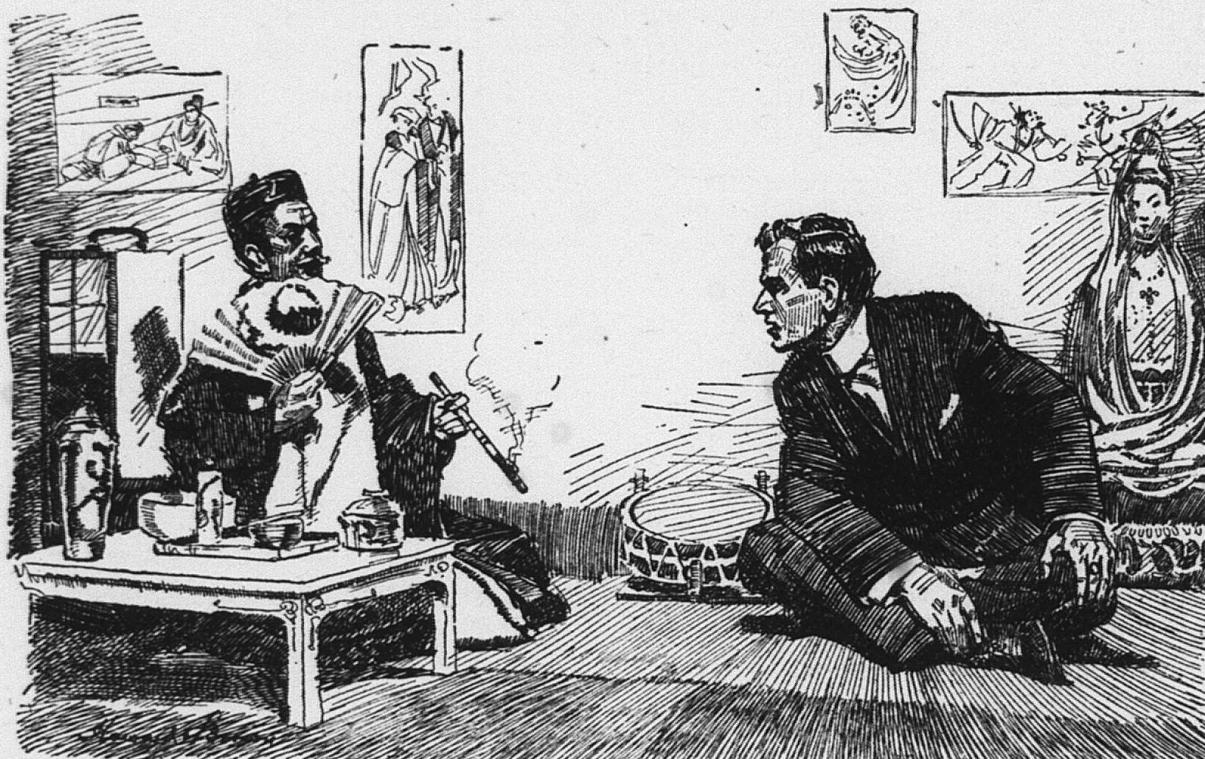
"Oh-h! Now you see you are velly strong man. You nod 'fraid to hurt liddle bit me. *You jus' 'fraid my papa.*"

"I'm not afraid of him," denied Bob strenuously. "But you don't understand matters. It requires a certain—er—genius for a foreigner to tackle a Japanese like your father. I'm not through yet. Don't you believe it! I'm

his full consent. Ichigo, indeed! That little slant-eyed hea—I mean Jap! You mean to say you'd rather have him than me?"

"I *got* marry wiz him!" declared Pine Twig stubbornly. "I *got* do it. I got marry a brave man. My papa have tell me so tousan' time already. I got marry man lig my papa. He a fighter!"

"Now look here," said Bob in his most coaxing and irresistible way, "you



His ardently desired father-in-law yawned capacious behind his fan.

going about it, though, in another way. I'm going to see Hardie. You know who he is. He was at college with your father in America, and he gave me that card of introduction to you all. Now he's here in Tokyo with his wife again, and I'm going to bring him out here and sick him on the old cod—old gentleman. You just wait, Piney. Ichigo, indeed! Hm! I'd like to see you! Why, for two cents I'd pick you right up now and carry you off whether your dad wanted me to or not; but I'm not going to be done that way. No, sir! I'm going to have you with

help the thing along, too, darling. Speak to your father, and tell him that you *want* to—that you are *going* to—marry *me*. Tell him all about me—who I am—and the work I'm doing in Yokohama. Tell him you *want* to marry an American and—"

Suddenly she pulled her little hands from under his and brought them together in a soft little clap of excitement.

"Oh, oh! I will tell you whad I will do. I will demonstrate upon my papa those nize American t'ing—whad you call it?—kuss—thad you have tich me!"

"Wh-hat!"

"I tick him, too!" cried Miss Pine Twig with enthusiasm. "Oh, how he goin' to lig those!"

"No, no, no, for Heaven's sake!" cried Bob in wild alarm. "Don't tell him I taught you any such thing. He's lived in America, and he—"

But she was already halfway up the path to the house.

Miss Pine Twig trotted into the chamber where her papa was still clumsily filling his pipe. She took it from his hands, carefully and skillfully refilled the little bowl, and, with a winning smile, replaced it in his mouth. The admiral's weather-beaten face had undergone a remarkable change. Almost he seemed to bask in the sunshine of the girl's presence. His eye followed her fondly as she fluttered about the room, assisting and directing the maids as they laid his favorite dishes in succession before him, and herself spearing the appetizing live fish upon his plate.

Throughout the meal she was silent, as became a well-brought-up young lady, and she listened with the most flattering attention to her father, now grown strangely garrulous. He told her tales and incidents of the recent campaign that not even his secretaries and biographers had heard before; and always he pointed out to the young girl the wonderful physical and moral superiority of the Japanese race over all others, and the godlike qualities of the emperor, whose mere instrument he, Higo, had been.

She let him run along until the meal was quite cleared away. Then she moved closely to his side; indeed, she nestled against him like a little kitten, and her fragrant, soft little cheek rubbed against his chin.

"Papa," she said, "it is true the Americans are not like Japanese. Sometimes they are afraid to speak out aloud

what is in their insides; but all the same it is well—is it not, papa?—that we should copy their virtues."

"Oh, yes," agreed the admiral with tolerant graciousness. "I believe in progress for our race. We will adopt the best the West-country people have to give, and discard what we do not want or need. Is that what my little girl means?"

Pine Twig was now kneeling, and her face came directly opposite her father's. He was struck by its curious sensitiveness and by the unusual excitement of the pretty brown eyes.

"But there is something else—something very nice they do. We must learn to do it, too. I like it!" she finished naïvely.

"And what is that?" inquired her father, surprised.

"It's a—kuss, they call it!" said little Pine Twig softly. "It is—like this!" and she leaned over and put her moist, open little mouth upon her father's grizzled cheek. If she had bitten him, he could not have started more.

"What is that?" he demanded roughly.

"A—kuss!" she stammered. "You do not like it, papa?" Her expression was piteous.

"No, no!" shouted the admiral. "It is foolish—indecent! I will speak to your governess. She must be more careful in her choice of foreign books for you."

"B-but I did not learn that from a book!" said Pine Twig softly. "Some one do that unto me already!"

Her father had jumped to his feet and was glaring at her strangely.

"A man?" he snarled, almost as if he were about to spring upon her.

She backed in alarm before his menacing attitude till she came to the farthest screen, and against this she leaned, half fearfully, half defiantly.

"Yes, a man!" she gasped. "And—and—I like it!"

Then, shoving the sliding doors apart, she ran from the room, sobbing.

He began to pace the floor, pulling fiercely at his great lower lip with his thumb and forefinger. Who was it had laid profane hands—worse, unhealthy lips—upon the daughter of the exalted Admiral Higo? How had this happened without his knowledge? Which of the many white friends who had come daily to pay him false homage had dared thus to impose upon his hospitality? It had been a mistake to permit the young girl to be seen at all. The old method of educating the daughters of Japan was safer, saner, better in every way. Hereafter Miss Pine Twig should be dispatched to some distant province and kept in proper seclusion. She had been improperly raised; that was very apparent.

The matter of his daughter's future disposed of thus harshly, it was characteristic of the little hero instantly to feel a softening toward the culprit. He thought of Pine Twig's mother, long dead, of his own absences in America, and of the war that had separated them in recent times. His eyes became moist, and the hand pulling at his lower lip trembled.

"I am getting hard in my old age," he grumbled. "What should a mere man-killer know of the heart of a little girl?"

No, he determined not to send his little Pine Twig away from him. She had committed no fault. Besides what harm was there in this little Western "kuss," anyhow? The admiral pursed



"Now look here," said Bob, "you help the thing along, too, darling."

out his lips. Pff! It was nothing but a smacking of the honorable lips. And for this, a little thing like this, he had driven his little girl to tears! Well, he would seek her out instantly, and if she liked such things, she should have them! He, Admiral Higo himself, would tolerate her practicing the art upon him personally.

"You understand," said Robert Bradley to his friends, the Hardies, "that Pine Twig is entirely different from other Japanese girls. She's just a darling little dove in a cage. Don't for a moment confuse her with the little simpering mousmees one sees abroad in the streets. Pine Twig is the real article, the kind of girls foreigners hear about, but never are permitted to see. You, of course," turning pityingly toward Hardie, whose susceptibility for the aforesaid "simpering little mousmees" had always been a sore subject between him and his wife, "only know her father, as she was attending the peeresses' school when you were here before. Now you want to be careful how you speak to *her*. The little thing has been brought up in that secluded, almost crushing fashion the Japanese of high caste think necessary for their young girls, and, until her father became famous, she had never even seen a white man. In fact, I am the only white man she really knows at all well," finished Bob, with justifiable pride.

"Is she pretty?" was Jim Hardie's question, though he regretted it the next moment, for his wife was at his elbow instantly.

"Is she?" repeated Bob vociferously. "Well, I haven't the vocabulary necessary to describe Pine Twig, being a mere architect of Yokohama and not a poet!"

Mrs. Hardie laughed a bit skeptically, but her husband nodded understandingly, and they set out at once for the house of Higo.

In the ozashiki Miss Pine Twig was discovered very much occupied and apparently entertained. A little apple-cheeked boy, whose round, solemn little face was a comical reproduction of the famous admiral's, was leading Miss Pine Twig a wild chase about the room. The child was not crying, but was roaring loud protests against some infi-

tion his sister seemed bent upon forcing on him. Set suddenly free, just as his sister had caught him by the sleeve, by the unexpected advent of the American visitors, Toro fled with a departing cry of disgusted triumph.

Pine Twig turned upon her guests a rosy, laughing face.

"What you t'ink, Misterer Bladley," said she. "I am jus' tich my brother some nize American t'ing lig you know, and he nod lig it. He—he jus' same my papa. He a fighter!"

"Oh, so you do know some of our customs, then," said Mrs. Hardie sweetly as she extended her hand.

"Yaes, I know," nodded Pine Twig archly. "And also I have tich it to my papa and to Madame Haru-no, to Goto, to Omatsu, and also Toro, my little honorable brother. All lig those t'ing bud my papa and Toro. They nod un'erstan' nize American t'ing. They fighter!"

Jim Hardie, corpulent and perspiring, had taken possession of the one Western article the room boasted, a big, soft rocking-chair presented by some admirer to the admiral, and now he mopped his red brow and watched the little Japanese girl approvingly.

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Hardie. "And what particular 'nize American t'ing' is it you are so enthusiastic about?"

"To kuss!" said Miss Pine Twig, smiling so that two shining rows of perfect little teeth gleamed attractively through her full red lips. "I lig to kuss!" said she.

Behind Mrs. Hardie's ample back, Bob Bradley was making frantic signs and motions to Miss Pine Twig Higo, but she only regarded him with wide-eyed wonderment.

"Cuss!" repeated Mrs. Hardie, scandalized. "Why, no—no, indeed—that is not one of our nice customs at all, and I think—" She turned just in time to intercept one of Bob's most eloquent signs to Pine Twig. "Why,

Bob Hardie, do you mean to tell me," she cried belligerently, "that you have been teaching this poor little girl to swear!"

Miss Pine Twig rushed valiantly to her lover's rescue. She was not her papa's daughter for nothing, and her papa—he was a fighter!

"No, no!" she cried. "Misterer Bladley *nod* tich me to swear. Thas bad words. I *nod lig speag* them. Thas *mistek!* He—he—thad Misterer Bladley tich me how to—kuss! *I show you—*"

She looked about her for an object upon which to illustrate, and her glance fell upon the red, working face of Mrs. Hardie's husband. Pine Twig approached him gingerly. Then she stooped and brought her face on a level with his.

"What on earth—" began Mrs. Hardie, and then she screamed.

"I *demonstrade*," said Pine Twig sweetly, "ag'inst your hosban'." And then that innocent, lonely, secluded, refined, and guarded little dove in a cage deliberately placed her charming little mouth upon the eager and uplifted lips of Jim Hardie.

At the same moment that Mrs. Hardie screamed, Bob sprang forward like one possessed. He seized Pine Twig by the huge bow of her obi, and forcibly, madly, dragged her from Hardie. The latter lay back panting, gasping in his seat, but presently there burst from him a loud: "Haw, haw, haw, haw!" that might have been, and was, heard all over the house.

"Don't do that again, you little fool!" cried Bob savagely; "or—or I'll be obliged to kill him if you do."

Pine Twig pulled herself from his grasp.

"You *tich* me do those!" she cried.

"Yaes, you *tich* me do. You say thas mos' nize American t'ing of all!" Her voice trembled with the sound of indignant tears.

"I know I did, darling," cried the now penitent Bob. "But I forgot to tell you that such things are only for—for sweethearts and husbands and wives. It isn't proper to kiss any one else. Just the person you marry or the one you are about to."

Pine Twig's face was a study.

"Ooh!" she said. "B-bud I doan wan' mek marry wiz *him*! I kinnod do!"

"I should say you can't!" snorted Bob jealously. "But you've kissed me, too, you see; so there's only one thing left for us to do, don't you see?"

Pine Twig nodded with alacrity, and upon her face was the same naughty, teasing little smile that had first tempted Bob to kiss her. This time he valiantly withstood the temptation. He turned his back, in fact, upon Miss Pine Twig.

"Say, you there, Hardie, if you want to make yourself square with me and Mabel"—Hardie cast an apprehensive eye at his frigid-looking wife—"you get busy. The admiral's in there somewhere. Go in and explain all about this kiss business, and make it clear, will you, that it's absolutely necessary for his and Pine Twig's honor that she should marry the man she has kissed." Hardie started delightedly, but blinked at an unseen pinch administered by his spouse. "You know whom I mean," said Bob disgustedly. "Now go along. And, say, when you pass through that screen there, don't turn around—and remember those peek holes are not for respectable foreigners! There's something I want to say to Pine Twig that I don't want *any one* to see!"

