

THE LOVE of AZALEA

by ONOTO WATANNA

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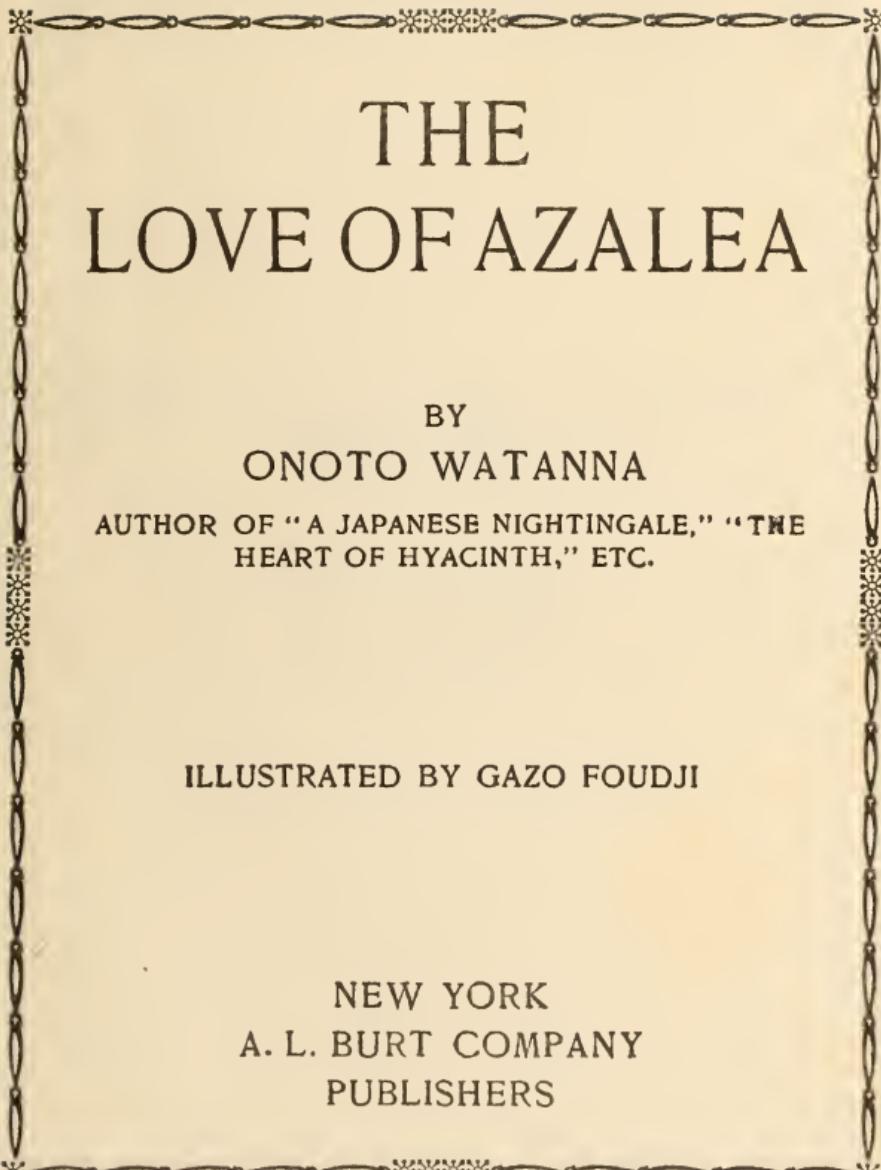
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"He had come quite close to his garden gate before he perceived the little figure waiting there."

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THE LOVE OF AZALEA

BY
ONOTO WATANNA

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HEART OF HYACINTH," ETC.

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THE LOVE OF AZALEA

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CHAPTER I

IT was drowsy in the little mission church, and the gentle mellifluous voice of the young preacher increased rather than dispelled the sleepy peacefulness. The church, if such it could be styled, was well filled. The people of Sanyo knew it for the coolest of retreats. They drifted aimlessly in and out of the church, making no pretense of either understanding or appreciating the proceedings. It was a curious congregation, one which, innocently enough, never

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thought of assisting the pastor. They came to see the white priest, not to listen to the pleading message he brought, which as yet they could not understand. His Japanese was too correct. Spoken slowly and painfully in the unfamiliar accent of the Caucasian, it was often quite unintelligible. But, as was said, the church was cool, the villagers curious, and the minister an unending source of wonder to them. If some of the congregation waited patiently throughout the length of the sermon, it was not because they deemed this the proper thing to do, but because they knew they would be treated to another form of entertainment, which they childishly en-

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joyed. For, after the sermon, the minister, closing the large black book before him and opening a small red one, would raise his voice, throw back his head, open his mouth, and sing aloud in a voice which had never lost its fascination for his hearers. He had done this from the first, leading an unresponsive congregation in hymns of praise; but singing to the end alone. No aiding voice took up the refrain with him nor was there even the music of an organ to bear his clear voice company. Through the opened windows the chirp of the birds floated. Sometimes a baby, grown restless, laughed and crowed aloud.

On this particular Sunday, however, the

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minister, who appeared unusually happy, had introduced an innovation. As its nature had been whispered about the village, the service in consequence was well attended. Behind the minister's small sandal-wood pulpit a bench had been placed, upon which the people saw seated five of the most disreputable waifs of the town. At first they were hardly recognizable. From smudgy-faced, soiled and tattered bits of flotsam, they were transformed in garments of white—miniature surplices they were.

The minister beamed upon them. The boys looked stoically back at him. This day those in the church forgot to look about

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at the various objects of interest, forgot to drowse, for all eyes were intent upon that little row behind the priest. When the sermon was ended and the minister turned to the red hymn book, the boys arose to their feet, and as his baritone voice was raised, five piping and discordant minor voices joined with him.

The result of the minister's effort for a choir was immediate. It broke up the apathy of the congregation.

Groups lingered about the mission house after the service—groups of curious child-women for the most part. The question discussed from every standpoint was the seeming elevation of these most unsavory

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and godless of town waifs. How could these good people guess that the young minister, restless at the seeming fruitlessness of his labors, had given of his own meagre salary to induce the hungriest of the town, for so many sen, to be respectable for one day in the week? What would not a Japanese vagabond do for a sen or a sweet potato? Submit to a bath, a robe too clean to touch and the pleasure—sometimes pain—of mimicking the voice of the white man.

The mellow tinkling of temple bells disturbed the gossips. It was the hour of noon, when the gods were good and for a little prayer would give them sweet food

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and excellent appetites. So straight from the temple of the white priest they dispersed, through the valley to the opposite hill, where the Shinto Temple, golden-tipped, beckoned them to the prayers they mechanically understood; a moment only in the temple, nodding heads and prostrating bodies, and after that, home and the noon-day meal. Thus every day. Only on the Sunday, since the coming of the foreign priest, they had added to the routine this weekly pilgrimage of curiosity to the white man's temple. Strange indeed were the ways of the foreign devils!

“Let us wait a little while,” said a round-

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faced, merry-eyed maid of fifteen, grasping the sleeves of girl friends.

Azalea was departing slowly when recalled by the raised voice of her friend. At a short distance from the other girls she paused and looked back inquiringly.

“Wait till they come out,” continued the speaker, Ume-san by name, “those beggars, and we will have some fun.”

“Oh, good!” agreed Koto, snapping her fan upon her hand; “we will find out what the white beast says to them.”

“Perhaps,” suggested Fuji, stretching herself—she was fat and indolent and the church seat was hard—“he pays them.”

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Azalea looked interested.

"I wish," said she wistfully, "he would pay me something."

"Perhaps he will," said Fuji, nodding her head slowly; "my honorable father says he is rich—very rich."

"And my honorable father says so, too," said Ume.

"Oh, all foreign devils are," declared Koto conclusively.

"Well, but Matsuda Isami says he is not," said Azalea. "And Matsuda knows surely."

"Matsuda is jealous," said Koto. "He wants to be always the richest. The gods despise avarice."

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Azalea was fluttering her fan somewhat nervously. She regarded it thoughtfully, then closed it sharply.

"I am avaricious," she said, with the point of her fan touching her pretty red underlip.

Her friends laughed at her, and she blushed.

"Yes," she said, "I am avaricious. The gods will despise me truly. I adore money. I would like to have one hundred yen all to myself."

"What would you do with it?" questioned Ume, the oldest of the four.

"I would leave my step-mother's house," said Azalea simply.

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“Here they come!” cried Koto. The girls fell into an excited little line by the church door, one behind the other. Out came the choir—their surplices doffed, their washed faces wide with smiles and their little eyes shining. Five sen rattled in the sleeve of each. The girls had drawn in hiding behind the church portico in order to surprise them. Now they sprang out into view, and grasped the boys by the sleeves. Thinking they were being set upon for their hard-earned sen, a series of angry shrieks and snorts burst out. Their fears set at rest by the merry laughter of the girls, they were finally induced to tell all they knew. The minister, it seems, had

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brought them to his house at various times, had fed them on sweet potatoes and rice cakes, and had taught them to sing just as he did. For this public effort in his temple, he had given them each—well, they did not propose to tell any one how much he had given, but the intimation was that it was a sum sufficient to keep them in luxury for some time to come. Furthermore, they, the members of his choir, were to have this same sum given to them as a weekly income, for singing, just like the white priest, in his church, each Sunday.

Azalea sighed and, sitting on the church steps, looked at the fortunate boys with envious and wistful eyes.

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"And does not the white beast want females also to sing?" she asked.

"Females!" repeated one of the boys.

"Did the gods ever favor females?"

"The foreign devil is not a god," said Azalea thoughtfully. "Who knows, perhaps he would pay me also to sing with him."

"Time to go home," said Koto, and she pulled Ume's sleeve. "Are you not hungry? Come, Azalea!"

"She won't give me to eat, my most honorable mother-in-law," said Azalea. "I need not go there."

"You will soon be a beggar, too, Azalea," laughed Koto, "and the white man

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will give you charity. But come, girls."

Clinging to each other's hands and almost tripping over each other's heels, the three girls fluttered homeward down the hill, leaving Azalea sitting alone, looking moodily and reflectively at the choir boys, now counting their money. She knew that they, like her, were orphans. Unlike her, they had not an uncharitable roof, called by her ungracious step-parent a home for her. Shelter beneath it was only grudgingly accorded, because Azalea's step-mother was vain and feared the criticism of neighbors and the wrath of the gods should she turn Azalea out. As it was, the young girl was only half fed and her clothes were those

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half-worn ones thrown to her by arrogant and fortunate step-sisters, yet the girl's nimble fingers made those same threadbare garments objects of attractiveness, which set off her own appealing beauty. But she was seventeen, unmarried and unhappy. Something must be done soon, or she would become the bride of the river. Her step-mother's scoldings grew with the girl's increasing beauty and grace. She did not know this was the cause, only she knew life was becoming unbearable.

The choir boys had already shuffled a portion of the way down the hill slope, when she sprang to her feet and ran after them.

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“Gonji!” she called one of them by name. “Wait just a moment.”

They stopped and she overtook them. She was breathless when she reached them.

“Is it because you are beggars,” she said, “that this priest favors you?”

Gonji nodded.

“I,” said Azalea, spreading out her little hands, “am also a beggar.”

They laughed at her. Only the homeless were beggars in their eyes. In addition, members of her sex were received among them only when they had reached the old witch age. The country knew many old women beggars, who drifted,

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whining, upon their staffs from town to town. Often they were blind and clung to the rope about the neck of a tailless cat, which led them. Who ever heard of a maiden beggar? So Azalea's statement was received in laughter.

"How much did the minister give?" she demanded, ignoring their jeers.

"Five—ten—maybe one hundred sen," glibly lied Gonji.

Her eyes widened and shone.

"Oh!" she said.

"That's only for the singing," said Gonji; "if we become convert to his religion he will pay more."

He turned to his companions for verifi-

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cation. They had moved on their way and he made to join them.

“No, no, don’t go! Wait a little while, please!”

“Well?”

“What is ‘convert?’”

“Why,” the Japanese boy of sixteen racked his brain for an explanation of the word, “why, that’s to—ah—that’s just abandoning the gods for a new one.”

“Oh!” His sleeve dropped from her grasp and she drew back, her face somewhat blanched.

“Abandon the gods!” she repeated.
“But if we do that, then the gods will be angry with us.”

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"That is true," nodded Gonji reflectively.

"It's bad business," he added.

"Perhaps," she essayed almost timidly,
"that new God is also kind and good."

Gonji shook his head skeptically.

"The priest at the temple says that he
is really an evil spirit."

The girl shuddered. She turned away
from Gonji and he resumed his way down
the hill.

Azalea walked listlessly back to the mis-
sion house. When she had reached it, she
paused irresolute. A sudden idea had come
to her. Why should she not pretend to be
converted? When the barbarian priest had
paid her she would go to the shrine of

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Kwannon and confess her lie. She would give half of the money to the gods, who would forgive her; she was hungry and ill-treated and she wished to leave the home of her step-mother, who was cruel to her. If money could be earned by a little lie, why should she not earn it? She would! She would!

The young minister closed and locked the door of the church. Turning on the threshold, he paused a moment before descending the little flight of steps, and looked about him at the smiling, sunny landscape.

The bells of the neighboring temple were melodious, and he found himself absently

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listening to them. With his hands clasped behind, and his head somewhat bent, Richard Verley turned slowly toward his home.

It was only the length of an iris field from the church, a pleasant saunter. The minister was wont to dream upon these walks—dream of the future harvest which would repay his earnest labors.

He had come quite close to his garden gate before he perceived the little figure waiting there. It was her voice—her odd, breathless voice, which called his attention to her—though he heard the one word ‘convert’ spoken in English. The rest of her speech was unintelligible.

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She stood in the sunlight, her cheeks vividly red, her eyes wide with excitement and with fright. It was that fearful, piteous something about her whole attitude which from the first reached and appealed instantly to the sympathies of the minister.

“ You wish to speak to me? ” he asked.

“ Yaes,” she said, nodding her head, and then very swiftly, as though she had learned the words by rote—“ I am convert unto you, Excellency.”

“ Convert! ” His eyes kindled and he stared at her without speaking a moment. Her head drooped, as if from its own small weight.

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“Yaes,” she said in the lowest, the faintest of voices, “I am convert—Chlistian!”

He seized both her hands, and held them warmly in his own.

“Come into my house, my child,” he said. “Let us talk it over.”

Her hands fluttered in his, then she suddenly withdrew them. They slipped back into her sleeves. She stood uncertainly before him, hesitating to pass through the gate he had opened for her.

“Come!” he urged gently.

CHAPTER II.

Even while the minister in the coolness of his study softly and gently questioned his faltering “convert,” a wily and smooth-speaking Nakoda was visiting her step-mother. Madame Yamada, as the latter was called, knew the marriage broker well, and being the mother of two daughters by a marriage previous to that with Azalea’s father, she welcomed him with more than usual cordiality.

Would not the estimable Mr. Okido remove his shoes and eat the noon meal within her humble house?

The estimable Mr. Okido would.

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Madame Yamada sent a scullery maid flying to his feet, where, kneeling in the humblest attitude, she removed his dusty sandals. Then she brought fresh water with which to bathe his feet.

Madame Yamada, who had not engaged the services of Okido, was curious to know the nature of his mission to her. She disguised her curiosity, however, under the blandest of manners. With swift acuteness she introduced her daughters into the room and had them serve the man, throughout the meal glancing under her eyelashes to watch the effect of her daughters' sundry charms upon the Nakoda, who she knew would not fail to dwell upon all such points

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with his employer. But strangely enough, Okido scarcely seemed to notice the presence of her daughters, and ate his meal in somewhat stolid silence. After the repast he permitted the pipe to be lighted for him and proceeded to smoke at his leisure.

Madame Yamada could contain her curiosity no longer. At a sign from her, her daughters withdrew. Then she addressed the Nakoda.

"In what way," she asked, "is the humblest one indebted to the esteemed Okido for his honorable visit?"

Okido put down the pipe on the hibachi and, turning toward Madame Yamada, looked at her keenly.

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"You have daughters, Madame Yamada."

"Two," she answered promptly.

"Three," said Okido slowly.

The esteemed one was mistaken. The gods had only blessed her with two.

Nay, the gods had been kinder. Were there not three, including her step-daughter?

"Ah, yes." Madame Yamada smiled coldly.

"Let me repeat," he said slowly. "You have daughters."

"Yes;" she allowed the word to escape her lips impatiently. Would the stupid broker never come to his business?

"And I," said Okido, "have a client

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who desires the hand of one of your daughters."

A red spot appeared in either of Madame Yamada's cheeks.

"What is the name of his honorable parent?" she asked, no longer attempting to conceal her interest.

Okido leaned toward her impressively.

"His name is Matsuda Isami."

Madame Yamada's hands trembled. She scarcely could control her voice.

"What—the—"

"Yes, the rich Matsuda Isami."

The woman thrilled with maternal pride. Her bosom heaved. "And which of my

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daughters," she asked, "has pleased the taste of the exalted Matsuda?"

Okido rubbed his hands softly.

"That one," he said, "who is augustly named Azalea."

Madame Yamada started to her feet with a cry. Then recalling herself she sat down again and for a space of a long moment did not stir. She regarded the Nakoda with baleful eyes. Suddenly she found her voice.

"Excellent Okido," she said, "the humble one cannot marry the youngest of her daughters first. Pray return to the exalted Matsuda and say from me that I am willing

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to consent to his marriage to my oldest daughter."

"What!" cried the amazed Okido, "you refuse?"

"Who spoke of refusing?" she asked in an agitated voice.

"Your answer is a refusal, Madame."

The woman was silent, her mind busily at work.

"Listen, Okido," she finally said, "a promise was made by me to the august father, now dead, of the girl Azalea. He bade me promise him that Azalea should be given to no one in marriage save with her own consent. So! I withdraw the offer of my oldest daughter as bride to Matsuma,

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and instead say this: Bid the exalted one win first the consent of Azalea. He is then welcome to her."

"Good!" said Okido, arising and shaking the crumbs from his hakama. "We will make direct suit to the maiden."

Madame Yamada had arisen also. "Yes, that is it," she said, "and for that purpose heed the advice of one experienced in such matters. Let His Excellency visit much the home of the humblest, and, in person, press the suit."

Okido regarded her uneasily. "My business——" he began.

"Oh, excellent Okido," interrupted the woman, "I promise you that you will earn

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your fee. Further, should the suit of your client fail—should the girl be obstinate and refuse his proposal, bear in mind, good Okido, that a double fee will be in your palm if my oldest daughter finds favor in the eyes of Matsuda."

Okido nodded his head slowly. He was thoughtful as the maid slipped on his sandals. As he left the house he stopped at the threshold and looked back at Madame Yamada. Her colorless face was drawn into strange lines. Her long eyes were half closed. Upon her face there was calculation—cold, cruel. She slowly repeated her words. Again nodding understanding, if not assent, the marriage broker went on.

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his way pensively toward the house of
Matsuda Isami.

CHAPTER III

As Azalea walked homeward from the minister's house, she could still hear in dreamy fancy the eloquent tones of his voice. She found that though beyond his presence she still thrilled at the very memory of his face. He had cast a spell upon her, she told herself. He was a disciple of the Evil One. She must go to the temple of Kwannon for help. Possibly the priests there would give her some talisman which would preserve her from any spell the barbarian might cast upon her. For though her ruse had failed and her sleeves were empty of yen, yet still she had promised

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the minister to visit him again the following day. Now she found herself wishing that the morrow would come speedily.

Her step-mother met her at the door of the house. Her lips were drawn in a strange fashion apart and her long teeth showed. This was her manner of smiling. It was uglier and more sinister than a frown. Azalea quickened her steps, the color beating up into her face. When she saw that set smile upon Madame Yamada's face she stopped abruptly before the woman. But her step-mother spoke in the most amiable of tones:

"You must be hungry, my daughter, since you have not had your noon meal."

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The girl raised her eyes inquiringly toward the woman. Then she answered simply:

“Yes, mother-in-law, I am hungry.”

“Come into the kitchen, then, Azalea. The maid has kept your rice warm.”

Azalea was too much accustomed to the vicissitudes of fortune to wonder at the sudden generosity of the step-mother. She ate the rice and sipped the fragrant tea with mechanical relish. The meal was unexpected, but non the less palatable to a hungry young girl. She suspected that her step-mother required something of her, but her mind, occupied with its late thoughts of the minister, had no room for speculation.

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over the motives of her step-mother. She let Madame Yamada herself open the subject.

"Daughter," said the woman, "would you enjoy a trip to Tokyo?"

Azalea looked up quickly; then she answered shortly:

"No."

Madame Yamada's eyes narrowed. She controlled her feelings, however.

"What, Azalea! You do not wish to go to Tokyo, where everything is so gay and bright and beautiful?"

Azalea rested her chin upon her hand and looked out from the kitchen shoji across the fields. She did not answer.

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“ You are becoming old,” said the step-mother. “ You will have to earn your living soon.”

Azalea did not move, but her step-mother knew she was listening to her words.

“ Here,” she continued, “ there is no way in which you could earn money, for you are of samurai descent and your august ancestors would not rest easily should you be reduced to manual labor.”

“ Mother-in-law,” said the girl quietly, “ you would be ashamed before our neighbours if I were to obtain work here. My august ancestors would feel no shame.”

“ What could you do here?”

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Azalea looked at her small white hands thoughtfully.

"I could work in the mills," she said, and added with a girlish sigh, "but it would maim my hands."

"Yes, and also your back, your knees, and afterwards your spirit. Let the stout peasant women labor that way, Azalea. Such employment is not for one of gentle birth. You shall go to Tokyo."

"What shall I do there?" inquired the girl.

"You have beauty and youth," said Madame Yamada slowly.

The girl moved uneasily and then catching sight of the expression upon her

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mother's face, she made as if to arise; but the other held her by the sleeve.

"Why do you start so?" she inquired gruffly. "Do you suppose I referred to the yoshiwara?"

"Yes," said Azalea, white to the lips. Her voice became passionate. "I will not go, then," she said. "You shall not sell me. I am the daughter of a samurai."

"Foolish child! Who spoke of selling you to the yoshiwara?"

"Ah, your eyes spoke, mother-in-law. Besides, what other employment could my youth and beauty find in Tokyo?"

"Are there not geishas and tea house

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girls, and is not their employment esteemed admirable?"

"Yes, but I have not their accomplishments, and I am too old to learn how to dance. To be a geisha, I have heard, one must apprentice at the age of twelve. I am eighteen years. Yes, I am getting old," she finished.

Madame Yamada, who sat behind her, looked at her with eyes that held no mercy. In some manner the girl must be sent away. Matsuda should then be told that she preferred the life of gayety in Tokyo to marriage with him. After that, Yuri-san, the oldest daughter, would console and win him. Azalea had always appeared passive

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and obedient by nature. This sudden impulse of stubbornness was as unexpected as it was disturbing to her step-mother. What if this slim young girl, with her childish face of innocence, should develop the strong will of her samurai parent? Madame Yamada smiled unpleasantly at the prospect, and her smile boded no good for the young girl.

Meanwhile Azalea continued to look out dreamily through the opened shoji toward the hill, upon whose slope stood the little peaked mission house. The words of the minister kept repeating themselves in her head.

“There is only one true God. He it

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was who created the world—and you. He loves you, and will watch over and care for you always."

Ah, if it were only true, thought Azalea. If this new God would only be kinder than those she had known, then she might even close the eyes of her heart to the words of the priests of Kwannon, and forget they had told her the God of the barbarians was an evil spirit. She would prove Him. If He proved unkind to her she would believe it, but if it were otherwise, why how could the evil one be kind? It was not possible.

"Answer when you are spoken to," broke in her step-mother's sharp voice.

Azalea started.

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“I did not hear you speak, honorable step-mother.”

“Your ears are accommodatingly dull. You did not care to hear.”

Azalea sighed, then pressed her lips together, as if to prevent the retort that might have escaped them.

Madame Yamada bent toward her.

“Do you wish to marry?”

Azalea reflected.

“No-o,” she said softly, and then, “perhaps, yes. It would be a solution of my troubles, step-mother, would it not?”

“Would you marry any one who asked you, then? You appear to lack the common qualities of maiden modesty.”

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"I did not say I would marry any one," said the girl, flushing, "but almost anyone would be kinder than you."

They were daring words, and she anticipated their effect upon her step-mother, for after having spoken them she made a frightened motion from the older woman, who had seized her arm and was cruelly pinching it. Tears of pain came into the girl's eyes, but she made no outcry. Suddenly Madame Yamada flung the girl's arm from her.

"Did my touch hurt, then?" she inquired.

"Yes," said Azalea briefly, her arm still sore, though released.

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“ Yet,” said her step-mother, “ the pain inflicted by a woman, who is weak, is nothing to that inflicted by a man. What will you do when your husband beats you?”

“ I do not know,” said Azalea mechanically, and then added slowly, “ but I should not weep, mother-in-law. I would not give him that pleasure. But—” she paused; “ all husbands do not beat their wives. Perhaps the gods will favor me with a kind one. I should not marry him otherwise.”

“ How will you test his kindness? ” asked her mother scornfully.

“ I will know,” she answered. “ I will see him and love him before I marry him.”

She arose and fluttered her sleeves back

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and forth. Her arm was in pain. She moved it thus mechanically as a nervous method of relief, but Madame Yamada had seen the figure coming along the white road toward their house, and she leaped to her feet like a savage.

“What!” she cried. “You stand shamelessly in the open doorway shaking your arms in unmaidenly fashion because a man approaches.”

“I did not even see him,” said Azalea, shrinking before the anger of her step-mother’s expression, “and, mother-in-law, see for yourself. The man is Matsuda Isami. Is it likely I would fling my sleeves at him?”

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"At him most of all," said her step-mother hoarsely. "Do not deny it, shameless girl!"

Before Azalea could recover from the surprise occasioned by these words, Madame Yamada, with one black look cast back at her, had left the kitchen, and was hastening to the front part of the house, there to prostrate herself with slavish sweetness and politeness before the exalted Matsuda Isami.

CHAPTER IV

Matsuda Isami was a small, sharp-eyed man of possibly forty. He was rich and powerful, the landlord of many of the families in Sanyo. The people feared him, while they respected his employment of hundreds of coolies, and it was said his parsimony had made him rich and kept the whole community poor. In some way, direct or indirect, nearly everyone in the community was in his service or debt. He was the magnate of the town, and accordingly hated, feared, dreaded. He had come on foot to the humble home of Madame Yamada, he, the taciturn, cold-hearted head

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man of the town, and all because Azalea, walking in the sun, in a kimona, patched, faded, but pretty, had turned her head toward him quite recently and smiled with childish impudence. Few people smiled upon Matsuda. This shabby daughter of a samurai who in the early days had made no secret of his lordly contempt for the rich tradesman had captivated Matsuda by one fleeting, innocent smile. Matsuda desired her now above all things, and swore by all the gods that he would have her.

Wealth and power, after all, were not sufficient to gratify the insatiable greed of his nature. He was desirous of something more priceless, and for which he would

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have given up all his possessions—this beautiful young girl, Azalea.

With impatience he listened to Madame Yamada's servile words of compliment and welcome. Hardly had he seated himself and with a gesture refused the proffered pipe, when he spoke of the object of his visit.

In accordance with her suggestion conveyed to him through the Nakoda, he had come in person to make his suit to her daughter. He desired to see her at once.

The prevaricating words of temporizing that came to Madame Yamada's lips were not even listened to by him.

Her daughter not at home? Very well,

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he would go, then, at once. Thereupon he arose. Madame Yamada bit her lip until the blood came. Then she clapped her hands and bade the maid who answered tell the eldest daughter of the house to hasten at once to assist the most exalted Matsuda with his clogs. The latter, however, kicked his feet into his own sandals. When the maiden appeared, he went shuffling in them toward the door, returning only a curt nod to her deep and graceful obeisance. Madame Yamada, clasping her hands in despair, followed him to the door.

Would not His Excellency wait a little while?

No, His Excellency would not—that is to

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say—yes, His Excellency would; for just at that moment His Excellency, casting a keen glance about him, saw a little figure sitting on the door-step in the garden to the rear of the house.

“Your daughter, I perceive,” he said, indicating Azalea, “has returned.”

The angry blood buzzed in Madame Yamada’s ears, but she answered calmly enough:

“Why, yes, it is true, Excellency.” Then raising her voice, she called to the girl: “Azalea!”

Matsuda, returning to the interior of the house, seated himself in the guest room, lighted his pipe and drew a long whiff.

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Then he looked at Azalea sitting before him pensively. His little keen eyes going from her to her step-mother and catching the glance of baffled fury bestowed by Madame Yamada upon her daughter Yuri, he allowed a sound which was oddly like a chuckle to escape him. Then he put the pipe down and again regarded the maiden Azalea. He said:

“ It is the wish of your step-mother that I address you personally.”

She looked at him with eyes of inquiry. What had Matsuda Isami to say to her? She did not dream that a man as old as her father, and one who was so exalted in public opinion, would deign to propose

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marriage with her, so insignificant and
humble.

“I wish to marry you,” said Matsuda
bluntly.

Her lips parted and her eyes enlarged.

“Me?” she said faintly, and repeated the
little word. “Me?”

“Yes,” he smiled. “Marry you, Aza-
lea.”

The color came in a frightened ebb to
her face. She looked at her mother and
sister fearfully. Their faces were abso-
lutely cold and impassive. In a flash she
understood her step-mother’s attitude of a
moment since. It was all clearer than
daylight. Azalea arose and bowed extra-
vagantly.

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gantly down to the very mats. Then, with her head almost at Matsuda's feet, she said:

"The humblest one is altogether too insignificant and small to become the wife of so exalted a personage."

The words pleased Matsuda. Plainly this girl would make a most excellent and humble wife. He bent graciously and touched her head, patting it. She slipped under his hand to her knees, and then to a sitting position. But her head was still bent far over, and if the suitor could have seen that dimpling face, its expression would have perplexed him.

He seated himself opposite to her.

"The marriage," he said, "can be speed-

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ily arranged. I do not like delays in any of my affairs."

Madame Yamada interposed, desperately:

"Time will be needed to make her marriage garments, to call together her august relatives, for maidenly meditation, and for preparation for the marriage feast."

"We can dispense with all these things," said Matsuda suavely.

"Too early a marriage would be unseemly," said Madame Yamada.

"Madame Yamada exaggerates public opinion," was Matsuda's response.

The woman's voice was barely controlled in its harshness.

"You, Azalea, what have you to say?"

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Azalea opened her fan and looked at it thoughtfully, almost as though in the painted pictures upon it she found an answer. Suddenly she raised her head.

"I do not wish to marry," she said, and added as an afterword: "—yet."

At that moment her step-mother could have embraced her.

Matsuda cleared his throat.

"When, then, will it suit you?" he asked respectfully.

The girl's eyes were still upon her fan, and without raising them she replied with a slight shrug of her small, bewitching shoulders:

"I do not know when. Maybe in one

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year; maybe in ten. I do not wish to marry—yet.”

Matsuda arose.

“For one year,” he said, “or for ten years, or as long as your caprice may make it, I will wait for you.”

Azalea’s fan fluttered closed. She bowed her head upon it.

“Excellency is very faithful.”

“Once,” said Matsuda, looking at her with half closed eyes, “your august samurai father deigned to call me ‘Dog.’ You will learn, maiden, that I shall prove my title to ‘Dog’ by my watchfulness and faithfulness. I have sworn to possess you, and possess you I will.”

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The moment he was gone Azalea turned toward her step-mother, upon whose countenance a look of sweetest benevolence toward her step-daughter was slowly appearing.

"Mother-in-law," said the girl, "you need not fear that I will marry him. No, my father spoke true words. He is a dog. He has only the instincts of a tradesman, and as such he comes here to buy the daughter of a samurai."

"Your words are wise, Azalea," said the step-mother, "and you win my maternal affection. Matsuda is not the fit husband for a warrior's daughter. Yet, Azalea, bear in mind that Yuri, your sister, had for

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father one less elevated than a samurai—one, indeed, who was a mere tradesman. She is well fitted to be the wife of Matsuda Isami. Therefore, you can help or hinder this our ambition."

"I will neither help nor hinder," said Azalea, crossing the room, and looking through the shoji. "Mother-in-law, I have no interest in the matter," she added.

Madame Yamada was behind her and had touched her arm, the arm she had lately pinched so viciously.

"Promise to be steadfast in your refusal of Matsuda. Promise that, Azalea, and you will find that harshness is an unknown quality in this household."

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“Oh, I will promise that, easily,” said Azalea. “I will not even look at or speak to the man. Other things now occupy my insignificant head.”

CHAPTER V

It was in the springtime, when the little leaves upon the trees were of the most entrancing shade of green and the wild plum and cherry blossoms blew in clouds of pink and white, making an impressionistic picture against the deep blue sky so lovely and entrancing that even such a serious-minded, earnest worker as the Rev. Richard Verley became unconscious of the sermon he had been writing and smiled out at the landscape.

Nature oftentimes, from her very beauty, distracts one from the work of composition, though one would call her lovingly an

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inspiration. How could the young missionary continue the writing of his sermon, when the alluring breezes of the spring softly slipped into his room and insistently drew the pencil from his hand. And so he sat there smiling at his desk and dreaming. He was not conscious of his dreams. He only knew the world seemed very good and fair. His pen trailed over the paper for a space, then paused, to continue again. Idly, and unconsciously, he had covered a sheet of foolscap.

The slight noise of the opening of his, sliding doors caused him to come to life with a guilty start. His usually pale face was flooded with color, as for the first time

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he saw what he had written on the page. He turned it over quickly, though he did not lay this last sheet among the previous pages of his sermon.

A face of prodigious fatness was thrust between the shoji.

“What is it, Natsu?” asked the minister in Japanese.

“The girl Azalea,” she answered. “I have told her Your Excellency is most busy, but she still stays.”

“That is right,” he said quietly. “I am expecting her.”

The servant pursed her lips and her round cheeks expanded till her little eyes

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were almost hidden. She muttered discontentedly: "Again, Excellency?"

"Yes," he said, "again. What are you waiting for?"

She shuffled unwillingly from the room, drawing the doors behind her. Suddenly she opened them again.

"Excellency," she said, "she is not truly convert—no! That is a lie!"

He smiled. The maid's jealousy of all his parishioners gave him amusement. She was envious even of their possible conversion.

"That will do, Natsu," he said. "Don't keep our visitor waiting."

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The woman muttered ill-temperedly as she passed along the hall.

The minister waited in pleasing anticipation. He had not expected her at this hour. She came usually in the afternoon. He remembered with what fearful shyness she had first entered his house, and the tremulous, almost breathless, fashion in which she had replied to his questions. He was of a hopeful, sanguine disposition. Though he knew that his small congregation consisted of those induced by sen to come to church, those who came from curiosity and others still—young boys and girls—from mischief solely, still he believed that his labor would bear eventual fruit, and

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lo, at last a convert! She was very young, somewhat fragile and in her own strange fashion lovely. From the first he had likened her to a timid wild bird. Even after she had entered his house, she had turned backward as though to retreat; then as his deep serious eyes met hers she spoke as if urged by some impulse, and repeated her faltering words in English.

“Minister, I am convert unto you!”

At first her visits had been irregular and spasmodic. She would come as far as the hill, then turn back. Again, her courage emboldened, she would reach his garden gate, there to linger but a moment, the antagonistic face of the minister’s servant

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affrighting her. But in the absence of the maid, Azalea would daringly pass beyond the gate. A few moments later the minister would meet her in the path and lead her into his house.

The minister hearing the light glide of her little feet now outside the doors, hastened to slide back the shoji.

She stood upon the threshold, her eyes widened, her cheeks glowing with the tremulous excitement that always assailed her upon the occasion of these visits. He held out his large hand in silence, and she, the color fluttering wildly now over her face, slowly and timidly lifted her little one from the folds of her sleeve and put it into his.

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He drew her towards his desk. Still holding her hand, he seated himself and looked up at her, without speaking, but smiling very tenderly. Her eyes turned from his and her lips trembled. She tried to withdraw her hand, but he held it firmly and then suddenly enclosed it completely with his other hand. Fright assailed the girl. She slipped to the floor, her head dropping on a level with his knees. Then Richard Verley bent and spoke to her in his strangely tender voice, which somehow always seemed to penetrate and still her beating little heart.

“Azalea!” He spoke her name so softly. “Lift your face, my little girl,” he said.

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“I want to see it, while I tell you something.”

She obeyed him like a child, but the eyes that met his were mutely appealing.

“What do you think I am going to say to you to-day?” he asked, smiling a trifle.

“About those honorable commandments?”

He shook his head.

“No—you already have learned them well, have you not?”

“Yes. You like hear me say them, mebbe?”

“Not to-day. I wish to speak to you about another matter.”

She looked at him apprehensively.

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“Oh,” she said, “mebbe your august God tell you I also visit at the temple that other day?”

He looked a trifle startled.

“What temple—what do you mean?”

“You God sees all things?”

“All things,” he said solemnly.

Her eyes expressed momentary fright.
She drew her hands forcibly from his and sat backward a little way from him, her head bent.

“Then,” she said, “you already know about—about my—my lie?”

“Lie?”

He leaned forward in his chair.

“Yaes—yaes—your God told you.”

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“Tell me what you mean.”

The face she raised was pitiful.

“Excellency, that was velly wicked lie I tell you wen I say I am convert unto you.”

He stared at her blankly. She could not bear the expression on his face and pushed herself nearer to him on her knees. Her hands fluttered above and then timidly touched his.

“Excellency, I sawry—sawry—” There was a sob in her voice now, and her eyes were misty. “Pray you be like unto the gods and forgive that lie.”

He stood up mechanically, then sat down again, turning in his seat toward the desk and resting his clasped hands there. She,

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from her kneeling posture, reached up to touch his arm.

“Pray—” she began and broke off, as though she could not finish. He turned his head and looked at her curiously. Still he did not speak.

“Listen,” she continued in her low, almost sighing, voice, which he no longer wished to hear. “I tell you only one lie—one liddle bit lie. Thas not velly much. Also I beseech the gods to pardon that lie—and I beseech also your mos’ kind God pardon me.” She broke off distressfully—“Excellency, will you not hear me?”

“I am listening,” he said heavily.

“Your voice so hard,” she said.

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His eyes were still stern. He spoke mechanically.

"I was going to say something—something personal to you to-day. You have shocked me. That is all. But I want to hear what you have to say. There may be extenuating—well, tell me how it came about that you pretended conversion."

"I wanted moaney," she said.

She saw his hands clinch and shrank before the look upon his face. She shook her head uncertainly.

"For money!" he repeated.

"Yaes, I needed some velly much. Gonji say you pay big moaney to convert, and so—and so—I became convert."

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The minister closed his eyes, then covered them spasmodically with his hand. Sitting back in his seat he remained with his face thus half shielded while she spoke on.

"But," she said, "you din not give me moaney; no, not even one half sen." She laughed a little, almost joyously.

"Ah, I am so glad you din nod give," she said. "I doan want that moaney. After that first day my honorable step-mother doan be unkind no more. Also she give me plenty to eat, an' new dress, also Matsuda Isami ask me marry wis him evelly day in those weeks."

The minister uncovered his eyes and

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looked at her. The expression of his face must have been less forbidding, for she moved confidently nearer to him.

"What do you think now?" she asked.

His voice was husky.

"You spoke of marrying some one."

She shook her head.

"No. Some one want marry wiz me. I doan desire. But sinz he want, my honorable mother-in-law is mos' kind unto me, and I doan starve no more. Therefore I doan wan no moaney—be convert now."

"Ah, why do you keep up the pretense, then?"

"Pretense?" She could not understand

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the word, as her English vocabulary was limited to words acquired from the minister's predecessor, a woman missionary.

"Why do you still pretend to be a Christian? Why do you continue to come here if it is no longer necessary for you to obtain money?"

"Because," said Azalea, smiling up at him, "I want do so. Also, I kinnod stay away. My august feet bringing me back all those times."

He sighed. Her face with its quickly changing expressions became wistful.

"Excellency, I am glad thad honorable God telling you thad about those moaneys. Perhaps he also tell you that I want be

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convert an' doan' want no moaney."

He wavered toward her a moment, and then turned his eyes from her. He had been beguiled too long.

"Mebbe your God doan' desire me?—mebbe," she said.

He did not answer. To recall him to her she touched his knee. His voice was hoarse.

"Salvation is free to all," he said dully.

She laughed almost joyfully.

"I make nudder confession," she said eagerly. "Sometimes I 'fraid of your God. The priest tell me he is evil spirit and I getting skeered. Well, wen I come unto your house I know that your God

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gitting hold of my heart, for it beating so hard, I doan know wha's matter wis me. I doan know whether I lidder bit skeered of your honorable God, or—or—of you augustness. So that other day wen you take my hand this away.” She tried to illustrate, but found him unresponsive. Her voice toiled forlornly. “I so ’fraid of tha’s influence of your God. I run so quick from your house I kinnod see, and then I came to thad temple and prostrate myself before Kwannon and beseech her save me from all those powers of evil spirit. Then I go home, and I know I jusd silly, foolish girl. Thad God you tell me ’bout is not evil spirit. No—no! You say nod,

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an' I jus' foolish, skeered, because, mebbe
jus' because I am thad happy."

"Happy! Why were you happy?"

He could not resist the expression of her eyes and almost unconsciously allowed her hands to slip back into his.

"Because you so kind unto me," she said; "you touching my hand this way—so warm—so nize! Tha's why I coon nod speag. Tha's stop my heart."

"I love you!" he said, the words escaping his lips almost without his volition.
"I cannot help it. That was what I wanted to say to you to-day."

She clung to his hands. Her lips parted. The color was wild in her face.

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"Oh," she said, "you love me! Tha's a most beautifulest thought, Excellency. Mebbe also your God love me—jus' me—also?"

He drew her into his arms and held her there a moment. He forgot everything else as he kissed her willing, questioning face and little hands. Then after an interval:

"What does it matter—what does anything matter now?" he said. "I love you. I know that you love me. Your eyes do not lie."

When he released her, her hands fell limply on his knees.

"No one," she said breathlessly, her eyes shining, "aever clasping me like thad."

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He laughed as joyously as she could. With his arm about her, as she knelt before him, he showed her the sheet of paper covered with his writing of her name.

“That,” he said, almost boyishly, “is how the Rev. Richard Verley wrote his sermon to-day — ‘Azalea, Azalea, Azalea, Azalea—nothing but Azalea.’ ”

“Tha’s me! I am Azalea!” she said.
“Oh, tha’s so nize be your convert.”

He laughed, then sighed.

“You will be that in time, I promise,” he said, “and meanwhile, well, meanwhile, we will be married.”

She looked up at him with frightened eyes.

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"Married! You also marry me?" she asked.

"Why, yes, of course. We will make a little trip to a town where there's another minister, or possibly I can have the ceremony here."

"Oh! Pray you doan make other converts. Please doan."

"Why?"

"Because perhaps you also marry them —yaes?"

He laughed again and kissed the tip of her little pointed chin. There was a bewitching dimple in it, and he had always desired to kiss it.

"When you are my wife, you will, in

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time, become my helper. You, too, will make converts."

"You gotter git consent my honorable mother-in-law," she interrupted.

His face fell.

"Also," she said, "I gotter git those marriage garments, and you must buy me lots presents."

"No, I'll marry you in the gown you have on."

"This!" She touched it in dismay.
"Why thad would be disgrace upon me."

"Very well, you shall be disgraced then. Now come—we'll go to your step-mother right away. There's no time to be lost."

She hesitated as they reached the door.

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“Wait,” she said. He paused with the sliding door half open.

“You bedder not come also. Let me speag to her alone. Tha’s bedder. If she doan consent, then I skeer her and say I marry wiz Matsuda. She doan wish that. She desire him for Yuri.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Ah-bah!” (Good-bye!) she said, passing through the opening. He drew her back.

“Is that the way to say ‘good-bye’?” he asked reproachfully.

She was puzzled.

“This is the American way,” he said boyishly, and stooping, kissed her.

CHAPTER VI

She ran all the way home. She wanted her stepmother's consent as quickly as possible, so that she might hasten back to the minister.

Her breathless words astounded Madame Yamada.

"That barbarous, beautiful priest wishes to marry me," she announced in one breath.

Madame Yamada's lips fell apart.

"What do you mean?" she inquired roughly.

"That's right—right!" cried the girl,

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clasping her hands excitedly. "Oh, I am the happiest girl in all Japan!"

Her step-mother extended a long finger and struck it at the girl's breast.

"What! The foreign devil wants to marry you?"

Madame Yamada was excited, agitated, above all delighted. The gods were favoring her. Here was a solution to all their difficulties.

"Breathe not a word to anyone of this, my daughter," she said, "but hasten back with the speed of wings to the house of the barbarian. Bring him here, and we will go at once to the next town and have a

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private ceremony there. The Nakoda Okido must not suspect."

Azalea swung her sleeves coquettishly.

"Oh," she said airily, "we will not make Japanese marriage, step-mother." She clasped her hands behind her and raised her head with childish dignity and pride.

"I am to be an American lady. Therefore we will marry in American fashion."

"How is that?" asked Madame Yamada, mystified.

"Oh, you don't understand," said Azalea pityingly, "but I do. He told me once how they marry. Just pray, bend head like this, and knees like this, hold hands tight—so, mother-in-law; and then the

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priest prays on top of the heads and the bride is given a ring—big and shining—very fine. That's the way they marry."

"They do not exchange the marriage cup?" questioned her mother, horrified.

"No—there are no marriage cups. Also to marry that foreign way, I have got to be Kirishitan.

"Ah-h! I see. You will turn convert?"

"I am already. I wish already to be so," said the girl simply.

An idea flashed swiftly across the mind of Madame Yamada—a brilliant idea.

"Good!" she said. "It is well for a maiden to be of the same religion as the man she marries. But do not let it be

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known till the ceremony is over. Then throw away your ancestral tablets. You will have no further use for them."

Azalea paled a trifle. She was not ignorant of the effect of such an action. One who renounces the tablets of his ancestor she knew is in popular opinion forever lowered. One might attend the church meetings of the Kirishitans, one might even affiliate with the foreigners; but it is only when one has openly declared oneself for the new religion and, in defiance of the old, destroyed the sacred symbols, the ancestral tablets, that one becomes an outcast. Yet it was necessary, surely. It was not possible without hypocrisy to acknowledge the

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new God, and still in secret cherish the tablets of the old.

Well, what were the tablets to her now?

Her husband's love, the new God's strength, would stand between her and shield her from her enemies. Azalea smiled bravely at her step-mother.

"Yes," she said, "if my honorable husband requires it, I will throw away the tablets."

They were married in the little mission church on the hill. An old and venerable missionary officiated.

The church was quite crowded, for Madame Yamada had spread the news about the town, in anticipation of its effect upon

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the community. She herself wept unceasingly throughout the ceremony, never once uncovering her shamed face buried in the sleeve of her kimona. Truly, thought her neighbors, the good Madame Yamada was distressed by this action of her step-daughter.

When, after it was all over, Azalea's friends turned their heads from her or looked askance at her, the girl simply lifted her eyes to her husband. The look of wistful apprehension that a moment before had clouded them vanished. Her face became radiant. She clung to his sleeve like a child, proudly, gaily. But when, after proceeding a few steps in the direction of her new

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home, she realized that they were being followed, a feeling of recklessness and defiance assailed her. She stopped suddenly and dipped her hand down into the long sleeve of her marriage gown. She hardly looked at what she had drawn out, but raising her hand suddenly she threw the tablets in the direction of the little river in the valley below. The noise of their fall upon the rocks frightened her. She covered her ears with her hands and stood trembling in the sunny light. Then she became conscious of the fact that those who had followed her had suddenly, and it seemed, silently, disappeared. She stood alone with the man, her husband. For a

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moment he seemed a stranger. That momentary blind impulse, she knew, cut her off forever from her kind. Publicly she had insulted her ancestors. She had chosen between them and this tall white stranger whom she scarcely dared to look at now. The silent departure of those who had followed her told more eloquently than any outcry could have done the resentment of her people.

Azalea looked about her dazedly. Suppose, after all, her friends spoke truly? Suppose this new God was in reality an evil spirit? Had she not felt its subtle influence upon her? When in memory could she recall the time that her whole

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being had thrilled and glowed with emotions and feelings so strange and new to her? Was it not the influence of this spirit which had forced her to throw away the tablets—had forced her to marry one of its priests?

Her husband stood looking at her tenderly, yearningly. He was thinking of her future, and of the trusting soul that had come to his keeping.

“Well, they are all gone now,” he said, “and what was that you threw away?”

She shook her head piteously. He waited for her answer, and marvelled that she, who had gone through the marriage ceremony in such a brave and happy spirit,

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was now so white and trembling. Surely, she had not begun to fear him? Poor little frightened bride!

"I din nod mean to throw it away," she said brokenly. "I coon nod help me."

"Oh, you are trembling about what you threw away? Well, let me go after it. Such a little mite of a hand cannot fling very far."

"No, no," she said, catching at his sleeve, "do not touch it. The gods may punish you also."

He enclosed her hands in his, and looked at her very seriously.

"You must not talk of 'the gods,' my

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wife. It sounds pagan, and I am going to cure you of the habit."

"Yes, yes," she said, and now she was almost sobbing; "pray you do so, ple-ase. I am most ignorant girl in all the whole worl'. I like know about those gods. Pray tell me truth, will you not?"

He could not understand the meaning of her beseeching voice. How could he suppose that she still dreaded the thought that he was a priest of a possible evil spirit? She wanted to be reassured. He only saw that she was very white and trembling, now that the ceremony was over, and he dimly realized that in marrying him she had sacrificed much.

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“When you look and speak like that,” he said, “I feel as if I had done some brutal act. Come, be my happy, joyful sweetheart again. Why, marriage is not a tragedy; not when there is love. Now, let us look about us just a moment, and then we will go home—to our own home together. Just see how sunny and beautiful everything is here. Was ever a sky more lovely? And the fields! What color can we call them?”

His arm was about her and she had recovered somewhat of her confidence.

“It is a purple world,” she said, “all purple and green to-day, Excellency.”

“Why, yes, it does seem so,” he said.

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“The skies are more purple than blue, and their very reflection seems to rest upon the fields to-day. Just look down there in the valley.”

“It is the purple iris and wistaria,” she said. “I so love them. Do they grow like that in America?”

“No, unfortunately.”

“And are not the skies purple there?”
she asked.

“No-o. That is, not often.”

“Oh,” she said, with a sudden, unexpected vehemence, “I never want to go to that America. I love these fields so purple and so green—and those skies! Excellency, you will not take me away, will you?”

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He was touched to the heart of him.

"No, no," he said. "I will not. I will
not."

CHAPTER VII

Azalea had been married during a brief absence of Matsuda Isami in Tokyo. He had gone there especially at Madame Yamada's suggestion, to purchase city gifts with which to help him in his suit. The townspeople had never been on sufficiently familiar terms with Matsuda to talk with him even upon his return from an absence. Hence he learned nothing of the marriage until Madame Yamada herself broke the news to him. She appeared to be suffering from intense mortification and anguish of mind because of what she termed the unnatural defiance of her step-daughter, who

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had married a barbarian beast against all the wishes of her people. As if this shame were not sufficient, she had turned Kirishitan and destroyed the tablets of her ancestors. Madame Yamada daclared vehemently that though she, from motives of pity, must sometimes see the abandoned girl, yet she never would allow her pure and virtuous daughters to be contaminated with her society.

The woman had not foreseen the real effects of such news upon Matsuda. For a moment he stood as if turned to stone. Then his long white teeth gleamed out between his thick, coarse lips like the tusks of a savage animal. In his eyes there was

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unchained rage. Suddenly he laughed hideously. That laughter alone would have unstrung the nerves of one less cowardly than Madame Yamada. She prostrated herself to the very ground and touched his feet with her head.

“ Most Exalted,” she said, “ the humble one craves your august pardon and abjectly beseeches you to perceive her distress. That this wretched girl has abandoned you for a vile and horrible barbarian is not the fault of the humblest one, who sought with all her power to bring about her union with you.”

There was an odd quality in the responding voice of Matsuda.

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“Who spoke of fault?” said he. “Has my mouth uttered blame upon you, Madame Yamada?”

Her courage returned and she arose.

“I should have known,” she said, “that Your Excellency is too noble to have blamed the unfortunate. And now that you have deigned to pardon me, will you not permit my daughters to wait upon you?”

The gray face of Matsuda had resumed its impassive expression, but his eyes were almost closed. He refused Madame Yamada’s invitation with a gesture and without words. When she did not attempt to press him, he moved toward the door.

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“What was the effect of this marriage upon the community?” he asked, turning to the woman.

“They were righteously insulted, and pity me.”

“Was there any demonstration when she threw away the tablets?”

“Yes. Her friends and neighbors turned from her as if she were evil, as she has truly become.”

“She is, then, forsaken?”

“Punished, Excellency. She believes herself happy at present, but who envies the lot of an outcast? She is entirely friendless.”

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Matsuda's eyes turned inward, as for a space he meditated.

"Not friendless entirely," he said, finally, tapping his own chest significantly. "She still has Matsuda Isami for friend."

"You!" repeated Madame Yamada faintly.

"I."

"But," she gasped, "she has deceived you more than anyone else. Exalted Matsuda, she has forced you to break the oath you made to possess her. She is married forever to the foreign devil."

"It is news," said Matsuda coldly, "that the foreign devils marry Japanese girls forever." He went a step nearer to the

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woman and brought his eyes on a level with hers. "She is not married to him, Madame Yamada. He will leave her soon —remember my words. After that—there is time then for the fulfilment of my oath."

Madame Yamada, left alone, grew repulsive in aspect. Her powdered face was white and long drawn. She had thrust her hands mechanically through her hair and it stood up from her head in stiff disorder. In the hope of securing Matsuda for her own daughter she had herself assisted in putting the girl she hated beyond her reach. Now she realized how utterly vain was this last hope. Her very action but brought upon her head the implacable enmity of

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the man himself, who she knew was not deceived in her. The gods alone knew to what extent he would carry his malicious vengeance upon her.

CHAPTER VIII

Meanwhile Matsuda sent the articles he had purchased in Tokyo as marriage gifts to the most respected and honorable foreigner, Mr. Verley. The latter was actually pleased and touched. He laughed at Azalea's first impulse of fear when the presents had arrived and reminded her that these were the only wedding gifts they had received. She, after her temporary fear, fell to admiring the beauty of the gifts. By the time Matsuda came to pay his personal respects to the couple, only the remotest suspicion of design on his part remained in her mind. No one could have been more

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respectful and humble in attitude than the rich Matsuda to the foreign minister, no one more solicitous for their comfort and happiness. The little mission house and its pastor found a sudden, unexpected patron, for Sunday after Sunday the chief man of Sanyu attended the services. Matsuda became a "pillar of the church." First he won the confidence of the minister, and later made the acquaintance of other and more powerful foreigners in the larger cities of Japan.

The recall of the missionary came like a shock in the midst of their happiness. Azalea, by this time, had learned and seemingly understood the religion of her

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husband. She had accepted it even before she understood it with a meek faith almost sublime. Yet, in spite of her seeming conversion, and her almost idolatrous love for her husband, there had curiously enough remained always with Azalea that small stubborn feeling of terror of the far-away "land of the barbarians" which constituted the home of her husband. All the joyful searching with her husband as teacher in the books of his people had failed to cure her of this innate sense of fear of the foreigner, a fear inculcated since childhood, when she had listened to the weird and horrible tales of an old grandfather who had once lived in one of the open ports and

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whose imagination was livelier than his memory. These vivid tales of horror, added to an occasional visit to the town of foreign sailor men, whose shore conduct was not that of superior beings, and the further assurance of the temple priests that these barbarians were evil—all these impressions were deeply enough implanted in the nature of Azalea, who had never wholly outgrown her child-nature. Just as a Caucasian child might shrink in fear at the thought of suddenly being taken from his safe little cot and transplanted among the savage tribes of Africa, so the little Japanese girl dreaded the thought of life in the questionable and unknown land of America.

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And now, when she had come to the years of womanhood, a thrill of that early fear still remained with her. Hence when her husband told her of his recall Azalea was quite stupefied.

“ You are going to leave me!” she gasped, her eyes wide with terror.

“ Leave you!” he repeated. “ Why, what put such an idea as that into your head? You are going with me.”

She shook her head.

“ No, no! I kinnod go,” she said.

“ Cannot! What a word to use to me. Certainly you will go.”

She caught at his hands and held them spasmodically.

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"You promise me on that day you marry wiz me that you never goin' take me away across those oceans. Yes, you promise."

"But Azalea, I am recalled. I must go. Now, be reasonable. These people who sent for me are my employers."

She slipped to the floor and sat with her hands clasped about her huddled knees.

"Velly well," she said after a moment.
"You go. I will wait here for you."

He sat down on the mat beside her and put his arm about her.

"No, no, we must go together."

With her head against his shoulder she cried hysterically.

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"I do not want to go—no, I do not want!" she kept repeating.

Thinking her eccentric stubbornness due to her condition, he said in the tenderest voice:

"I could not leave you alone now. Why, what would a little girl like you do all alone with a wee baby and no husband to care for both of you."

She struck her hands passionately together.

"Tha's why!" she said. "Jus' why I doan want go. I am 'fraid for that liddle bit bebbey."

Argument and persuasion seemed useless at this time, for Azalea could neither under-

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stand the one, nor would she yield to the other. Even when Richard Verley returned from Tokyo, where he had found money cabled for two passages by his missionary society, Azalea would not consider the journey. A less conscientious man than the young minister would have used the price of the second passage in providing for the comfort of his wife, during his absence, but Verley repelled the idea, even though he knew that once in America he could easily find funds. So in obedience to his Massachusetts conscience, Azalea's share of the cabled funds was sent back.

Then it was that Azalea would hysteri-

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ally consent to journey with her husband, only to refuse in the end.

Verley's recall was imperative. Yet at times he thought of refusing to return. His many gifts and benevolences among the people had eaten away the last instalment of his small salary. He could not leave his wife supplied with funds sufficient for the entire period of her illness; yet once in America he would be able to send small sums regularly. The society had mentioned something vaguely of a desire to have him lecture in the United States and after that it was intimated that he might be sent to China. In any event he would return for Azalea after the birth of her child.

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All these confused thoughts and reasonings played through the mind and conscience of Verley. Yet so finely balanced were the moral and emotional traits of this young man that for a time he could come to no decision. He prayed, and then the precepts of his religion conquered. Since Azalea would not accompany him, he must go alone. Parting was inevitable, but absence was not for long.

Once again he sought Azalea. Failing to move her by the most passionate entreaty, Verley tried to make her see his reasons for his decision, which he now felt more than ever must be final.

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Azalea looked up at him with an apathetic, yet tender, expression:

“Yaes, yaes,” she said wearily, “I understand. I kinnod go. Your God—yaes, my God also—he calling you—not me. You go! I stay!”

Verley now mutely enough accepted the cruelty of circumstances and sought to cheer the drooping spirits of his wife. She at this time was beset by feelings of the most intense depression, induced as much by her frail condition of health as her childish terror of the seas which lay between and separated her husband’s America from her Japan.

During the last weeks of his stay in

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Japan, Richard Verley spent his time in attempts to earn sufficient money so that, at least, Azalea, until he could communicate with her from America, should not want for anything. He wrote articles for a Tokyo weekly paper. Even the native journalists of Japan dream not of making a living at this profession, unless they own an interest in the paper to which they contribute. The amount the young American missionary received for his contributions could be said to add nothing to the meagre sum he had been enabled to lay by from his salary. This, he calculated, would keep Azalea in comparative comfort for possibly two months. He sighed as he

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thought of her childish ignorance of the value of money, and he hardly dared to think of the possibility of the premature birth of his child.

But upon the eve of his going fortune quite suddenly reversed its frowning face. His financial worries found an unexpected alleviation. Matsuda Isami, the friend of his church and a professed convert, had come to him and offered a certain sum of money. Of course the American had protested at accepting any money for personal use from the Japanese, but Matsuda insisted that he knew of the minister's embarrassment, and being himself possessed of much, wished to share at least a small part

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of it with his friend. He felt sure Mr. Verley would sail from Japan in an easier frame of mind if he could be assured that his wife was well protected from want. The amount offered by Matsuda was insignificant, but seventy-five yen goes far toward living in Japan. She would be independent for six months to come, at least. And while the minister hesitated over the temptation, the wily Matsuda suggested that if the minister felt any backwardness about accepting it as a gift, to at least accept it as a loan, giving Matsuda a lien upon the contents of his house. This need only be perfunctory, a formal salve to his pride, for Matsuda was confident the

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minister would pay the loan in no time. It is needless to say that the man of trade triumphed over the man of dreams. Richard Verley mortgaged the furniture of his house, without explaining this part to his wife, who was already disheartened at his protracted departure. He was enabled to put into her hand, the day before he sailed, a sum of money larger than she had ever seen before.

The parting was heart-wrenching. It took place in the little house, for he did not wish to have her go to the big city to see the actual sailing of the boat, and she at the last moment had decided against going even to the railroad station of the

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town with him. She wished, she said, to see him leave the house, just as if he were going on a visit in the neighborhood, to the church, to an afflicted beggar, or one dying and deserted. He told her she was the bravest woman in the world because she would not let him see her face save with a smile upon the lips. Her eyes kept back their tears. Only at the last moment she clung about his neck and, from kissing his face, fell to kissing his breast, his arms and hands, and then slipped to the floor, there to kiss, in a fashion that shocked him, his very feet.

When he was gone she closed every shoji of the house and shut herself up alone.

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That night she slept underneath his desk in
the little study where he had worked, his
large black bible the pillow for her head.

CHAPTER IX

When the fields had turned from purple to gold and yellow, and Summer was hot in the land, Azalea for the first time in two months crept from her chamber and sat at the door of the cottage, her baby on her back. She had been very ill and now she was as thin and fragile as a spirit. Weak as she was Azalea had come to the door during the absence of Natsu, to watch for the mail carrier. During her long illness, and almost from the first day, she had been wont to turn her face always toward the Street shoji, there to watch and wait with undying patience for the coming of that

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carrier who should bring her word from her husband. But every day, from the rising of the sun to its setting, she waited in hungry vainness. She hindered the progress of her health and became feverish and then delirious. Even in her delirium she would seize the hands of the hard-faced Natsu and pitifully beseech her to bring her a letter from her husband. Now July had come. Spring had gone and the Spring baby had come. Still no word from the father to bless and cheer them in their solitude. Azalea had been too ill in those days to wonder why the woman Matsu attended her with such faithfulness. But as she grew stronger she used to watch

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mutely the sullen-faced servant, moving about her chamber, keeping it cleanly and even sweet with the flowers she brought from the woods. Azalea would have wished to be on friendly terms with her, but when she attempted speech with her Natsu remained grimly silent, seldom even answering the timid questions of her mistress. On this day when Azalea, by clinging with her hands to the dividing walls of shoji, had made her weak way to the door step, Natsu was absent from the house. She had gone to the house of Matsuda Isami.

The sun was warm and very good to feel. The baby, in its little bag on her back, was no heavier a weight than the

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discarded obi. Azalea, though weak, felt happier and more restful than she had in days. How good it was to be out in the open air once more, to look up at the wide blue sky, the abode of the great white God; to feel the touch of the soft breezes and to hear the little babbling noise of the moving trees, the wee creatures in the grass and the singing of the birds in the camphor trees.

With chin resting upon her hands she sat there, absently dreaming. Her position brought the sleeping baby's head close against her neck. The warmth of its contact comforted and thrilled her, just as the touch of the child's father had done. Ah, it was true she had waited long for word

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from him, but he would not fail them! That small, soft head pressed at her neck seemed to reassure her of this. She would grow strong again, strong and happy as she had been. To Matsuda she gave no thought. The one God was good and he would not permit this evil one to intrude again upon her.

Some one spoke her name, and she lifted her head. Before her, in the path, stood the bowing Okido. Mechanically, and without speaking, she returned his salutation. She was too weak and listless to feel interest in his unexpected call upon her, and did not question him.

Madame Azalea was recovered?

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She nodded listlessly.

“Good!”

He shuffled his feet, waiting for an invitation to enter the house. The indifferent silence of the girl was not encouraging, and the Summer sun was very hot and uncomfortable upon his back. However, he was not to be conquered by a woman’s unnatural silence and the heat of the Lord of Day.

“I perceive, Madame Azalea,” he continued, “that the gods have been good to you. You have a child.”

She smiled faintly.

“Yes,” she said, and for the first time he perceived the faintness and weariness

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of her voice. He inquired with some anxiety:

“ You are still ill? ”

She shook her head.

“ Quite well,” she said, “ but when one has lain long upon the honorable back, then one’s speech sometimes becomes exhausted.”

“ Ah! ”

This response, he took it, might be an intimation that she was not strong enough for conversation. On the other hand, it was longer than her previous monosyllabic answers, and therefore more encouraging. Well, he would speak to her of the child. This subject must surely interest her.

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“ Permit me to inquire,” he continued, with bland interest, “ the sex of your honorable offspring? ”

“ Male,” she answered simply.

“ Ah! you are indeed fortunate.” He went a step nearer to her, looking solicitously at the child’s head. The projecting gable above mother and child was a sufficient shade for the upturned face of the sleeping child; but the mother must be moved from her apathetic listlessness in some way. So the Nakoda exclaimed in alarm:

“ Do you not fear the sun upon your child’s young eyes will blind them? ”

His words had the desired effect. She

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started and put back her hands behind her head. Then, somewhat unsteadily, she arose.

"You will pardon us, if you please," she said. "We must go into the interior."

Okido had hoped to be invited to enter, but her answer did not disconcert him. He went up the little steps, and stretched out his hand as if to assist her. Madame was too weak to walk alone; would she not permit his most respectful assistance? She clung for support to the front of the sliding door.

"Yes," she said, "I am still augustly weak. So pray you, good-bye, kind visitor."

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He bowed deeply to her, and then:

"Madame Azalea, permit me first to leave in your house a little gift for your man child."

She let him put into her hands a child's tiny toy.

"You are very good," she said.

"It is not I who am so well disposed toward your child," he said, "but one whose interest in it is such that he would give all his possessions to it—if you would permit it."

She raised her face, white and startled in expression now. Her hands crept out from the sleeves.

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"Ah," she said, "of whom do you speak, good Okido?"

He did not answer her query, and her breath came excitedly.

"You speak of my husband? You have heard from him?"

"Not your husband, Madame Azalea," he said, "but one who would become so."

She passed her hand bewilderedly over her brow.

"I do not understand," she said.

Her strength had been already too much taxed. She turned from the Nakoda and opened the shoji behind her. Then noiselessly she slipped into her chamber, feeling her way through the room with her hands

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outstretched like one gone blind. When she found the couch she tottered, rather than lay, face down upon it in that instinctive fashion of the Japanese woman to protect the child upon her back. Soon she slept the sleep of the exhausted.

Some one sent fresh flowers in the early mornings to the house of Azalea. They were sweet always with the sparkling dews upon them and they filled the house with fragrance. Azalea delighted in them. They were symbolic of the truth that there was sweetness in life in spite of its melancholy. And so, in those days, she would sit before the flowers, her little head bent above her sewing, and would attempt to fashion the

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garments of her baby in imitation of the flowers themselves.

The baby grew in strength and beauty, a solemn-faced, large-eyed morsel of humanity, with skin like a peach bloom in color, soft and fat and delightful to the touch of the caressing mother.

If it had not been for that ceaseless, tireless waiting and watching for the promised letters from the father of the child, and of his own personal absence from the house, Azalea might have found complete happiness in her child. But always by day she sat with her face turned toward the West, and at night she trimmed and burned the light and set it at the West shoji, that any

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time he might come would find her waiting.

Often the man Okido would loiter by her house and stop a moment to chat with her and to praise the child. Sometimes he brought a little gift, and once he inquired very solicitously whether Madame Azalea was in need of money. She had answered with careless pride:

“No, I have sufficient until his return.”

But the Nakoda’s question nevertheless worried her after his departure. She went indoors and took down the little lacquer box in which she had kept the money left her by her husband. It had been so full in the beginning that she had laughed over its weight. Now the box was light as

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though empty. There were only a few bits left. She shivered as she closed the lid over them.

“ Yet,” she said, with trembling lip, “ it is not all gone. He will come when but one bit remains.”

She burned more oil that night in the waiting room for him. Through the night the bright red light twinkled against his coming. But he came not.

CHAPTER X

She was sewing by a half-opened shoji. The garment upon which Azalea was working was very tiny. It seemed almost ridiculous to conceive of the amount of labor she was expending upon an article so trivial. Nevertheless, she worked unceasingly upon it. The little garment was gorgeous with the embroidery wrought by her nimble fingers, embroidery so fine and exquisite that even a connoisseur in Tokyo would have been delighted to see it. From early morning till the darkening night, Azalea worked upon this one garment. Upon it she had expended all her passion,

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her love. This labor was a balm, a salve, a comfort for her ever-aching loneliness of spirit, for it was the garment in which the child was to be dressed when his father should return.

Azalea, alone in the little cottage, ostracised by her former friends and without the presence of her husband, found a nameless comfort in working upon the garments of her baby. She said:

“My baby came in Springtime. If it had been a girl, she should be called Sakurasan, after the cherry blossoms that he so loved. But his great God was kinder. He blessed us with a man-child, and it shall bear the name of Sachi. Now I shall

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fashion a little garment which shall hold all the tints of the Spring, and, like my baby, will be a thing of joy."

As she sat on this day, with her head bent above her sewing, she became conscious of the fact that some one had entered her garden and was looking in at her. But when she peered out through her shoji she could see no one. Feeling uneasy, she folded her work and, leaving it, stepped out into the garden. Then she saw at once Matsuda Isami. He had evidently been talking to the maid Natsu, for the latter had disappeared into her kitchen. Azalea went forward to meet the visitor. He was very cheerful, though at first constrained

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by her sudden appearance. He inquired solicitously after her honorable health and insisted that she was pale and heavy-eyed from too much sewing. She smiled faintly as she shook her head and assured him that she was most honorably well.

"And your august husband? His health also is good?"

"My husband——" her voice faltered, but she finished with pride: "Yes, his health is good."

“Ah! Then you have heard from him?”

She flushed. Did Matsuda guess the truth, that since the going of her husband, nearly two months before, no letter from him had reached her hands? She did not

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answer the question and he repeated it.

“ You have a letter from your honorable husband? ”

She bowed her head without speaking. It was the simplest way of lying. He had taught her it was an evil thing to prevaricate with the lips.

Matsuda appeared somewhat taken aback.

“ And when do you expect his return? ”

She looked away from her interlocutor. Her eyes were wide and wistful.

“ I look for him to come at any time—any day—any hour,” she said. “ Always by day I look to the West for his coming, and all night long I burn the light, with its

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flame to the West. He is always expected."

"You are a most estimable wife," said Matsuda sneeringly. "Yet has it never occurred to you that your faithfulness is old-fashioned and fit only for a Japanese woman? You, the wife of a foreigner, should not entertain such feeling."

"Is not faithfulness esteemed by all nations?" she asked quickly.

"No. The Westerners make light of its qualities. Have you not heard how many of these foreigners who marry in Japan leave their wives never to return?"

"My husband is different," she said.

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“So they all say—while they wait,” said Matsuda.

Half unconsciously her hand went to her heart. She looked as if she were in some sudden pain as she spoke.

“You do not understand. He was a priest of the great God. He could not lie. Ah! he was different from all other men.”

“The eyes of a foolish wife are blind,” said Matsuda. “What a pity that yours could not sooner perceive the baseness of the barbarian.”

“Baseness,” she repeated. “I do not understand.”

“You think your husband will return to you?”

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“I am sure of it.”

“And against his coming you embroider rich garments for his child.”

The blood rose slowly to her temples.
Her fingers twitched and then she closed
them tightly.

“Yes,” she said; “it is true.”

Matsuda laughed harshly.

“Yet,” said he, “it is not your husband
who pays for these garments of your
child.”

She stared at him incredulously.

“You are insane to speak so,” she finally
said. “My husband gave me money with
which to purchase the articles upon which
I work.”

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He bent his lean, evil face to hers.

“That money he accepted from me,” he said.

She shrunk back a step.

“From you! I do not believe you.”

He fumbled in the bosom of his gown.

“Behold this,” he said, shaking before her eyes a piece of paper. “This is his receipt.”

She pushed the paper from her.

“I will not look at it,” she said.

“You are afraid.”

“No!”

She seized the paper and read, her eyes dilating with horror as she did so. It was a receipt for a loan of 75 yen. Her hand

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fell limply to her side. The paper fluttered to the ground.

What! Was the money of this Matsuda paying for the sacred garments of her child! Ah, how terribly blind must have been her husband to accept help from such a source. Her pride scorched her. She suddenly turned and walked swiftly into the house. In a moment, however, she returned, a lacquer box and the tiny garment upon which she had worked in her arms. She set the box at Matsuda's feet.

"There," she said, "is what is left of your evil money. Some of it I have already spent upon this garment. I would not let it touch my child." She tore it

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across and threw the pieces upon the box.

“Go now!” She pointed to the gate.
“You contaminate his august home. I
have always hated you, Matsuda Isami,
now more than ever. My father spoke
true words. You are a dog!”

Laughing softly, he stooped and lifted
the box, then slowly counted its contents.

“Seventy-five yen,” he said, “was the
amount of the loan. There are but twenty-
five here.”

“My husband’s letter will come in the
next foreign mail,” she replied proudly.
“You will wait until then.”

He changed his tone.

“Madame Azalea, it is well known that

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you are deserted by the barbarian. No one pities you, because it is alleged you insulted your ancestors for the sake of this beast. Now you have become an outcast. Even the beggars will not ask you for charity. Yet I—I, Matsuda Isami, whom you have named ‘dog,’ have compassion upon you.”

He paused to note the effect of his words. She was staring coldly and stonily before her. Her thoughts were bitter. Matsuda went a step nearer to her.

“You do not believe in my pity for you?” he asked.

She raised her head proudly.

“I do not need it,” she said.

“Hah! Your words are proud. You

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will learn soon to frame your lips to meeker words."

She turned as if to re-enter the house, but he sprang lithely before her and stood in her path, his hideous face thrust before the range of her vision.

"Listen once again. You have come to beggary, Madame Azalea, for in my sleeve this minute rests the last of your yen. What will you do now?"

"Yes, Matsuda Isami," she said, "you hold the last of the money, but there are things I can sell, and the house is yet mine. Let me pass."

He laughed in her face so that his breath struck her.

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“Every article within the house belongs to me—me!” he said, touching his breast with his fingers. She stared at him with horrified eyes. Inside the house the wail of her baby, awakened from its sleep, floated out to them, and the sound silenced both for a moment. Then she pushed by him, and still he barred her passage.

“Where would you go?” he taunted. She slipped desperately under his arm and snapped the shoji between them. He could have pushed it aside without the smallest difficulty, but he stood on the steps like one already having possession, and laughed softly to himself.

CHAPTER XI

He heard her soothing the child within and the sound of its subdued cries. Finally, comforted, it must have slept, for there was no further sound within.

Matsuda pushed open the shoji door. The house and furniture were his. He would enter when he pleased.

She was standing behind the shoji, as though awaiting his coming. Her baby was strapped to her back and she held something clasped close to her heart. It was a large black book. Matsuda recognized it. She spoke in unfaltering accents.

“Pray you walk in, Matsuda Isami. The

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furniture is waiting to be taken. Truly an empty house will be of more comfort than one dressed in what belongs to you."

"An empty house?" he repeated. "But I do not propose to empty my house. The house, too, is mine, since I bought it within the month."

"Ah," she said, "I suspected as much. Very well, take also the house, most honorable Matsuda Isami. We will leave it at once."

He followed her down the path for a space. When he seized her sleeve, she shook it from his grasp.

"Do not make claim upon us, also, Matsuda Isami," she scornfully mocked.

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“ It is not possible you purchased us, too? ”

“ No, but I shall do so, Madame Azalea.”

“ Oh, no, that is not possible.”

Her proud and stubborn demeanor caused him to change his tone.

“ Listen,” he said. “ By the law you are no longer the wife of the barbarian. He has deserted you and hence you are divorced. Become wife with me. My house awaits your coming, and I have sworn to possess you.”

“ I would rather wed with Death,” was her answer.

He turned in savage exasperation and ran toward the house. She, standing still now, watched him enter. A moment later

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she heard his hoarse laughter and the crashing of articles within. Sick despair crept through her being, freezing her faculties. She could not move, but stood like one fascinated, watching the trembling of the house itself. It shivered, swayed and shook from side to side, as though a very tempest were sweeping it within. Then suddenly there was an upheaval, a splintering crash, and the little house upon the hill was a mass of broken debris. Matsuda, his passion unsatisfied with the destruction of the furniture, had seized the main pole of the house—the support of the frail structure—and had shaken it with such violence that the house itself had collapsed. A

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providence which seems by some irony of fate to watch over the fortunes of the evil, had saved the man himself from so much as a scratch. He was snorting and puffing like a bull as he sped down the hill past the trembling, shrinking Azalea.

A sound escaped her lips. It could not be called a cry. She made a little rush toward the fallen house, then stopped and covered her eyes with her sleeves. She was homeless, without means, and upon her back her warm, sleeping babe hung heavy and helpless.

Dazedly, almost blindly, Azalea made her way down the hill slope, across the little bridge that spanned the narrow river

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in the valley below, up another hill, and on through the fields. She had come to the house of her stepmother. At least she had never been denied a roof there.

Her knock was timid and faint. As though expecting her, Madame Yamada hastened to the door. Azalea spoke in the weariest, the faintest of accents.

“Excellent mother-in-law, my house has fallen and I am without money and very tired. I wish to come into my father’s house a little while.”

Madame Yamada laughed shrilly.

“The doors of your father’s house,” she said, “are closed to the one who has dishonored them.”

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Azalea stood in silence. Even in her misery, her pride withheld her from pleading. She bowed her head in apathetic politeness.

"Say no more, then," she said. "We will go elsewhere."

That night she slept under the open skies. The shadows of the night were her only covering, and the soft, mossy grass her mattress. She slept well, as the exhausted often do, and felt nor knew the discomfort of her unusual bed, for she was close to the ruin of her home that had been, and near, too, to the little mission house. Her last thought ere she slept was a vague and almost childish remembrance

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of an argument she had once had with her husband. She had protested against the locking of the mission house, declaring that locks were unknown and unneeded in Japan. He had insisted that thieves might enter the place and despoil the little church of its few possessions. Now Azalea thought with a strange feeling of bitter triumph that she had proved herself right. Oh, if the little church were but open, what a haven of refuge it would prove now for her and for their child. Who had better right to its protection than the wife and offspring of the priest of the church?

CHAPTER XII

The Summer slipped by on sleepy wings. Autumn's mellow, balmy touch was upon the land. By day all Nature was beautiful, but at night the starry skies were cold and chilling. The earth, too, lost its warmth and shivered as if in anticipation of the coming winter.

On a certain night in the month of October, a woman, with a baby on her back, made her weary way through the village of Sanyo. One could see even in the dim light that she was haggard and hollow-eyed. Her small hands, which ever and anon crept nervously toward the little head

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against her neck, were tragically thin. For almost two months Azalea, the wife of the white priest, had been a common mendicant. She had wandered about from place to place, seeking at first employment and later reduced to the begging of alms. The small inland towns of Japan have few industries offering employment to women. Azalea was further hampered by the white child she bore upon her back and the ignominy of her religion, for in some way her history had followed her from town to town. Neither her beauty nor her youth were of avail to her now to earn the pity of those who feared the gods too much to refuse alms to a beggar. The wife of the

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foreign devil was an outcast of the gods, a pariah, a thing accursed. What respectable Japanese would lend aid to one who had wilfully destroyed the tablets of her ancestors? And so in this land where beggars oft-times grow fat on charity the pariah starved. Sometimes a peasant or farmer, knowing nothing of her history, would give her shelter and food at night, but when the morning light revealed the blue-eyed babe upon her back, they turned her superstitiously away. She hardly knew whither her feet carried her, so many, many had been the days since her wanderings began. Only Nature was compassionate in that the sum-

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mer months kept her at least from the chill of exposure. But even Nature has limits to her patience, and Autumn had come. During the first few weeks of her wanderings, the baby had appeared strong and well. The out-door life in the country but strengthened its little frame. The starving of the mother was a gradual process, something which at first did not affect the baby. But as the days and weeks went by and the mother grew weaker, the contagion of her weariness affected the babe. He became peevish and ailing. The round, cunning, gurgling baby, to whom the mother had passionately clung as though for strength, grew thin and cried constantly.

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Its little face fell into the odd lines of one aged, thin, pinched and anxious; for what nourishment is there in the breast of a starving woman?

After a night of vain effort to keep the baby warm in her arms in the open country, Azalea turned frantically back toward her native village.

She had a vague notion of going once more to the home of her step-mother, this time to beg with her head at the august woman's feet for shelter and charity. When the latter had turned her from the door, stubborn pride had buoyed the girl up and given her that almost feverish strength which had sustained her this long. Now

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the last strain of pride in her breast was dead. Hope had long lingered, hope and faith in the dimly remembered words of the white God, that he would protect her always—yet now even hope was gone.

And thus it was, then, half clad and almost starving, that Azalea returned to Sanyo. It was night and the streets of the town were almost deserted. But the little houses, like fairy lanterns, glowed in the darkness with light and warmth, and as she passed along she could hear the babble and soft, happy murmur of the contented and housed families. Her hunger gripped at her throat, parching it. The baby was mercifully silent, but its weight

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was so heavy that she walked unsteadily and stooped beneath it.

Who would have recognized in this shadow of a woman the exquisitely lovely and dainty girl who, despite her shabby clothes, had bravely held her head so high in the town? Would the white priest himself have recognized her? She had ceased to think of him in these days. She had told herself that he had been but a beautiful spirit whom the gods had sent to bless her for a little time only. Now he was gone. Azalea had forgotten the language he had taught her; had forgotten the God he had told her would comfort. Her own wanderings and the cries of her baby had occu-

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pied her mind to the exclusion of all else. Only sometimes when she slept she dreamed of his great, tender brown eyes watching over and guarding her, and in her sleep she sighed his name.

Now before the door of her step-mother's home she stood once more. Madame Yamada came and looked at her. With her came to the doorstep her two daughters. Azalea bent so low and humbly that with the weight upon her back she nigh fell to the ground. Her voice was almost too faint to hear.

"One night of shelter, good, dear, kindest of mothers—and a little food!"

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Madame Yamada's voice was as hard as her face.

"So you have returned!" she said.
"You are without shame, it seems. This is the house of respectable people. The Kirishitan cannot enter."

"Kirishitan—Kirishitan!" Azalea repeated the word vaguely, dazedly. "I am not Kirishitan," she said. "The gods——"

Madame Yamada's shrill laugh interrupted her.

"What! And you carry the evil book in the front of your obi!"

"That!" Azalea dragged the book from her obi. She held it up with both hands,

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then with a sudden, wild vehemence dashed it to the ground and put her foot upon it.

“It has brought me evil. Good step-mother, I have cast it from me. Give me shelter,” and she stretched her hands out in piteous appeal. But only the blank wall of shoji faced her now. Madame Yamada and her daughters had closed the doors upon her, even as she renounced her religion.

In a frenzy she beat with her thin hands upon the panelling, and her moaning voice reached those within.

“Oh, hearts of stone, take then the child within. It is dying! dying!”

Her step-mother thrust her fist through

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the paper shoji. One baleful eye was placed at the opening. But she did not speak.

The burst of passion subsided. Azalea's hands fell to her side; she slowly stiffened and straightened herself. She stood in giddy hesitation a moment, then slowly moved away.

Through half the length of the night she wandered about the hill country and town of Sanyo. Once she came to some water and its murmuring song evoked a momentary response in her. She began to laugh in a soft, mad way as she stepped into it; but the water came only to her ankles and the baby upon her back moved and moaned

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in its sleep. Something burned within her head. Words, words—words—spoken in that deep voice she had so loved. To take life was an evil and unpardonable thing in the sight of the One God! She stepped upon the bank of the brook in shivering terror. Suddenly she ran from it as though from a great temptation. She sped on from the dark allurement of the country to where the light of the city told her of the warmth and happiness of others. Through street and street she wandered, her feet dragging, her head dropped forward. She lost her sandals and her feet, in the worn and old linen, bled from the touch of the pavement. She had now lost all sense of

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locality. Only she knew that thrice she paraded one particular street—an avenue shaded by dark, drooping bamboos, under whose shade houses of exquisite structure and light gleamed out upon the night.

Azalea stopped before one of them—the largest of all. Her hand rested heavily upon the bamboo gate; but she did not attempt to push it open. Now she stood still with a nameless quiet and terror in her heart. Suddenly, as she wavered, the babe upon her back twisted in its wrappings, and wierdly, piercingly cried aloud. A moment later one appeared at the door of the house with a lighted andon in his hand. He came with hasty steps down to the

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bamboo gate, and there in the dim light of
the lifted andon he saw the woman Azalea.
He seized her by the arm and drew her up
the path and into the house.

CHAPTER XIII

For nine days she remained in the house of Matsuda Isami. He put her into the great sleeping chamber above the ozashishi, removed the paper shoji from the house and slid into its place the winter wooden sliding walls and doors. Thus they were safe from spying intruders, and she might not leave the house, since the wooden street doors were fast. Outside her room the woman Natsu-san remained. Matsuda himself moved into the ozashiki, and from there he kept guard over the woman in the chamber above.

When first the serving-woman Natsu-san

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entered the chamber to serve her, she found the girl crouched off in the farthest corner of the room, whither she had crept after Matsuda Isami had set her in the room. She was numb with cold, hunger and fear. Her feverish mind could not follow the tangled sequence of events that had passed over her that night. She dimly recalled that sudden flash of andon light at the end of her wanderings, the touch of arms of seeming supernatural strength which had crushed her aching body as they carried her up and into this room of fears. The room had no light save what sifted into it from a takahiri (lantern) in the hall, which the servant had set by the dividing doors.

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"I have brought food," she said briefly, and set the tray on the floor by the famished Azalea. She reached out a trembling hand and cautiously, fearfully touched and felt of the food. Reassured of what she touched, her hands seized upon the contents of the tray. She found the milk, warm and sweet, and in a moment she had slipped the child out of its bag, laid its limp and listless little body at her feet and thrust the nipple of the bottle between the tiny, parted lips.

Someone in the night put a slumber robe upon her. Her weakness and exhaustion gave way. She slept. But in the early morning, turning in her sleep instinctively

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to reach out for her child, she missed it, and started with a cry of fright and anguish that rang out wildly through the silent house.

It was five days before they put the child back into her arms. At the end of that period she put her head at the feet of Matsuda Isami, swore by the eight million gods of heaven that she was his humblest and meekest of slaves, and promised to do whatsoever he should command if he would but return to her her child. After that she was like a mechanical puppet. The woman Natsu-san dressed her in softest silken crepe, loaded down her little fingers with rich jewels, and drew the hair, fallen so wildly about her face, back into smooth

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mode. She moved about like one in a dream, a nightmare from which she could not wake nor extricate her. She was but a passive doll in the hands of the woman, and did not even move her hands to assist the servant in attiring her. But when they brought the child, she rushed upon the woman, seized it with savage force from her arms, and then fell to weeping over it in such a way that the one she was hereafter to name "master" feared for her reason, and left her for the nonce alone. Thus a respite of a few days was given her.

Physical strength crept back into her wasted body, bringing health, too, to her bewildered mind. Memory--burning, in-

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yincible, accusing—awoke, told her that she was about to become a thing more outcast than ever, because she would be guilty of that sin the most unpardonable of any a woman of his (her husband's) people could commit. She could not delude herself with the fancy that she would be the wife of Matsuda Isami, whatever the law might be, for she had pledged an eternal faith to her true husband and the child was the connecting link between them. Now as from day to day she waited in fear for the time to come when Matsuda Isami should claim her promise, a promise she dared not break if she would keep her child, there flooded back upon her the teachings of her husband.

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Now at last she knew she believed in the faith of the Kirishitan, and before that faith she stood convicted. She did not attempt to justify her actions by her sufferings. There was no justification in the creed of his religion. His last words to her had been: "Have faith always. Be true to me, my love, and to yourself. I will return." Yet how had he kept his word to her. There had not come to her one word or sign since his departure. If he had sent word to her the great waters that divided them must have swallowed it up. There was nothing left to her now save the child, and for his sake she would sell herself and become wife to Matsuda Isami.

CHAPTER XIV

Patience is not always an enduring virtue. That of Richard Verley had long since evaporated. Waiting, with a faith excelled only by that of the one in Japan, for word from his wife, his stay in America had become unbearable.

At first he had thought her failure to answer his letters due to mistakes she might make in addressing him. He recalled how, when teaching her to write his address, she had continually forgotten to put the name of the city or State. She was quite sure that everyone in the United States must know him. But as time

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passed, he knew this could not be the reason. His letters urging her to answer at once, and giving explicit instructions as to address, received no response. He thought of her condition and became alarmed.

When finally, refusing to wait longer, and leaving his duties unfinished, he took ship for Japan, he was in an agony of bewilderment and apprehension. If anything had happened to her! Illness, the possible premature birth of the child, when she would be too helpless and ill to write. How foolish he had been not to have arranged communication with her through a third party. And yet, who could he have called upon for such a service? He thought of

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her outcast position since becoming his wife; of the eccentric and stubborn fears that had impelled her to remain in Japan. And then an overwhelming sense of regret overpowered him, that he had left her at all. His place was by her side. His first duty belonged to her! There had been a flaw in his former reasoning. His service to the Master could have been better subserved than the way he had chosen.

So, with his mind sick with gloomy forebodings, his conscience and heart aching, Richard Verley returned to Japan. He hurried from Tokyo in a fever of impatience to the little town of Sanyo. The journey was interminable—intolerable! For the

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first time in his life the gentle-natured Richard Verley fretted and upbraided those who served him. The runners crept! Their vehicles were ancient and broken down. The conductors of the miserable trains were responsible for the creeping of the train. Some one was responsible! Everything was wrong! Most of his journey, besides, was made by the slow method of kurumma. Sometimes, unable to bear it, he would get out from the kurumma and plunge ahead himself on foot. Every step, every moment that brought him nearer to her, but added to his sick premonitions. All was not well with her! Something

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dire had overtaken her. He dared not imagine what that might be.

When he touched the town at last, he did not wait a minute, but without noticing the townspeople, who regarded him curiously, he hastened on toward where had stood his home.

The sight that met him when he reached the place staggered him. He looked about him dazed, as one who sees with unseeing eyes. He could not understand. Something was wrong with his sight—his head, he told himself. Where once had stood the little flower-embowered home, there was nothing but a heap of

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broken planks and debris, the melancholy debris of a fallen house.

Snow was falling slowly and turning to water as it fell. The trees were leafless. Where the sunny, flowering bushes had stood about the tiny cottage, there were only the black stalks standing up in barren nakedness. Desolation and tragedy seemed heavy everywhere. He blundered forward a few steps, his hand to his eyes.

“A mistake somewhere,” he muttered, “I have lost my way. This is not the place—this is not—and yet!”

He uncovered his eyes and again cast them about, slowly. The surroundings were as familiar to him as the face of a

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mother, and over there, the length of an iris field away, there was the church—his church! He turned in its direction.

At the church door he fumbled with key to the lock. It turned easily enough, but when he pushed the door inward it did not move. Then he discovered the reason. The door was nailed to. Panic and frenzy swept over him in a flood. He began frantically pounding upon the door, shaking it by the handle, pushing against it with his shoulder, beating upon its panelling with his fists, and tearing at the hinges with his fingers. The blood was in his head. He could neither see nor hear. Only that sensation of horrible foreboding and cer-

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tainty of disaster pervaded his whole being.

A temple bell began to tinkle, lazily, insistently. Small black birds, cawing as they flew, swept close over his head, hastening toward their night home in the woods. The rain descended heavily, noiselessly. The shadows darkened dully.

“What am I doing?” the minister suddenly asked himself, and paused in his efforts to break the church door. “She is not here! My fears are driving me mad. How do I know that harm has come to her? I must not trust to the phantoms of my imagination. God is good, good!” He walked out a few paces, thinking dazedly. Then with a sudden resolution to

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seek her in the village, he began to descend the hill. His step was more hopeful. He tried to keep up his courage, but as he made his way along his lips moved ceaselessly in prayer.

He went first of all to her step-mother's house. Here in the miserable, drizzling rain he stood outside the house, none bidding him enter in response to his knock. Yet all through the house he could hear the sounds of his coming announced.

A woman shrieked his name. Some one called back in a loud whisper which penetrated through the paper shoji walls:

“The Kirishitan!”

Then he heard the patterning of hurried

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steps and the jabbering of voices. Soon he was conscious of the fact that eyes were regarding him from a dozen of wall holes. He knocked again, louder, and one within, unseen, called in insolent tone:

“ Begone! The curses of Shaka upon you!”

He told himself his ears deceived him. His knowledge of Japanese confused the language surely. He knocked again, and again, each time louder. Again the voice within:

“ Who is it knocks?”

He spoke distinctly in pure Japanese.

“ I am Verley-sama, your daughter’s husband. I have come to seek my wife.”

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There was silence, and then:

“We do not understand your language.”

He repeated his words slowly, patiently, enunciating each Japanese syllable distinctly. But again came the reply:

“We do not understand.”

He recognized now the voice. It was that of the step-mother of his wife, Madame Yamada. She had some reason for her lies. He was positive she understood his Japanese.

“My words are plain,” he said. “I have come to seek my wife.”

“She is not here.” The voice was raised angrily now. “Seek elsewhere, foreign devil!”

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He ignored the insult and persisted doggedly.

"Where shall I seek?"

Someone laughed jeeringly within, and then the taunting words floated out:

"Ask of the gods, priest of the evil one."

"I ask of you," he said hoarsely. "I shall not leave your house till you reply."

He heard the sound as of one moving with angry and impetuous haste within, pushing whatever stood in her path aside. Madame Yamada thrust aside the sliding shoji doors and stood in the opening.

Her words were mockingly sarcastic, and she bowed with extravagance.

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"In what way can the humblest one serve the mightiest?"

"My wife?" he demanded. "Speak, woman, where is she!"

She smiled inscrutably, but as he went nearer to her the sneering lines about her face deepened, revealing all her bitter detestation of the Kirishitan.

"You will be punished if you have injured her," he said.

"What will the wise and mighty Excellency do?"

"I will have you arrested. You will be forced to answer."

"So!"

She drew in her breath with the hissing

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sound peculiar to the Japanese. Then she drew the skirt of her kimona closely about her, and turned to re-enter the house. He caught and held her by the sleeve and then she stood still, her eyes half closed.

“Answer me!” he cried.

“It is not I who am the keeper of the outcast. You come to the wrong house, sei-yo-gin. Seek elsewhere.”

Still he held her, and she could not free herself, though she made effort to do so. Thus held, in angry durance she stood.

“You are her mother-in-law. You know where she is. I will not release you till you speak.”

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“ Go to Okido-sama, the Nakoda,” she said sullenly.

“ Okido-sama? ”

“ He knows! ” said she.

He let her arm go and she, free, pushed the shoji viciously closed, attempting to crush his hand in the opening.

“ Okido-sama! ” he repeated thoughtfully, “ Okido-sama, the Nakoda! ”

CHAPTER XV

Okido-sama, the Nakoda, was squatting comfortably upon his heels eating his warm rice and fish when Richard Verley came to his door. During the absence of the minister, Okido had apparently prospered. His house was new. His servants many and obsequious. The one who hastened to respond to the minister's knock did not recognize him in the darkened rainy evening. He perceived only a barbarian and, knowing his master's trade, saw in him a possible customer.

Verley was shown into the guest cham-

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ber. Shortly came Okido to the room, fat and oily, discreetly wiping the rice crumbs from his thick lips with the back of his hands. He was bowing grotesquely at every step as he came toward the minister, but when he finally lifted his head and saw who his guest was, he gave such a startled jump that he fell in a heap on the floor, and there he remained, trembling with fright. Instantly Verley was convinced that the man knew all about his wife, her whereabouts, the horrible fate that must have befallen her.

"My wife! You know her whereabouts?"

"Your wife!" stammered the cringing

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Okido. "What was her august name, Excellency?"

"You know it. Answer at once."

"Excellency is honorably mistaken. I do not know the name of the exalted one's wife."

Verley, with no effort at gentleness, seized him by the shoulder of his robe, and as he spoke shook the trembling wretch threateningly.

"You will answer my question. Understand."

The Nakoda began to whimper, drawing his sleeve across his eyes and furtively looking about for a means of escape.

He was poor man, very poor, harmless

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man. Surely Excellency would not hurt him.

"Quick. I am waiting."

"So many people I know," whimpered the Nakoda. "How I can remember one woman among them all."

"You do not need to remember. You already know of whom I speak."

"She was a tall woman with thin cheeks, yes?" he inquired with attempted guile.

The minister answered by tightening his grip upon the man's collar, and pushing his knuckles hard upon the neck. Okido shrunk fearfully from the large hand of the white man. He felt sure it would hurt hard. After a moment:

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“She was fat—yes, surely fat!”

“That will do.”

He slipped down to the minister’s feet and beat his head, seeking to shake off that hand at his neck.

“Listen,” said Richard Verley, “I will give you five minutes in which to answer. At the end of that time——”

“Excellency will not beat a poor man. Ah, surely not!”

“Excellency will kick the life out of you.”

“No, no.” Okido cast a fearful glance at the minister’s boots. “I will speak truth. Surely!”

At those words, the minister for a

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moment forgot his caution, and slackened the tension at the man's neck. But in that moment Okido was free. He had slipped not only from the minister's grip, but had disappeared as if by magic through the wall against which he had crouched.

Richard Verley was alone. He strode from one to the other of the four walls of the shoji. He threw them all apart and penetrated into the interior apartments. The servants fled before him with the speed of wings and disappeared as silently and swiftly as their master. Suddenly he found himself on the door step. He went down slowly into the street.

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Someone called his name. "Excel-
lency! Master—sir!"

He turned quickly and saw the woman
Natsu following him.

Her name burst in a cry from his lips,
and he rushed toward her.

"Natsu! You! Your mistress—quick,
how—where is she?"

Her eyes shifted from his face. She
covered her own with her sleeve, and thus
she stood, the picture of sorrow.

The minister stared at her, horrified.
When he spoke his voice was strange.

"I understand," he said. "She is—"

And so she had died—his little, laughing
Azalea, his beautiful child-wife, had died

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while he was away from her. He put out his hands blindly, as the inclination to faint overcame him. He hardly understood the words the woman spoke.

“ Oh, master, master, master! ”

But the woman’s voice recalled him. He stared at her mechanically. Mechanically he spoke.

“ I understand,” he said. “ She is dead.”

“ Dead! ” repeated the woman, and shook her head. “ No, no, not dead; better than that than what is, O master—sir! ”

“ Not dead! ” His hands unclenched, His fears had lent phantoms to his imagination. “ Alive! Why, then all was well.”

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His thought escaped his lips, and the woman answered:

“ Better death than sin, O master.”

He could have laughed. What! Was this servant of his trying to frighten him with her old jealous tales of the insincerity of his wife’s conversion. The sins of Azalea were microscopic.

“ Come, Natsu, let us go to her,” he said impatiently. “ Why do you look at me in that way? Are you, too, seeking to hide her whereabouts from me? ”

“ No, master, but if I take you thither, you will curse me for my evil offices.”

“ I don’t understand you, Natsu. You

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always were a mystery to me. But now, come. Where is she?"

"Oh, master, seek her not!"

As he still sought to draw her along with him, she slipped down to his feet and stayed his progress with her head there.

"Why do you seek to deceive me, Natsu? What is the matter with you? Why do you act thus? What has happened to my wife? Speak!"

Still kneeling, with her head at his feet, she answered:

"She has become wife to Matsuda Isami, Oh, Highness."

As he did not speak or seem to comprehend her words, she repeated them. And

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then, as still he made no sound, she said:

“ Isami is richest man in Sanyo. What is there he cannot buy? ”

She was seized by the shoulders in a savage grip. Her very teeth smote together with the shock of his grasp.

“ You lie! ” he cried. “ You lie! Vile thing, you lie, I say! ”

CHAPTER XVI

It was the evening of the return of Richard Verley to Sanyo. Azalea was sitting passively under the hands of the maid, Natsu, having her shining black hair brushed and twisted into the elaborate mode approved by Matsuda. Word had come into the room where thus far she had been kept a prisoner, ordering her to prepare for the wedding ceremony. Whatever her inward emotions, now as she sat under the hands of the woman, she showed only a stoical calm. That nameless antagonism which had always existed between

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these two had become a deeper thing during these days in the house of Matsuda. Instinctively Azalea knew the woman for an enemy, and accordingly feared and hated her. Though forced to submit to the woman's attendance, yet she would not condescend a word either of entreaty or command. Matsuda held her destiny in his hand. He could rob her of her child. He had kept his word and taught her lips to frame themselves to meeker words. But the woman—Natsu-san—to her at least she need not kneel. Now on this day as Natsu dressed her mistress, Azalea showed no interest in the other's evident agitation, despite the fact that the woman showed

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unusual signs of being discomposed. Finally as the silence became unbearable to her, the woman broke it with strange words :

“Mistress,” she said, “the man Okido is waiting below in the guest room.”

Azalea inclined her head, but made no comment. Okido, like all other people, was of no interest to her. The woman lowered her voice.

“I have taken a patch from your floor, mistress. If you will put your head to it you will hear what he has to say to the master.”

Azalea’s glittering eyes looked at the

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patch uplifted by the woman. Still she remained silent.

The woman's insidious voice continued carefully:

"Mistress, you have heard the ancient saying of the samurai: 'To die with honor when one can no longer live with honor.' "

The girl beneath her hands did not stir, nor did she deign to turn her head to where the woman pointed. The shorter sword of the samurai was set close to the patch. It was covered with a white cloth—the cloth of honorable death. The woman had provided the wife of the white priest with a means of escape. Yet she had judged wrongly. Azalea was not merely the

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daughter of samurai. She was the wife of a Christian. Life could not be taken so easily as the woman supposed. The code of the samurai pointed out that death was better than dishonor. The new religion said nothing on this matter. It simply forbade the suicide.

The woman, her task completed, arose and brought a mirror to Azalea, who, still silent, stared fixedly and unseeingly at the reflected face. She started somewhat as the maid's lips touched her ears, and in the glass she saw the fat red face close to her own.

“Mistress, to-day if you listen you will

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learn the full extent of your folly and the dupe you have been to us all."

The mirror slipped from Azalea's hands. She reached them up suddenly and pushed them against the face of the maid. Her nails sank into the puffed fatness of the woman's cheeks.

"Your touch offends me," she said.
"Come not so near, low-born one."

With a cry of rage the woman sprang back, clasping her hands over her hurt cheeks. Then, muttering, she shuffled toward the doors. There she paused vindictively.

"You are a peacock now, Madame Azalea, but your feathers will look less

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proud and pretty when you learn what they have cost you. You disdained the servant of the white Highness and taught him to do likewise. But the lowly one was in his service long before his eyes desired you. Even a snake crawling in the grass may strike a revenge. There is nothing too small or lowly to bite."

Azalea did not move or deign to turn her head, even after the woman had gone and she could hear her glide along the hall. For a long time she sat in silence. Once she looked with fearful stealth at the opening in the floor, but she did not look for long. There was nothing further for her to hear, she told herself. Who knew already

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better than herself the extent of her de-
basement?

CHAPTER XVII

Okido bowed to the floor before the illustrious Matsuda Isami. Knowing well the nature and temper of his employer, he did not waste much time upon courtesies, but went briefly to the object of his visit.

“He has returned,” he said.

“What is that you say?”

“The white beast——”

“Ah!” Matsuda’s grasp relaxed. He took several strides across the room, then stopped before an opened shoji and drummed upon the panelling.

“Well, then—what of that?” he asked.

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Okido came to his elbow and whispered agitatively :

“ But she will see him. It cannot be helped.”

Matsuda laughed diabolically.

“ I have complete command over her eyes, my good Okido. Have you not yet observed how she is conquered? ”

Okido shook his head dubiously.

“ But should Mr. Beast come in person to your house? ”

“ We have means of dealing with barbarous dogs,” quoth Matsuda contemptuously, “ and the police of this town respect the authority of their masters.”

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“ But the letters, most Exalted? He will make inquiry.”

“ Pah! What of it?” Will it be the first time that mail has been lost between this country and America? ”

“ —— so much mail.” Okido moved uneasily. “ Excellency, I am afraid of the heavy boot of the barbarian. It was I who kept back for you the letters from the barbarian to the woman. It is said his government is powerful—revengeful. Let me beseech you to give me a sufficient sum to get swiftly away.”

“ On the contrary. You must stay here and help me. Besides, you forget the woman Natsu was the one who held the

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letters. They should weight her sleeves, not yours."

" Yet, good Excellency, I was the carrier, and—— ”

" You delivered the letters? "

" Not to the one to whom they were addressed, but to the servant of the foreign devil, who, Exalted, declares she gave them to you."

Matsuda laughed unpleasantly.

" Huh! Then it is my sleeves which are weighted!"

In the room above the speakers the woman Azalea watched over the open patch in the floor. Her face beneath the heavy rouge plastered lately upon it by Natsu

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was a ghastly white. Her bosom was heaving with her quick breathing, her glittering eyes were horrible to look upon. She had heard and understood every word of the dialogue, and now she crouched in the attitude of a feline about to spring, looking down with dreadful eyes upon the head of that one below. Yet in this moment of frenzy Azalea did not scream or faint. Now the strength of her samurai ancestors surged upward through her veins, tingling her whole being. Everything else was blotted out—forgotten. She obeyed only the hereditary instinct of the samurai—an instinct for revenge. When she could move from her crouching position by the opening,

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she arose with silent swiftness. She stood straight and still, only her eyes slowly travelling about the room as though seeking some object.

Suddenly she found it—the sword! Her small hands gripped its blade and felt its keenness. Then she hid it in the folds of her kimona, and, her colorless lips close pressed together, she passed soundlessly from the room down the little flight of steps and through the hall. Suddenly and almost soundlessly she pushed aside the shoji of the ozashishi. Now she stood between the opening, her eyes upon the startled ones of Matsuda Isami.

In a flash he understood that somehow

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she had heard and knew now the truth. His servants had grown careless. She had escaped from the trap he had set for her. Vengeance was written in every line of her rigid form. He could almost see the twitching of her fingers upon the concealed weapon in her sleeve. With a cunning worthy of the man he advanced a step toward her, hoping in this way to precipitate her attack, and when she should spring upon him he would trip her. He said as he advanced:

“ Little dove, you look pale to-day—
why—— ”

As the sword flashed upward he dashed to one side and then slipped under its guard.

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His heavy hands locked together descended crushingly upon her head. She threw back her arms, the sword slipping from her hand. Then she fell backward.

Across her fallen body Matsuda Isami and Okido stared at each other. The latter was shivering as though afflicted with ague. He kept repeating over and over between his chattering teeth: “Shaka! Shaka! Shaka!”

“Do not speak so loud,” hoarsely commanded the other, “or, by all the gods, I will send you to join her!”

The little Nakoda shrank and shivered beat his head upon the floor.

Matsuda strode to the dividing doors.

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He called the woman Natsu as he clapped his hands. She came hurrying along the hall and stood open-mouthed on the threshold, looking in on that outstretched form. Her eyes lifted in question to the man Matsuda.

“Hear me,” he whispered hoarsely. “The woman has fallen in some swoon. We will tie her devil offspring to her back and carry her up to the place where she belongs. Give me your aid, good Natsu, and I will marry you instead.”

CHAPTER XVIII

Save for the moving of the trees in the early winter air, there was only silence on the hill, where stood the little mission house, but a ghostly moon pushed its rays through the boughs of the trees, glistened on the panes of the church and silvered the interior.

The rows of dark pews shone up stiffly in the moonlit church, and a great white beam glimmered across the pulpit, shaped as a cross.

Azalea crawled on her hands and knees up one of the aisles of the church. She was moaning to herself as she made her painful journey along.

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"—to touch his God!" she said, "for even the evil are forgiven."

Now she was before the little pulpit, her weak hands upon it. She sighed at its contact, and a feeling of intense calm and rest seemed to flood her being, but she could not support herself against the pulpit structure, even upon her knees, so weak was she and so nauseating the pain in her head. Gradually she sank downward, lower and lower, till her face touched the floor. Then she spread out her arms, and lay very still, face downward.

It was past midnight when Richard Verley came back to the door of the little mission house. His old-time beggar pro-

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tegee Gonji accompanied him. From the boy the minister had learned much—all, indeed—concerning his wife. He knew now what had befallen her so soon after the birth of her child: her homeless condition, her vain efforts to obtain work, her wanderings and terrible privations, and then the gossip of the town. People whispered that as a wraith she had returned to Sanyo and had passed as a shadow into the house of Matsuda Isami. The feelings of the husband can be imagined. Such was the temperament of Richard Verley that, even with the knowledge in his mind of her probable relations to the man Isami, there was no thought of blame for her in his

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heart. Indeed, the strongest emotion that swayed him was remorse of the deepest and bitterest. He should never have left her. He should have either forced her to accompany him or have remained in Japan with her.

His first impulse now was that of the man-brute, the desire to kill with his own hands the one who had injured him and his so terribly. But a calmer, higher instinct triumphed—the instinct of the man of strong spirituality to turn to that One who had never failed him in time of stress. Something seemed to force his footsteps toward his little house of prayer. So dazed and numb was the condition of his mind

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at this time, however, that he did not even notice when he came to the door of the church that it was no longer nailed to and boarded up.

Richard Verley entered the church alone. The boy was afraid to enter. He did not know what evil spirit might be lurking in the night within the white priest's temple. He stretched himself out on the doorstep of the church and went to sleep there.

It was very dark within now, for the moon was gone. For a moment the minister paused irresolute. Then his hand touched the side of a seat. He sat down mechanically. Suddenly he covered his face with his hands, and tried to pray, but

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his prayer was wordless. For how long he sat thus he could not have told. It might have been the length of half the night, for when he uncovered his eyes again things seemed changed about him. The faint glimmer of the dawn lent its first grey light. He looked about him—at the melancholy church interior, his eyes traveling slowly and painfully over the dusty pews and then upward toward the little pulpit cross where he had spoken so often. A patch of color caught his eyes and held them. He thought he dreamed and turned his glance away, but, fascinated, his eyes came back to that bit of color there at the foot of the pulpit.

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He started up with a loud cry. A moment only, and he was beside her, his trembling hands touching her. Something stirred upon her back and he saw the round head of the baby. Its eyes were wide open now and looking at him with interest. Like most Japanese babies, it was a grave, mute little mite, but its eyes were large and, like his own mother's, blue in color. He knew it for his own child, though he could not see the face of the mother who lay so very still. Some blessed instinct guided his staggering feet to the door. He aroused the sleeping Gonji, and put into his arms the child. Then he went back into the church.

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She had told him in those other days, so many times, that his voice would waken her from the very sleep of death. When her eyes looked up into his face she would not close them though they ached with weariness. She even smiled at his broken repetitions of her name.

"I do not know how it is you are here," he said, "but here you are—in my arms, my wife, and it is enough."

Her voice was weak, but inexpressibly sweet.

"It is enough," she said.

