

The Red Book Magazine
(May 1911): 49-57.



Tokiwa

A Tale of Old Japan

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ILLUSTRATED BY KYOHEI INUKAI

FOR fourteen consecutive days she had remained before the shrine, eating no food, drinking little water, sleeping not. Mechanically she went through the monotonous motions, bending her body back and forth, until it seemed like some mechanical puppet, working clock-like back and forth, her parched, weary lips uttering only the feeble common prayer of the devout Buddhist: *Namu, Amida Butsu!*" ("Save us, Eternal Buddha!")

A venerable bonze, almost blind and entirely bald, slipped his rosary drowsily

from finger to finger. Tokiwa saw him not, though well she knew that he was at her side, and ever her dry lips intoned: "*Namu, Amida Butsu!*" Thus for fourteen days. Then she dropped forward, her brow striking for the last time the stone feet of the great image. The bonze, assured of the completeness of her penance, carried her aloft into the great hall of the nuns. There he left her, in peace at last, and started upon his pilgrimage.

Many years before, hundreds of monks had congregated before this same, then

gorgeous, altar, chanting their splendid ritual; but the fanatical Nichiren sect had pointed out to the world the faithlessness of its priests—who ate the forbidden meat, who lived in open luxury and licentiousness, who flaunted their wealth in the face of a poverty bowed world, and whose political power knew no limit. A zealous band of bigots of this rival sect attempted to burn the monastery. It had withstood the assault of the incendiaries, but the marks and ravages of the attack were physically upon its walls. It became uninhabitable for monks of wealth and ambition. For years it remained untenanted, a weird yet rugged old mass, stripped of its wealth, but not its beauty—deserted, falling to the decay of neglected age.

A bonze at the Court of the Emperor, an eager missionary and loyal servant, incurred the displeasure of the Emperor's master, the Shogun, or war-lord of Japan. Without warning his family had been attacked and practically exterminated. Driven from pillar to post, he found himself at last a deserted fugitive, with nothing remaining to him but the dear one at his feet, she who had followed him upon all his wanderings. In the act of committing *suppuku*, he perceived the wide, appealing glance of the child upon her back. It too, still lived. Swiftly the sword was replaced, and he set himself another task. He penned a humble petition to his enemy, finding in a fisherman a willing courier to the capital. His request was granted. He was ordered to shave his head and retire to the ruined monastery on the shore of Kamakura.

In this retreat, the broken-spirited bonze gave himself up to a life of prayer and piety. Here the child, Tokiwa, grew to girlhood in solitude and innocence. From the first she had been given by her grandfather as a sacrificial offering for his sins to the Lord Buddha. She knew no speech save that couched in the language of prayer and admonition. To her, life meant one constant act of expiation, of prayer, fasting, for mortal sin committed in some former state. She accepted her lot piously, humbly, sweetly. Only sometimes she could not forbear running out

into the sunlight, to smile at the blue skies above her, to stretch out her hands to the stars, to whisper back to the golden fields which spread out beyond their overgrown temple gardens.

Not even the people from the nearest village visited the deserted temple, save when rare pilgrimages were made to the place; and then they who went told, with shudders, of the unspeakably old, blind bonze at the shrine, and the weird sprite face of the child nun, who danced alone in the deserted temple, to please the gods.

It was summer. The bees had made a hive in one of the out-jutting eaves of the temple. The world was saffron colored, the hills, the skies, the fields, dim purple. A traveler pushed his way through the tangled brushwood, and paused before the ruined temple. He stood like one lost in the meshes of a strange dream. So deserted and still seemed this refuge he had sought that at first he wondered dazedly whether indeed there were life within.

Then he saw the sliding of the window screen, and Tokiwa leaned far out. She reached up a slim bamboo rod, poked at the eave and dislodged the hive. A moment of retreat from the angry bees, and then she cautiously slipped the *shoji* open again and obtained the coveted honey. Within arms' length of the sacred shrine, she crouched upon her heels, eating the sweet morsel she had stolen.

A sunbeam came through an opening door and fell like a searchlight upon her little startled face. She thought of the reverend bonze, remembered her devotions and thinking now only of her sins, fell upon her knees, putting her face upon the floor. A strange voice spoke her name, very gently, and she looked up slowly.

"Art thou Tokiwa?"

When she had recovered from her human amazement, she answered that she was indeed, miserably, that sinful and guilty worm, Tokiwa, grandchild of the temple bonze. Then, human feelings again assailing her, she asked: "And thou?"

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To which replied the boy with a smile strangely sad:

"Like thyself, a poor exile and fugitive, seeking an asylum from Shinran, the bonze, once my august father's friend and servant."

Now Tokiwa knew nothing of the history of the times. She knew little indeed of her own history, save that in some former state she had sinned grievously, hence her expiation in this present life. Of the state of unrest and oppression, of civil war, of intriguing factions, of intolerable humiliation of the Mikados, she had heard never the faintest murmur. To her, the Mikado was a God, the chief of all indeed, for this the bonze had taught her, clinging still to the Shinto belief despite his Buddhism. In the tangled

reasoning of the child mind of Tokiwa, the world without was very good and beautiful. People there were joyful; they did not need to suffer for their sins. The gods were not punishing them. Penance was reserved for such benighted ones as she.

Now here, apparently, stood before her another sinner like herself, one who said he too had been driven into exile. They were kindred spirits, twins in suffering.

She went toward him slowly, wide-eyed, her cheeks and lips red as the poppies tossed at the feet of the great Buddha, for Tokiwa was too poor to make a richer offering. With small hands crossed upon her bosom, like some fascinated creature, she stood in silence, looking at him, very near to him—so near,



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indeed, that he inhaled the breath of the incense in her garments, the subtle odor of *umegaku* and the pine. It clung about her, upon her garments, in her hair, her very body. Her eyes were like liquid pools of dense blackness into which his own seemed to have leaped and lost their soul.

"Tokiwa!" he whispered lowly, and now he reached and touched the little crossed hands upon her bosom. They did not unclasp, but they trembled under the warm touch of his hand.

She began upon her prayers, but her voice caught upon the words. She could not finish them. Never in her life before had a human hand held her own; never had she looked into the eyes of a fellow mortal. The stone gaze of the Buddhas was calm, with a wisdom past understanding, but never they smiled, and always the touch of their feet, where daily she put her small meek head, was cold. Unconsciously her own lips and eyes caught the infection of the boy's smiling gaze, and, as she smiled, again he spoke:

"Tokiwa, how beautiful thou art. Pray thee, smile again!"

Some vague feeling of unrest stirred within her. She clutched her heart tightly, as if to stay its tumultuous beating.

"Hush!" she whispered, "Buddha will hear!"

He followed her, catching at her fluttering sleeve, as, soundlessly, she fled across the great room of worship and disappeared into an interior apartment.

He was seventeen, a youth born and bred in the refined, slavish luxury of the Imperial court. It had been customary for the Shogun to raise its Mikado in this effeminate form, making him merely a child in intelligence and hence a figure-head in authority. His features were delicate, his arched eyebrows as sensitive as a poet's, his lips as full and pouting as a child's. He had a tender chin and brow. His eyes were large and long, and somewhat melancholy, but there were latent hints within them of a stronger power possible of awakening. He was slim of figure and exquisite in his bearing. He moved indolently, but with grace.

From day to day he wandered about the dusty, silent temple, bowing mechan-

ically before its effigies, examining the wonderful art work indelibly printed upon its walls, going about from room to room, climbing up and down its eight stories, and always eternally seeking, seeking.

But no longer Tokiwa danced for the gods; no longer her graceful little body prostrated itself before the shrine. No longer she touched the great foot of the stone Buddha with her small meek brow.

The wind-bells tinkled. A hummingbird flew under its glass. Under the sun the lotus in the unmoving water opened their white fingers, revealing the golden heart within. A hand, white as the lotus itself, pushed its flat shaped leaves aside and over the clear mirror of the water thus revealed, a girl's eager face looked and looked.

What instinct had guided her to the pool? How could she know the water alone in all this deserted wilderness would show her her beauty? Maybe at some time before the coming of Prince Go-Yoshi she had dreamily watched the slim outline of her small reflected hand upon the water and thus had learned of nature's mirror.

However it be, for seven days she had obeyed the injunction of the reverend bonze. She had performed her devotions in another part of the temple, mindful that it would be unseemly for one so humble to appear before the Son of Heaven, for such, she was assured, their visitor would some day be, or mayhap was already. And so to him she intoned her perpetual prayers. Of him she had dreamed, and waking, dreamed again. Unconsciously the words he had spoken came to her lips:

"Tokiwa! How beautiful thou art! Pray thee, smile again."

Now, in the dawn, she had come to the pool, irresistibly

drawn there by the eternal feminine within her, to prove him.

As she looked, whispering mechanically the recurring words of her prayer, she saw that other face coming beside her own, there in the water beneath. For a moment she did not stir. Then as he spoke her name, his lips almost touching the small pink shell of her ear, she turned to him throbbing:

"Anata!" (Thou at last!)

"Where hast thou been, beloved?" A caress was upon every word he spoke.

"I have been praying," she faltered.

"For what?" he asked.

"My sins," she said.

At that he smiled.

"Thy sins, Tokiwa?"

She caught her breath as if she could not find the words she wished:



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"—for I am not like thee, exalted one!"

Suddenly she remembered to whom she spoke, and slipping down tremulously from the wall of the pool, she put her head at his feet, beginning her wistful prayer:

"*Namu, Amida*—"

Stooping, he lifted her to her feet. She found herself held in the curve of his arm, his cheek against her own.

They spoke not at all, only moving step by step, about the old, overgrown temple gardens.

Summer had left only its last touches of deep bronze upon the land. Earth was sighing with its too swift departure. Already the trees had begun to drop their glorified freight. Like our best hopes which elude us, they slipped one by one from the branches, leaving them bare, hungry, naked! But still the nightingale poured forth its passionate heart to the starlit nights.

"Listen," said the Prince Go-Yoshi, "I will tell you my dream of last night. Once, many moons ago, in the season of White Dew, you and I met and loved. You were a white butterfly drowsing on the heart of a wild poppy. I was a *gaki*—a thing of evil! I had the form of a scorpion, and always I wandered restlessly about, seeking prey for my death sting. I saw you asleep on the heart of the poppy, and slipping up behind, I found my way, bent upon your destruction. Suddenly you fluttered your white wings upward, and then—in my dream, Tokiwa—I saw your eyes, just as they are now, beloved, and all the evil dropped away from my heart. I was no longer a *gaki*; but a palpitating repentant, pleading with the Lord Buddha to make me worthy of your touch. As am I now, dear beloved!"

She shivered slightly, and he slipped his arm out of the sleeve of his *haori* and drew half of it about her. Her voice was timid. She had the accent of one speaking a new language.

"The Son of Heaven cannot sin!"

"Nay, beloved. The gods belong not to Earth. Not even the Mikados are divine. Nor I. I am like you, Tokiwa, hu-

man—gods only when transported by our love. Yet hear me swear, as we stand beneath the open heavens, where we are told blessed Nirvana may some time be found: for the time of this life, and as many after as may come, I will be your husband and take you for my wife. Make me the same promise, beloved."

Her lips could not frame the words, her eyes speaking the language he longed to hear. Suddenly a cloud passed over her face. She pushed herself free, holding him back with her hands upon his breast.

"When they shall come for thee!" she said.

"Tokiwa!"

"Thou hast told me of thy father's wrongs, and Oh! the sufferings of thy people!"

The old blind bonze came tottering toward them, feeling his way with his staff, knocking upon the bare tree trunks, the now leafless shrubs.

"Son of Heaven!" he cried, his voice gaining a strange power from the emotion deep seated within him, "The time has come at last!"

He put the dispatch brought by a courier into the boy's trembling hand. It slipped from his nerveless fingers ere he could read it, and fell fluttering to the ground. An aimless wind caught the wisp of paper and blew it against the *obi* of Tokiwa. There it rested, against her heart. Her hand closed upon it with a sudden strength. She thrust it into the boy's tightly clenched fist.

"Go!" she throbbed whisperingly. "Thy father calls thee. Thy people need thee!"

Suddenly the ancient bonze intoned solemnly the warrior's prayer to Hachiman, the God of War.

"*Namu, Hachiman, Dai Bosatsu!*"

("Glory to Hachiman, the Incarnation of Buddha!")

The Prince Go-Yoshi caught his breath in a sobbing gasp. But he had turned about at last. He did not look back.

Always the parent comes first. Duty is higher than love. Thus from the suffocating struggle of heart and mind

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1960. JULY 1, 1960

Go-Yoshi emerged noble. Tokiwa was ejected, not from the heart, but from the mind, which at this time could hold but one mighty impulse.

These were the troublous times of the Hojo rule, when for the first time in the history of Japan the Emperor's condition was so deplorable that often he knew not the bodily comfort of an ordinary citizen. At the cruel mercy of the war lords, their condition was pitiable. One

not as a puppet went the boy back to the great capital. His father, already banished to Oki, needed succor. The Prince Go-Yoshi heeded the impassioned promise of the gallant little army which had rallied to his support. He planned to assist his father to recover the Imperial power, and this at the price of his own forfeit of the throne as a puppet of Mi-kado.

Not easily was the mighty power of



boy Emperor was set up only to be deposed for another, often his own infant son. So rapid was the change from one boy Emperor to another, that princes of the true blood and direct line were now nearly exhausted. Yet this was the rule of Hojo. Infant sovereigns, divine figure-heads in the eyes of the world! And the real Mikado in exile!

Now Go-Yoshi's turn had come; but

the Hojo to be overthrown. In the delirium of defeat, there in the besieged and burning fortress of Kasagi in Yamato, Go-Yoshi gave himself up to despair.

A bonze, blind, tottering, so old his trembling hands could barely support his staff, made his staggering way into the beleaguered fortress. With his head at the feet of the Prince Go-Yoshi he



brought strange tidings, and a promised solution to the dangers now besetting the youth. The Hojo were to be propitiated.

Where the road from Kamakura meets the beach, a vision of extraordinary loveliness entrances the beholder. Here the fairest of all islands shows its face of eternal green. The ocean tosses its waters upon Enoshima's shore like a great, playful mother, washing her best loved child. In the distance the mountains of Idzu are dimly seen, and, as if enthroned as Queen of the World, above all, Fuji Yama raises her head of snow.

Along this road where nature seemed to show only her gentlest and kindest aspects, the hosts of Hojo traveled. Whither? There was no enemy to be met and destroyed hereabouts. The lately rebellious Mikados, father and son, were subdued; the former sent, heels up in his palanquin, disgraced, into exile, there to die of a broken heart. But for the latter, the bonze had bought a pardon, purchasing it at a curious price—another prince of the true blood!

Hands tied behind him, lest he do himself injury, his eyes bound about with

a cloth, the Prince Go-Yoshi, upon his knees in his palanquin, was carried under guard of the soldiers of the Hojo; for as a hostage should he be held until the bonze had redeemed his promise.

Suddenly the cortege halted. Seemingly in the heart of the woods, it had come upon a curious sight, one seen only near the habitations of men. But here no dwelling, no meanest hut, nor smallest cot, told of human abode. Yet hidden only by the giant pines, centuries old, a few *cho* from the cortege, the ragged peaks of the old temple of Kamakura seemed to fling up their defiant ears skyward. Under the very shadow of its gloom some one had set up the "flowing invocation!"

Only a sheet of cotton, suspended upon four sticks driven into the ground! How eloquent its meaning! How effective upon even the roughest, the hardest hearted of the warriors of the blood-thirsty Hojo.

One stooped to the little brook hard by, and offering a prayer with the aid of his rosary, poured the water over the cloth, waiting patiently for it to strain through, ere he passed the dipper to a brother soldier. One by one, solemnly in

turn, they performed the charitable function.

How significant to them this simple sheet of cotton! It told of mother love and mother pain. Mutely it appealed to the passer-by for the love of all the gods, to shorten the sufferings of one in agony. Thus the mother who dies in childbirth, guilty of some awful offense in a previous existence, or in this life, must travel through the darkness of the lowest Hades, until through the compassion of the passers-by the cloth is worn out by the water poured upon it.

Here in the woods, far from the dwelling place of men, who should there be to shorten the period of suffering of the child Tokiwa, mother of a new Emperor of Japan? Did not the fourteen days of penance at the altar, ere the coming of the child, suffice?

The bonze undid the cloth which bound the prince's eyes, and set free the imprisoned hands. And still he did not move. His dazzled eyes saw not, or, if they did, heeded not, the "flowing invocation," and the reverent, silenced warriors about it. Only they saw the grizzled walls of the old Kamakura temple; and something welled up and stirred within the frozen heart of the poor defeated one—captive in the hands of the

dreaded Hojo. The bloody days of soul torture, of physical suffering, of fire, starvation, humiliation and surrender—all that had written their record in letters of fire upon the mind of the Prince Go-Yoshi—forgotten! A woman's face—nay, but a child's—came back to his memory's eyes.

"Tokiwa!" he suddenly cried aloud, dashing against the door of the temple, and plunged into its deserted interior. There in the sunlight admitted by the opened door, a moment he lingered, where little Tokiwa had danced for the gods!

He ran from room to room, fleeing up the eight flights of stairs, like one pursued rather than pursuing. His voice vibrated with his struggling emotions, now hopeful joy, now fear, unknown:

"Tokiwa! Tokiwa! Tokiwa!"

And then at last:

"Oh, my beloved!"

He had come upon her in the great hall of the nuns. Here where once hundreds of maiden souls had rested from their prayers, Tokiwa slept alone, her still pure and innocent face thrown back upon the wooden pillow, as if she looked upward at the faces of the compassionate gods on the great vaulted ceiling overhead.



Go-Yoshi, upon his return, was carried under the roof of the Hojo; for as he be held until the end of his promise. The cortège halted. Seemingly lost in the woods, it had no sight, one seen only by men. But here no nest hut, nor smallest abode. Yet hidden pines, centuries old, a cortège, the ragged temple of Kamakura their defiant ears skyward, shadow of its head set up the "flowing

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