

THE "BEAUTIFULLEST" ONE.

by

ONOTO WATANNA.

Benny stretched himself. His jaws split in a great yawn, as, his clinched arms outstretched, he shook himself, like a great, sleepy dog, into a semblance of wrathful wakefulness.

"Wake up, you somnolent lot!" he roared, surveying his companions with disgust. Parker merely rolled over and groaned. Wharton sleepily mumbled something, and glared ^{resentfully} ~~angrily~~ through half closed eyes at the light blazing in through the paper screens.

"I say, wake up!" growled Benny. "Lets get out of here ~~anyway~~".

"Too blame hot" protested Wharton. "Too blank many fleas".

Benny ground his fists in a bunch together. "We've been mewed up here for a month now, too lethargic and bored to even stir. I'm spoiling for sport or diversion of some sort. Lets do something -- anything -- anyone".

Parker turned over again and again he groaned. Benny surveyed him in high disgust.

"Ah, come on!" he urged.

"For my part" declared Wharton, yawning noisily, "until this hot and humid spell passes, I lie flat ~~at~~ at ease here in Kyoto, unless something electrical occurs to shake me up".

And just then, with a rap, or rather a scratch upon the panelled sliding doors, Akedo entered.

He was a wistful faced Japanese of about twenty two, with bespectacled eyes, which seemed almost blank and inscrutable behind their thick walls of glass. He was clad in correct European attire and looked very spic and span in comparison with the lounging Americans, as, his tiny patent leather shoes creaking, his silver topped cane swinging and his black silk hat glistening, he came into the apartment.

Even Parker sat up to welcome him.

"Hello, Kido!" he greeted him.

"Howdy, old man" said Wharton.

"Have a seat, Kido" from Benny. "Anything doing? What are you got up so swell for on this sweltering day? Look as if you had been to a banquet".

Akido parted his coat-tails carefully and disposed himself in preference upon the matted floor itself. Slowly he rolled and lit a tiny cigarette, and for an interval puffed in silence. There was something dejected solemn[^], anxious about his attitude, with all its assumed carelessness, and quite out of keeping with his festive array.

"Come on, now, out with it!" prompted Benny cheerfully. "Whats the trouble? "

The Japanese regarded his finger tips precisely put together, reflectively, and then turned his wistful gaze upon his friends and late college mates. ~~Then~~ he leaned toward them upon a sudden impulse.

"Very well, I goin' tell you. I mek you my confidences. "

Wharton sat up. Parker raised hi self to his e elbow and Benny began to fill several glasses with a beverage which sizzled cheerfully at the squirt of the seltzer upon it.

"You say mebbe I loog lig' I dress to go unto banquet. I nod go unto those banquet yet, but tonight I got go there. Me? I got go lik dam fool mek meyry ad mos' sad time my whole life".

"Whats the funeral?" queried Benny.

"Thas nod funeral" said Akido sadly. "Thas more worse than those funeral. Thas wedding tonide. Listen! You hear those musics?"

"Tum-tum-bing-bang--boom-m-m-m!" derisively mocked Parker stirred to bitter animation. "We do, our gentle friend. We have heard 'those musics' the livelong day. Pray enlighten us as to ~~the~~ noisy significance?"

"Thad music account tonide grade soldier and beautifulest princess ad all Japan goin mek marry".

"So? And you're to be a guest?"

Akido's little brown hands clinched. A look of real pain writhed his features.

"Me?" he cried shrilly. "Me? I should be those bridegroom! He goin' mek marry wiz my beautifullest princess!"

His friends were now all concern, sympathy and interest. Akido was a particular favorite of them all. Not only had he made himself well liked by them in America, but he had been the means of inducing their respective parents to see the educational value of a trip to Japan subsequent to their ~~Sophomore~~ ^{Senior} year in college. Moreover, up to the present trying period, Akido had shown them no end of a good time in Japan, and it was not his fault that the weather was so devilishly hot and that the country was infested with the most malicious fleas upon the face of the earth.

"Listen" urged their Japanese friend passionately. "She a daughter of thad Prince Go-Saigon, very grade prince ad Japan, bud Alas, he god ~~no~~ moaneys. He poor man. He god two daughters. One beautifulest. Other -- not so beautifulest. Firs' time I lood upon those face of thad beautifulest one, I got a -- whad you call thad --er -- mashy! - ad my heart. I go to my honorable father. Entreat him hasten to those Prince Go Saigon mek a beg for alliance wiz thad daughter. My father go. Prince Go Saigan he say, he moach 'bliged, but inquire which hees daughter my father' son

want mekm marry wiz. He say he got two daughter.

My father say: "Yputh is mindless and sightless. My unworthy son have desire for that daughter who possess those grade beauty!"

"Ah yes", say the Prince Go-Saigon, "You mean my eldes' daughter". Now I have declare unto my father I tink thas youngest daughter. Udder one she too dignify and proud be young. My beautifulest one she loog so gay and young. So my father explain I lig' mek marry wiz those youngest daughter. 'It is much to be regretted' then say those Prince Go Saignon "For in t that event, you got wait until my other daughter marry firs'. Thas not proper youngest daughter marry before oldest".

"So, my father he go unto his mos' bes' frien', Marquis Sesso, velly grade man ad Japan! He fifty-seven year old, too old to loog ad wife for beauty. He is widower. Got lots moaney. Also big name at Japan. He much 'bliged my father, and go for look-at meeting ride away. By and by come grade ~~messy~~ notice about those wedding thad Marquis Sesso marry thad eldest daughter of Prince Go Saigon. Me? I sm like crazy man wiz joy. I rush wiz all my honorable family and relative to grade party ad those house of Prince Go Saigon. I look my eyes once more upon thad beautifulest one. What I see? I faint on my heart. My head turn round in swim. I am feel sick allover. What you tink? My beautifulest one -- she was those eldest

daughtr! I am mek mistek! I am been toomuch quick.
Today she mek a marriage wiz those Marquis Memso. Me?
Nex' week, I also mek marry those udder one. Me no
like her".

And Akido, who was an emotional little chap,
despite his nationality, buried his little brown face in
the cap of his hands and groaned hysterically.

Benny thumped him on the back until he gasped.
Parker coughed and blinked angrily. Wharton got to his
feet.

"I would'nt stand for it" said he savagely.
"If I were you, I'd have my own girl, and no other --
hanged if I would'nt!"

Akido, under the stimulous of Benny's strong
hand had arisen and turned toward the door.

"No can honorable do nutting now" said he
dejectedly. "Thas too lade".

He pushed the door sorrowfully open, and went
out with his little drooping shoulders bearing eloquent
testimony of the heaviness of his heart.

The Americans fell to discussing his case
with sympathy. Wharton and Parker intended to use the
their influence to induce him at least not to marry the
other girl even if he must give up the one he loved.
Later he might meet another. Akido was a sentimental
fellow, and there was no telling what might come to
pass.

Suddenly a great gasping chuckle emanated from the previously silent Benny.

"I've got it!" he burst out. I've got it. Jove! What a game it will be!", and he turned a kindling face upon his friends. "I'll tell you what we'll do to help little 'Kido, fellows. We'll kidnap that bride!"

To the buzz of derision his words brought forth, he went on excitedly. "The wedding won't come off till eight. Its only four now. We've no end of time, you see. They'll let the bride alone for an hour or two just prior to the ceremony. Thats a custom. Heard about it from Kido. Now, Kido is going to make us wise as to just where her shoji, or whatever they call em, is, and he's got to attend to our getting into the grounds, buying off the guards and what not. We'll break in gently upon her maiden meditations. See? A word to the sister from someone in Kido's employ. She'll help us -- slip into the bride's place, don't you see. She'll probably be glad to get a bloated millionaire instead of little lean-pursed Kido. Then off we'll rattle with the bride, across our broad shoulders. We could easily hide her somewhere here. Could put her in one of the trunks in an emergency. These Japanese girls are no bigger than babies. Who'd think of looking in an American's house anyway for a lost Princess? Later Akido can square himself with her cruel father, and all will be well as a marriage bell. What do you think of the scheme? I think it's

bell. What do you think of my scheme? Personally I think it a peach? Well?"

"It's a peach of a scheme all right" roared Parker, "but as impossible as the burglarizing of the sun out of the clear skies. Why, man, don't you know, this girl's a princess -- a real, live, ginocine, 28 karat princess?"

"Pooh! What of it? They're common in Japan. Look at Kido. He's a Prince too, isn't he, and poor as a church mouse. Why he told me that some of the jinriki-men in the streets are descendants of princes and samoroos and what not. Shucks! I wouldn't think anything myself of marrying a Japanese princess. She's nothing but a girl anyhow -- and a poor one at that".

Wharton was pulling at his chin with thumb and forefinger, after a characteristic habit when in thought.

"By George," said he slowly. "I like Benny's scheme, and I believe it practicable. Now here's our chance. We've been bored to extinction for a month now, hankering and eating our souls out for something real to do -- a lark worthwhile. I say -- lets give Benny's stunt a chance!"

The sisters were seated opposite each other,
each
both under the hands of their respective hair dressers. Sakura-san was a round little lump of chuckling good-humor. Her black eyes danced merrily, even now, when her heart was really sore. Her cheeks were like rosy jelly bags pricked in the centers with deep and enduring dimples. Her hands were like those of a fat baby's, minus knuckles and all flesh and dimples. Indeed she was so comely, and wholesome, so altogether squeezable and loveable that even a barbarian would not have remained long indifferent to her charms. Nor must one omit to mention her altogether amiable disposition. She was fairly idolized by all the members of her father's house, the ancient retainers, and faithful servants who still clung to the house of Go-Saigon despite its poverty.

Her humor and patience were still intact now at the end of quite three steady hours of tireless labor upon her little person, and she was able to throw back to the tired maids a word of thanks and consideration.

Quite different from her sister was Asago. Slim, with a perfect face, she was a cold, but exquisite example of the beauty of a Japanese woman of patrician birth. But discontent and impatience lurked in her long restless ~~yx~~ eyes. Her milky teeth worried constantly the pretty drooping underlip, and thrice an agitated maid felt the weight of her small perfumed hand upon the ear.

Toilet completed, the maids fled at her short word of brief command. Brides desired and were entitled to an hour of maiden solitude. "Begone! Lo-born ones. Come back only when ordered".

Then alone at last with her sister, she stared at her a bit malignantly.

"You smile?" she inquired coldly. "It appears, then, ~~that~~ you are happy. ~~xxxxxxwaddingxxxx~~."

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Sakura's round moon-like face settled into an expression of distressing seriousness. She wiped one of the bright, entirely tearless eyes with ^{the} end of her sleeve. Her voice was conciliating.

"From the decree of heaven there is no escape", she softly quoted, "and" she added, with a tremulous note ^{of} bravely hope in her voice, "it is said by the philosophers that even a calamity left alone may turn into a fortune".

"The ~~omens~~ ^{horrore} are very good for you" said Asago bitterly. "It is not you who are to be sacrificed upon the altar of a fool's mistake".

"Am I not the real victim?" quavered little Sakura, with an unexpected ring of emotion in her voice. "Last night, sister, I wept many times upon my pillow. My sleep^s were as if dipped in the dew. But now today --- before the servants --- before my honorable parents --- all smiles! And afterwards? I shall live for my lord's comfort and desire".

Asago turned abruptly from her sister, and moving across the room, she pushed aside a screen, that opened

upon a little garden below. For some time, she stood staring out dully before her, a vague melancholy and despair creeping upon her. She did not even raise her head at the light touch of her sister's little hand upon her shoulder.

"~~Sakura~~"

Sakura-san,

"Thou art too ambitious, sister" said ~~Asago~~, in gentle reproof. Asago did not reply, but she lifted her own hand, and removed ~~Sakura's~~ from her shoulder.

It was growing steadily darker -- grey purple twilight slipping down softly over the skies and casting a shadow upon the adjoining chambers of the two maiden daughters of the Prince Go-Saigon. Alone, at their respective windows sat the princesses. The moon, stealing out of a darkly silvered sky, showed their small, smoothly coiffured heads, glistening under its beams, each laden with its precious insignia of rank. Small red lips, closed mutely in a waiting silence; inscrutable dark, wistful eyes, brightened by the fever of the beating hearts within.

In the other wings of the old Shiro (Castle) apart from these secluded apartments of the maidens, all was light, bustle, movement. The beat of a geisha's drum, the twang of her samisen as she tuned it against the coming celebrations of the night. And then suddenly, boomed out slowly and insistently a temple bell, tolling musically the hour of seven. One more hour only for the bride!

She stirred. A shiver passed swiftly over her. T

The hands upon the sill trembled, so that she clasped them the tighter. For the first time her courage failed her. She felt afraid, panic-stricken, overtaken. Her future loomed up before her -- tied for life to one from whom she shrank, while all her heart remained in the warm keeping of another. Leaning out of the window, in a husky whisper she called beseechingly to her sister. But the latter did not move. White and still as the dead she sat; she who would have given her very soul for the fate so dreaded by her sister. After a moment:

"Asango!"

"Sakura-san?"

"It is seven".

"Seven".

Then only the sound of the bride, sobbing.

There were pine woods close at hand, and on them the shadows were very black. Under the princess's windows a small artificial garden smiled fragrantly in the moonlight. Its paths were very white, where, on the grass the flat white stepping stones were set, one beside the other. Across them the moon shed a golden path, clear as sunlight.

Someone stepped out from the dark woods, and his shadow fell like that of a giant's across this glistening pathway. The shadow moved, grew yet larger, and then other, as dark, shapes, loomed up beside it. Suddenly beneath the windows of the maiden Princesses of Go-Saigon three stalwart forms were seen.— Stout, bleached-skinned

barbarians!

Sakura was upon her feet, panic-stricken, her fat little hands frantically clutching her riotous heart. The first feeling, which had held her spell-bound with fear, had left her. She was poised for flight, her small, round mouth gaped for the alarm call.

Suddenly she found herself pinioned by a pair of arms, a hand upon her mouth. She struggled vainly to free herself; then opening her little eyes widely as they would stretch, she saw that the one who held her prisoner was -- her sister!

"Listen!" whispered Asago. "Do not call for help, Sakura-san. Today, but a few hours since, a letter came into my hands. It was from the Lord Akido. 'Solution of the gods' I cried, then realized miserably, or thought I did the impossibility of such an act. But now I see -- it is it can be done. Oh, sister, lend your honorable aid to us also!"

One of the intruders had vaulted over the window ledge, and now in the half lighted room, he stared, as if fascinated, at the slim, lowly young princess of Japan who was looking at him questioningly with her long, brilliant eyes.

"You -- will -- come -- with --us?" he asked.

She pointed, wordless, to the window, and there was in that simple gesture all the charming majesty that seemed to invest her.

"Guai-koku-gin ----(Outside country-man) "

"Go!"

"Won't you come then?" stammered Parker, almost pleadingly.

It seemed to the dazzled youth that a faint smile came into the eyes of this wonderful princess, as she answered very softly:

"The Lord Akido shall have his proper bride. I pray you wait --below".

It was a short dash into the shelter of the woods, and then on -- and on -- and on. Ahead ran the fleet-footed Akido, his sandalled feet touching soundlessly the greensward beneath. Behind, the panting Benny, with his precious human burden, and on either side the enamored conspirators.

"Beautiful---as a goddess, I tell you!" gasped Parker, running and breathing hard.

"Jove -- some adventure, believe me!" murmured Wharton in the rear. "Hustle, Benny, for the blessed gods who are aiding us".

But Benny, the burden-bearer, growled with an unusual absence of his native good-nature.

"Beautiful as a goddess she may be" he snarled back over his shoulder, "but Gee Whiz! she's as heavy as a horse!"

And now into the apartments of the Americans the little party staggered, and with a great breath of relief Benn swung down the burden from his shoulders, and set it upon the floor. It remained there, unmoving, a

darkly shrouded mass.

"Where's Kido?" asked Parker uneasily, discovering for the first time that their Japanese friend was not with them.

"He'll be along duly" assured Wharton. "He stayed behind to bark off any possible pursuers". Then turning eagerly toward their captive. "Hadn't one of us better----

"Not I" promptly asseverated Benny. "I don't touch her highness again if I know it. Two hundred stone or I'm mistaken".

"I'm surprised at you, Benny" said Parker, indignantly. "What's the matter with you? Getting short-winded in your old age? Gasping over carrying a fairy weight like that!"

"That" snorted the perspiring Benny, "I wish you had the job for a second even!" X

"Wish I had" said Wharton sentimentally. "I saw the princess. Say, she was some ----- but why do you suppose she doesn't move. You don't suppose that you---rough old brute -- could have crushed or hurt her?"

"Not much. Slung her up like a bag of potatoes, and barely touched her. She did the hurting part", and he rubbed his shoulder ruefully.

The trio observed the unmoving bundle in silence.
Then:

"Suppose you speak to her", suggested Wharton.

"Do it yourself. I'm no lady's man".

"Well I -----"

"Oh leave it to me" said Parker impatiently,

and he leaned gallantly over the little bundle on the floor.

"Er-----" clearing his throat --- "Miss --- Ah----
Princess! Your royal highness!"

Benny thrust his great hand before his chuckling mouth, while Wharton grinned from ear to ear. Blushing to his ears, Parker floundered on.

"C-c-can -- I -- er -- help your highness -- to
er----g-get up?"

No answer. No movement. He stooped over and touched her; then he shook her arm slightly, but still she did not move.

"She's dead! Thats what she is!" cried Parker in an agonizing voice, and with a swift, sudden movement, he pulled the enveloping veils from the girl's face. Still kneeling, he stared at her with his mouth wide agape. Suddenly Parker leaped to his feet, his glance wild.

"We've got the --wrong one!" he gasped.

She lay there in all the fat and dusky charm which had endeared her to all true Japanese. Over the downy-baloom-like cheeks two shining tear drops chased each other and fell. She made no effort at all to arise, but lay there crying good-humoredly, and alternately dimpling half confidently, half fearfully at her captors.

Ah, blind and stony-hearted Guai-koku-gin! who saw nothing but a little rolly-polly, flat-nosed, absurdly fat oriental, where they had looked for a slim, dreamy-eyed, poetic faced princess of Japan.

"Lord God of Israwl!" groaned Benny, hugging his b
big face in a pair of gigantic hands. "What are we to do?
What are we to do?"

In attitudes equally attesting consternation and
despair his friends stared back at him.

"We've got to pay the piper, that's all" said
Parker between clinched teeth.

"--or we'll never get out of Japan alive" added
Wharton in a sepulchral voice.

Benny sat up with a savage movement, a murder-
ous light in his eyes.

"Do you mean to tell me that that d---- little Jap
skunk has had the nerve to go back on us?"

"When I told him we had the wrong one" declared
Wharton, "he just spun around like a top on end, and
then suddenly made a dive from the room. Saw him from tge
window skinning up the st eet as if all the fiends of hades
were after him".

Benny groaned loudly.

"Then" went on Wharten bitterly, "up turned that
cussed little manikin of a lawyer of his. Fancy sending
a lawyer on such an expedition! Fine sort of samourai
spirit left in these old islands! And he said --- well,
he said that the whole thing had leaked out. He said
that the Lord Akido --Gad --I'd like to get my hands on
Kido just for a few sweet seconds, alleged that wd had
imperilled the honor of his betrothed. That ~~it~~ was impos-

-sible for him --- the Lord Akido! -- now to "mek marry wiz her", and that one of us would have to take his place. Otherwise, we all stood a good chance of Japanese dungeons--torture chambers and Lord knows what -- since her father, the Prince Go-Saigon was determined to horribly punish the despoilers of his home and daughter!"

A deep silence followed, then Parker said hoarsely
"D-did you s-see those chaps in stocks in Hong-Kong? T-they heads were stuck through holes in boards, and their toes w-were----"

"Shut up, you fool!" roared Benny. "That was China.
"Its the same race at bottom" asseverated Parker.
"They crucified, upside down, the first white men here. I read that in a guide book, and----"

"Oh shut up -- both pf you!" snarled Benny.
"Anyway, their request is -er -- reasonable enough"

Parker

Silence again. Parker was regarding Benny a bit furtively, and the latter had one eye hopefully pinned on Wharton.

Wharton
"Benny" said Parker softly. "Its -- up to you, old man".

"Me!" howled Benny, looking perilously like a great overgrown baby. "You expect me to marry that -- baboon! Do it yourself!"

"I'm out of it" said Wharton loftily, thrusting his hands easily into his trousers' pockets and stretching his legs before him. "Its up to you, Benny, or, as you suggest, Parker can do it"?

"Whats that you say?" barked Parker, in a very ugly tone for him.

"I said it was up to you or Benny. Benny got up the --er -- affair, while you made the mistake. I was a mere onlooker, and you know it".

"I made no mistake" denied Parker heatedly. "I tell she said -- practically said she'd be along. I couldnt take her by force, could I?"

"Why not?" demanded Wharton coolly.

"Yes, why not?" aggressively demanded Benny.

"Because --- because--- Hell', she didn't look capable of any such snide trick, and I trusted her".

"There you are!" ejaculated Benny triumphantly.
"Its clearly up to you!"

Parker's voice took on a positively whining tone.

"It can't be. You fellows know, I'm er--- practically engaged to Kitty Whitcomb".

He choked over the name, and for very pity of him, his friends were silent. Parker turned toward Wharton.

"Say, old man, you have'nt any ties -- nothing to bind you -- no one to care. You go ahead and marry her theres a good fellow".

"What do you take me for?" asked Wharton coldly.
"I'm out of this, I tell you"?
"Benny---" Wharton turned desperately to his other friend, whose broad face laughed at this moment like

bore a curious resemblance to a bull-dog's. A change of feeling swept over ~~Maxim~~ Parker. Benny's aloof attitude aroused his ire.

"It's all your fault, you big chump! You can do it".

"Now see here----" began Benny, slowly getting up from his seat, and thrusting out his great, ugly jaw. "I'm not feeling playful today, friend ~~Wharton~~ Parker".

Just then the shoji against which Sakura-san on the other side, had been leaning, and listening with bated breath to the unintelligible conversation ~~of~~ these excitingly interesting and most peculiar "foreign devils", gave way beneath her considerate ^{weight} ~~way~~, and she crashed through the sheer walls and fell sprawling into the room.

She bobbed a hundred curtseys, most grotesquely, and each time her little black head touched the matted floor, she lost her dignity and her balance. At home, the Princess Sakura-san was dependent upon the helping hand of an ever-attendant maid, and her salutations were ever the embodiment of dignity and propriety; but here, alone in the apartment of these white men, she was like a tame kitten, astray from home, and jumping excitedly ~~frantically~~ for a ball now here, now there. Finally she subsided to the mats in a breathless little heap, satisfied that her curtsey had been sufficient and attractive. She flung open a gorgeous little fan, placed it before the smiling lower part of her face, and then with an upward glance of two merry, sparkling eyes, she deliberately flirted with the

enemy. The effect was almost miraculous upon her audience. Sakura, over the top of her little vermillion and golden fan, bestowed upon each of the young men a separate smile, beaming and confiding. Then she wagged her fan twice before her face, drooped the tinted lids above her eyes, and rested the tip of her dear little pug nose upon the top of the fan. Her words were delicious -- the accent fascinating. She said:)+-----

"I likee you velly much!"

Who is there among us who ~~isn't~~ is not pleased to be "likeed", and Sakura's ingenuous confession was oddly enough taken as personal by each of her hosts.

They made no reply to this charming statement, however, being moved to a golden silence by the novelty of a new and unexpected emotion. ~~And~~ After a moment, Sakura again spoke, and this time, she raised her little chin to the top of the fan, and her head shone above it like a small reproachful questioning mark.

"You likee me too?" she said.

There was the blurred sound of three throats being cleared in unison. Parker found his voice first. He said: "----Er-r-r-----"

Wharton next mumbled something that sounded like "Sure-e!", while Benny bowed silently, but gallantly.

Their answers entirely satisfied Sakura. She smiled delightedly, and all of her really pretty dimples instantly came into play and worked new havoc upon her audience. "Tangs. Much 'bliged!" said the little

Princess Sakura-san.

Another silence fell, and then again spoke
Sakura-san:

"This welly nize house!" said she. "I tink I
stay long time!"

This announcement chilled slightly her previous-
ly melting hosts. Averted glances were exchanged; but
the Princess Sakura-san secure in the knowledge of her own
famous charms, continued archly.

"Mebbe I stay ad those house foreaver? Tangs.
Much Ubliged".

She waited a bit longer this time for conversation
from these curious white men, who had taken her captive,
and now when she spoke her tone had lost something of
its gayety; nay, there was even a reproachful hint of pain
in it. ~~And~~ now the fan descended, closed. She laid it
in her lap, and put her two fat baby-like hands directly over
her little throbbing abdomen, and: ""I got a empty at my
honorable insides" said the little Princess Sakura-san
sadly.

Benny rushed for a basket of fruit; Parker
brought a large box of candy (purchased at a European store
in Kyoto and promised to a famous geisha) and set it in her
lap, while Wharton hustled off to find their joint cook.
It was outrageous that this poor little creature who had ~~sp~~
spent the night in their house should be hungry. They had
actually forgotten to feed her! It was a dastardly
shame, and feelings of genuine pity mingled now with their
curious new sense of admiration for this queer little fat

lady.

Sakura took three separate little nibbles upon a juicy persimmon; then with an enchanting smile of graciousness, she offered it first to Benny. He, much moved, shook his head in refusal.

"No, thank you. Its for you".

"No-e?" His refusal mystified her. No Japanese would have refused her; indeed he would have taken her pretty act as a mark of compliment and condescension. Sakura, her hand still outstretched, moved it toward Wharton but quite unaccountably he turned his back toward her, and his shoulders moved strangely. A hurt look came into the girl's face, and it was timidly, pathetically, that she now offered the fruit to Parker.

Parker, with a black glance at his friends took it at once. Instantly Sakura's good-humor returned. She beamed radiantly upon the trio. Having made a sweet meal of candy and fruit, she presently turned her full attention again upon her hosts.

"I am seventeen year ole!" she announced importantly. "How ole you?"

Benny admitted to twenty-three years. This much interested Sakura. Twenty-three years! That was a great age.

"How many bebbey you got?" she inquired sweetly.
"What?" asked Benny.

"Bebby" she repeated. "You know, nize liddle bebbey -- mek a cry -- so", and she illustrated to the life the crying of a small baby

Wharton turned away, gulping, while Benny laughed in her face. Gloom had slipped out of the lately dark seeming apartment. Parker alone was grave, his angry glance upon his friends: "I'll breed brutes to laugh at the poor little devil" he inwardly called them.

"No" admitted Benny. "No babies got, Princess. Sabe? No got any!"

"No--oo?" with a pitying glance. "Too bad! I velly sorry for you -- you soach nize mans!" she said, and reaching out one of her ridiculously ~~little~~ ^{little} fat hands, so soft and full of dimples, ~~she reached over and~~ stroked Benny upon the arm. That touch reached something in the young man which had been lying prone since the capture of the Princess only the night before -- his chivalry.

"Say" said he impetuously. "You're an awfully good fell---girl!"

Sakura nodded complaisantly, her dimples abroad again.

"Yaes" she admitted naively, "I gradest beauty ad all Japan! Much 'bliged".

There was an explosive sound from Wharton, and in some manner or other ~~Benny~~ seemed to collide with him. The two went sprawling upon the floor. Frightened at so much noise and commotion, Sakura had arisen, and was trotting off hastily toward the adjoining room, when Parker followed her.

"Don't go yet! " he begged. "You have'nt told ~~me~~

~~yet~~ what you think of me?"

She looked him over from head to foot, shyly, slyly, examining him from the corners of her little slanting eyes, head on this side and then on that. Very slowly her fan came back to her face. Only small dancing eyes were now visible above its top. Her voice was as liquid and sweet as a siren's.

"Y-oui!" she said softly, drawling out the word caressingly. "You mos' nizest gent of all!"

The following afternoon the aforementioned Attorney for the Lord Akido, and now representing also the great ~~Prin~~ Prince Go-Saigon, again paid his respects upon the Americans. A marriage had already been politely suggested, though the foreigners did not know that the Japanese merely required this as a formal badge of honor for the princess, and as the most graceful method of extricating themselves from an otherwise possible diplomatic tangle. The Americans were sons of men of power at home. The Japanese had no desire to antagonize them. Nevertheless, the Lord S Akido had pointed out to the Prince Go-Saigon that the family name and honor was now imperilled, for ~~he~~ had become ^{The kidnapping of the Princess} the subject of delight knowledge among the foreign colony in Kyoto. The Japanese believed that the only thing that would honorably "save the face" of the Princess Sakura-san in the eyes of the foreigners was a marriage, such as would have followed had the girl been a westerner.

It was partly now to reassure them, and partly to reassure himself against possible bodily violence that

the silken-voiced young Japanese attorney had brought with him the young men's ex-friend and his own client, the Lord Akido Isami, of whose connection with the distressing affair neither he nor his prince were aware.

The Attorney was unprepared for the cordial reception awaiting him. In fact, the Americans now greeted him as a warm friend, wringing his hand (a mark of American esteem, he understood), and in other ways expressing their esteem of the Japanese man of law. Moreover the giant (Benny) instantly poured for him a sparkling drink, which tickled and pleased his oriental throat immensely. Akido, alone, was gloomy. He sat apart, his miserable little face turned toward the window from which he could see the peaks of the Sesso Palace where the beautiful new Princess was now installed. Akido had not attended that wedding. A wretched outcast, he had spent the night wandering about the streets of Kyoto, knowing not whither he was going, or what he was doing. He had yielded however finally to the importunities of the Attorney, and now once again he was in the house of his base friends.

After a pleasant interval, the Attorney beaming and flushed from the unexpected stimulous and exhilaration of the novel beverages tendered him, took up the matter under consideration.

"It is my duty, honorable sirs" he said, "humbly to inquire the honorable decision at which you gentlemen have arrived over night".

Wharton

Benny cleared his throat, but ~~Parker~~ was before him./

"I am prepared to say" said he, "that I for one am quite willing to do the honorable thing in the matter".

Benny had found his voice. His big burly tones rang out firmly.

Wharton

"You're out of this ~~Parker~~. Step aside". and with a grip upon the arm of his friend, ~~he~~ he pushed Wharton to the background. At the same moment Parker thrust himself forward. His eyes were gleaming with an ardent light.

"We spent half the night" he sentimentally admitted "discussing the -- er--quite astonishing charms of the Princess Sakurey. She's so wholesome -- so altogether -- By Jove! she's beautiful in her way. In fact, I --er -- if you'll allow me, I offer myself upon the altar of-----"

"Why Parker" roared Benny in angry disgust,
"You're engaged to Kitty Whitcomb!"

The silence that followed this declaration was broken unexpectedly by three discreet little taps, upon the shoji, as of a fan knocking upon the pannellings and a moment later the plump little subject of discussion, her round face wreathed in a smile of beatific delight and satisfaction, appeared in the opening, bowed to the assembled ^{ladies'} and then trotted happily into their midst. At the same moment something within the silent Akido seemed to explode. He appeared to leap up electrically into the air, like a rubber ball bouncing. Then, all Japanese

politeness and courtesy and composure flung recklessly to the four winds of the orient, he sprang across the room, and seized the Princess Salura-san in his arms.

To add to the general confusion that followed, the fat little lady was heard to emit gurgles of satisfaction, while the small, fascinating, dimpled han^{dy} which had but the previous day patted the arm of Benny, was now seen arising and falling upon the shoulder of the Lord Akido Isami.

When finally the embraced pair returned to earth, they were no more breathless from excitement than the ones who had not been thus blissfully engaged. Akido's tongue chattered like a monkey's, and his eyes were fairly devouring the Princess Sakura-san. She was answering his fiery questions as quickly as her ~~her~~ soft red lips would let her, and the dimples in the adorable balloons of her cheeks were flashing in and out like stars twinkling.

At last the Lord Akido remembered his late friends and he now turned toward them. As stated before Akido was an emotional little chap. For a moment he beamed in silence upon the trio; then with a sudden whoop of sheer joy he rushed forward and in turn, one by one, he vigorously embraced each of his American friends.

"Thank you!" he shouted. "Thas right beautifulest one! Thas right! Thas right!"

Onoto Watanna.